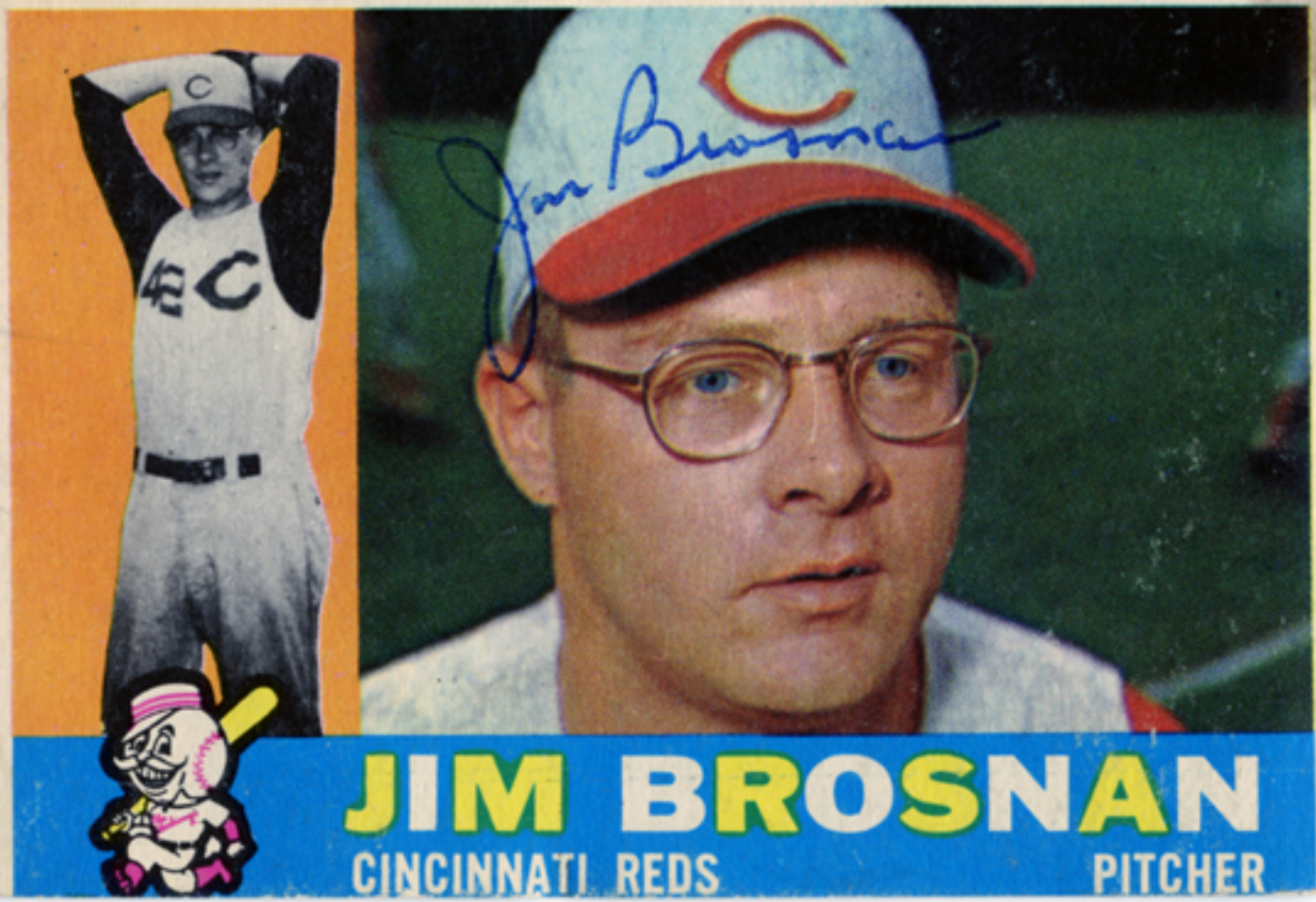
JIM BROSNAN
CINCINNATI REDS
PITCHER

Aug. 8, 2004-----

Former major league pitcher Jim Brosnan stands up during a seventh-inning stretch at Wrigley Field. He grabs a box seat for support, a one time throne that has seen tears, laughter and pain. At 75, 6-foot-4 Brosnan has had two knee replacement operations. The player-turned-author gets up slowly, as if he is carrying a box of books.

And if you could peek into the box, you'd find that the books are filled with words of renewal.

As the Wrigley Field crowd sings along, Brosnan reminisces about his last major league game.
Between 1956 and 1963, Brosnan pitched for the Cubs, White Sox, Cincinnati Reds and St. Louis Cardinals, and appeared in 831 games. He had a lifetime 3.54 ERA, and once struck out Willie Mays three times in one game. If he pitched today, he would be a multimillionaire.

"Quitting didn't bother me," Brosnan says. "I was a writer, I was going to be a writer."

