

Donald Bessey ME'82 6/12/41 – 7/16/18

Don was a fixture for many years at our meetings until, I believe, his health issues made it ever more difficult for him to attend.

Don dealt with the effects of MS, which also impeded his early career as professional baseball player.

None-the-less, he still took every day as an opportunity to surmount the challenges he faced, including lecturing on MS to colleges and clubs, and exploring early Wholistic Medicine Research and alternative approaches to healing. This photo is of him participating in a hike to the Tennessee Valley (Golden Gate Recreation Area) during our Golden Gateaway weekend in 1998.



Don Bessey and Mike Diggles--Photograph by Bernie Krause

No challenge too hard for Bessey

By Dave Newhouse [<https://www.eastbaytimes.com/author/dave-newhouse/>] | Bay Area News Group

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Spring training is in full swing, and the old ballplayer is holding up better than expected. You could say he's scooting right along through life.

Don Bessey spent five years in baseball's minor leagues. But his pitching elbow gave out at the same time his vision faded in the early 1960s.

Not until 1970, though, did he discover he had multiple sclerosis. His eyesight was the first indication. Then later came loss of mobility and terrible facial pain. Thus the last 38 years haven't exactly been a hayride.

But at 66, the old ballplayer still is fired up about getting better, because he's ever the competitive athlete, even in repose.

And when the regular season starts, he will be there watching the Oakland A's and San Francisco Giants in person, moving around the ballpark on his motorized scooter and using binoculars to aid his limited vision.

Negative attitude? One might think so, given Bessey's long siege of physical setbacks. But negativity isn't part of his vocabulary. He is the personification of positiveness.

"I still want to improve," he said this week in his Hayward home. "I kind of have the personality that if I can walk, I want to jog. If I jog, I want to run. There's a marathon out there."

That's Bessey in a nutshell. On an African safari with his wife Ann, he stared at Kilimanjaro's 19,340-foot peak.

"How could I climb that?" he thought at the time.

How does he keep that upbeat personality?

"I want that challenge all the time," he said.

Ann has been married to Don 22 years, and she so admires his drive and determination.

"It's very inspirational," she said. "Sometimes he's stubborn. He's tenacious. He's going to hold onto what he wants to do and be. But he's remarkable. He just persists." Bessey is the son of a cotton farmer from Corcoran, a rural road stop between Fresno and

Bakersfield. Young Don had a dazzling curveball as a teenager, and the Philadelphia Phillies signed him right out of high school.

He worked his way up to Triple-A, one step from the big leagues, by then with the Milwaukee Braves organization. But his right arm was failing, and his last no-hitter would be pitched in the uniform of the U.S. Army.

While stationed in Germany, he learned his vision couldn't be corrected by surgery.

Even harrowing injuries he sustained in a 1990 accident couldn't compare to the "excruciating" MS-related facial pain Bessey was forced to endure in recent years. After finding the right medication for his pain, he resumed swimming — his favorite exercise. But when springtime comes around, he gets excited waiting for the official baseball season.

"From the time I was 6, 7 years old," he said, "I wanted to be a baseball player."

Baseball is back, though it's asking fans for forgiveness over the steroids mess. The players created it, but the owners allowed it to become a Congressional issue, while the game's commissioner turned his head.

"I just can't believe it," Bessey said. "I don't understand it. I hear them talking that, in other days, they used beer and alcohol. But we didn't do it to enhance our playing."

But that won't keep him away from the ballpark. Nothing can.