

Strange Bedfellows

If you really want to get to know your neighbors, invite them to a sleepover.

Swimming with the Fish

No need for the community pool when you can have one of these surreal aquatic adventures.

PLUS Get the **downlow** on Juno star **Ellen Page**.

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AMERICAN WAY

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Albert Pujols

is one of the most philanthropic professional athletes of all time. He's also **the man who's saving baseball.**



Good Guy Finished First



It's hard to be a Cleveland Indians fan. Don't believe me? Just stick *Major League* at the top of your Netflix queue to see what I mean. That movie, released in 1989, pokes fun at my beloved Tribe, long bedeviled by blooper-reel seasons, poor attendance and the infamous 30-year slump. Cleveland baseball also has the dubious distinction of the worst season record in recorded professional baseball history,

when the 1899 Cleveland Spiders went 20-134. You read that right: 20 wins, 134 losses.

My Tribe turned things around starting in 1994 and since then, they've even won seven division titles. And they've made the World Series twice. But they haven't won it all since 1948. In fact, the Indians didn't even win it all in *Major League*. Hollywood couldn't bring itself to make a Cleveland team the World Series champions. Just pennant winners. (Sorry I just ruined the ending for some of you, but it's been 21 years — you should have rented it by now.) Twenty-one years old though it is, *Major League* remains a bittersweet reminder of how much my team has elevated losing into an art form. So how could someone still be a Friend of the Feather, you ask? After such a ridiculous, plague-filled existence? For me, it was because of Albert “Don't Call Me Joey” Belle.

When I was growing up in

1980s Cleveland, the Indians were the joke of the town. So, too, was it in 1989 as Indians baseball was better known for *Major League* than for would-be Hall of Famer Joe Carter's then .243 batting average. All that changed when this man-child from Shreveport, La., was called up from the minors. Albert Belle was a run-maker. His career had been nothing short of spectacular ever since he first burst onto the scene with the Erie Warriors. He was a physical specimen, a ball blaster with heavyweight size and middleweight speed. He was the toast of Cleveland from 1989 to 1997, when he was traded to the Chicago White Sox. But he accomplished some major feats. He was an All-Star from 1993 to 1997, a three-time American League RBI leader, the 1995 AL home run leader and the only player to ever hit 50 home runs and 50 doubles in a single season. With a résumé like that, Belle should have had “Cooperstown” written all over him.

Of course, there are the other stats that forever marred Belle's shot at the Hall of Fame: It's these other stats that have

forever inked the name *Albert Belle* into the annals of baseball's Hall of Shame. Like the time he threw a baseball at the head of *Sports Illustrated* photographer Tony Tomsic, which cut the journalist's hand as he deflected the ball. Or the time he tried to run some teenagers over with his SUV after they egged his house. There was the time he accused *Plain Dealer* columnist Bud Shaw of rummaging through his locker, getting in the sportswriter's face before he had to be physically restrained by a teammate. Of course, there's the time he threw a ball at a fan in the stands for calling him Joey, his childhood nickname that he officially dropped when he left alcohol rehab in 1991. And there was the time that I waited for Albert outside of Ewing Kauffman Stadium in Kansas City, Mo., following a day game with the Royals in 1996. I held my official No. 8 jersey in one hand and a Sharpie in the other. I stood right next to the Indians' bus so he'd have to see me and, if not sign an autograph, at least acknowledge me. He did acknowledge me when I held out my jersey and Sharpie. He then shook his head, got on the

team bus and flipped me off. I threw my \$80-plus No. 8 jersey in a Kansas City trash can.

I get visibly upset every time I recall my hero that almost was. I'd be more upset right now if there weren't a silver lining to this baseball drama. Right now, as we prepare for the 2010 Major League Baseball All-Star game, there is another Albert making waves — both on and off the field. Unlike Albert Belle, St. Louis Cardinals first baseman Albert Pujols, No. 5, is the toast of the game — and for all the right reasons. He has more power than Belle had, and his extracurricular exploits are as humanitarian as they come (page 32). He makes me want to buy a No. 5 jersey, and if I bothered to withstand the throng of fans who greet him at every game, home and away, I have no doubt he'd sign it for me. In a sport regularly marred by controversy, Pujols is saving baseball. And he makes it easy to be a St. Louis fan.

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