Brosnan wrote "The Long Season," a diary of his 1959 season with the Cardinals and Reds. The book revolutionized sports journalism with its frank reportorial style that took the reader inside the heart and soul of the clubhouse.
His topics included contract hassles, mid-season trades and spitball techniques. Before "The Long Season," baseball books were mainstream schmaltz, like "Babe Ruth: The Idol of the American Boy," and Joe DiMaggio's "Lucky To Be a Yankee" -- books usually ghostwritten by down-on-their-luck sportswriters.

That all changed in 1962, when Brosnan wrote "Pennant Race," the companion book to "The Long Season" that chronicled the Reds' drive to the 1961 National League pennant. His work was the precursor to tell-all books like Jim Bouton's "Ball Four."

"The Long Season" and "Pennant Race" have just been reissued in paperback by the Chicago-based Ivan R. Dee Publishing. "These are books I read as a younger man," says Dee, a longtime baseball fan. 'The Long Season' was better than 'Ball Four,' because it is so literate and incisive. When we began thinking of building a small baseball list among our other books, I immediately thought of 'The Long Season' and was delighted to find it was out of print."

So then Dee obtained the rights to both books and met Brosnan for the first time. Dee says, "He's a delightful guy. He looks like a pitcher in a way, in the sense that he's tall. A little stiff now, but we had a grand time."

Brosnan lives in suburban Morton Grove with his wife of 53 years, Ann Pitcher (and that's the truth). They have three children: Jamie, 49, an artist; Tim, 48, currently unemployed, and Kimberly, 44, a folk singer and teacher.

Brosnan attends only two or three Cubs games a year. He doesn't follow baseball much on television, because he doesn't have cable TV. But his eyes are as keen on the game as they are on the written word.
"I do remember the last time I got booed," he says. "It was here. It was my last season. Earl Battey hit a grand slam off me. My wife and son were watching the game. There was a pretty good crowd. For a week, all she would talk about is how my son broke down and sobbed."

From the 1950s through the 1970s no athlete wrote about sports like Brosnan. Here's an entry from "Pennant Race":
"To get to Cincinnati's Crosley Field, I usually take a bus through the old, crumbling streets of the Bottoms. Blacks stand on the corners watching their homes fall down. The insecurity of being in the second division of the National League -- in the cellar -- leaves me. For 25 cents, the daily bus ride gives me enough humility to get me through any baseball game, or season."

Brosnan fidgets in his seat. "That was one of the best writing days I had," he says of that passage. "I finished that about 5 in the morning. Writing it over and over, trying to get in everything I felt, but also to keep it intact enough to stick it in somewhere. We were going to play a lot of ballgames.

"Sportswriter Jimmy Cannon said, 'That's the best thing you've ever done.' I said, 'What else have you read?' He said, 'Nothing. You're not going to get any better than that'."

Brosnan would keep notes on a pad while sitting in the bullpen during a game, but didn't write on a schedule. "I wrote when I felt I had something to say or I remembered there was something I had to get down," he says. "Once I got started, I would do a couple of pages."

He never showed his manuscripts to anybody. Not even his roommates.
Besides writing books, Brosnan occasionally wrote book reviews for the New York Times and the Chicago Daily News. For 25 years, he was the baseball writer for Boy's Life magazine. On road trips, he would cart along books by Dostoevsky and John Updike. He also carried a blue-gray 1960s-issue portable Olivetti typewriter. It broke earlier this year when it tumbled off a shelf.

Due to his scholarly nature and his Coke-bottle glasses, Brosnan's teammates thought he was different. Future Hall of Famer Frank Robinson nicknamed Brosnan "The Professor." His St. Louis manager Solly Hemus recalls, "You think Brosnan's writing was funny? Wait until you see him pitch."

"I read Updike, Thurber, Roger Angell," Brosnan says. "I liked the way they put words together. It was different than the daily newspapers. I read two, three newspapers a day. But Updike was talking in an entirely different language. So I stole it."

How would he describe that language?

"How about poesy a form of poetry?" he answers.

"Poesy!" he continues. "I had it in a puzzle the other day. When I started writing, I thought, 'How am I going to learn to use words I don't use or hear?' So I got hooked on crossword puzzles.

"Or, I never thought I would get into women writers. I like Toni Morrison. I used to think, 'What do they have to say to me?' Hell, they give me a new outlook as to what is going on in the world. I just finished a book by Southern writer Anne River Siddons.

"I just finished a book by William Tapply. It was the 21st book he's written and the 19th I've read. He's a lawyer. His heroes solve legal problems, but not necessarily crimes. I don't like John Grisham. I read his first book first, which was unfortunate because he has written some good stuff. His first book was forced. He wasn't telling me anything I didn't already know. It's important for me to find writers who do that. I can tell in 20 pages whether I want to continue to listen to what the writer says."

In 2003, former Houston Astros manager, pitcher and current ESPN.com columnist Larry Dierker wrote a critically acclaimed book "This Ain't Brain Surgery (How to Win the Pennant Without Losing Your Mind). " During a recent stopover in Houston, Dierker recalled Brosnan. "I read both his books," Dierker says. "They're excellent. They're literature. It's not just capitalizing on being in the limelight. People thought I was different, too."

Colorful pitchers of the 1950s and '60s like the late Bo Belinsky hung out with starlets like Mamie Van Doren. Brosnan hung out with S.I. Hayakawa, who was teaching at the University of Chicago in the mid-1950s. Hayakawa, who died in 1992, moved to to San Francisco in 1955 and was later elected to the U.S. Senate from California. "In 1958, I was with the Reds, and we were in San Francisco," Brosnan says. "He Hayakawa calls me on the telephone and says we're going to see jazz great Earl 'Fatha' Hines. He was a big baseball fan, too. I gave him a baseball cap."

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On this humid afternoon at Wrigley Field, the old relief pitcher calls for a four-home-run day.

It turns out eight home runs are hit as the Cubs beat Philadelphia 10-7. On May 2, 1956, Brosnan was the losing pitcher as the New York Giants beat the Cubs 6-5 in 17 innings at Wrigley Field. The two teams combined to intentionally walk 11 batters, then a record. Brosnan had four intentional walks.

"May 2, 1956?" Brosnan asks with genuine excitement. "Wait a minute! That's the day my son was born. We had a flat tire. The gas station was fixing the tire and they said they'd call the cops to take my wife to the hospital. I said, 'No, I'm taking her and staying with her.' I'd been up since whenever. After everybody was fine, I came up to Wrigley Field."

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Jim Brosnan was born on the west side of Cincinnati. His Irish father John was a lathe operator at the Cincinnati Milling Machine Co. His German mother Rose Elizabeth was a piano teacher and nurse when she wasn't rearing five children.

"I spent as much time in the library between the ages of 10 and 15 as I did playing baseball," Brosnan says. "I read whatever my mother told me to read -- until I got a hold of Joseph Altschuler's novels. Nowadays, I can't find him in the Morton Grove, Evanston or Niles library. From him, I learned how to distinguish the good words from the bad words. I learned about voice."

Brosnan learned how to develop an easygoing yet direct style. His writing is as smooth as a drag bunt and nowhere near bombastic as a home run.

He likes one-sentence paragraphs.

But he still doesn't know how to describe a paragraph. "I read a lot of baseball books written by guys who wrote books for kids," Brosnan says. "And they were awful. I read stuff that sportswriters would do because they were hired to to it in the name of somebody else. I didn't believe any of it. There was no sense of humor. There was no sense of anybody on these teams knowing what the hell the game was about.

"But I thought I could do that! And I had promised my mother I would write a book someday."

In 1958, Brosnan wrote a diary piece about his season with the Cardinals. He sent the story to the new Sports Illustrated magazine. An editor at Harper & Row saw the article and asked Brosnan if he could expand his text. "Win or lose, it didn't make any difference to him," Brosnan says. That's how the seeds of " The Long Season" were planted for the 1959 season.

But the baseball community did not appreciate the book. Cardinals broadcaster Joe

Garagiola called Brosnan a "kooky beatnik."

Brosnan also wrote about scheming with fellow pitcher Ernie Broligio on how they would soft toss to each other so they could get a couple of base hits. "I got ripped by the commissioner Ford Frick over that," he says. "I got called into his office in New York. I was told he wanted to ban my book."

Other visits to New York proved more fruitful. In 1960, celebrated author James Thurber, a fan who had penned baseball-themed short stories, invited Brosnan to appear on his Sunday talk show in New York City. "I have an enlarged Thurber sketch of a baseball catcher in my bathroom," Brosnan says. "I look at it every morning. I have a lot of books, but that is my only artifact."

Brosnan's book collection includes all of Ogden Nash's poetry books and the entire 17-volume edition of Mark Twain's writings, which he inherited from his wife's family.

By the time Brosnan was traded to the White Sox in 1963 (for the wonderfully named Dom Zanni) the baseball community knew of the pitcher with the creative curve. "When I arrived at the airport Sox general manager Ed Short met me and said, 'You can't write here, either. Period.' I was hoping for a little better welcome than that. I responded with a four-letter word that begins with 'F.' Hey, by that time, I had sold two pieces, one to Atlantic Monthly and the other to Sport magazine."

In March 1964, the American Civil Liberties Union intervened and accused the White Sox with violating Brosnan's rights.

Forty years later, Brosnan soldiers on. Since his typewriter broke, he has stopped writing. He does not own a computer. He tries to keep in touch with his Reds teammates. "A guy sent me a clipping listing all the players on the Reds who have died since 1961," he says wistfully.
"Gus Bell. Gordy Coleman. Vada Pinson. Vada was as much a part of that team as Frank Robinson was. He covered half of Robinson's territory in right centerfield. I think there are three Alzheimer's sufferers from that team."

Brosnan never considered updating "The Long Season" or "Pennant Race." He says sternly, "I don't approve of it. A lot of guys are embarrassed with what they do now, compared to what they did then."

But Jim Brosnan still stands tall in a crowded ballpark.

He is proud to be a writer.