

My wife and I had first been to Memorial Stadium back when we were dating and since we had no other plans in a mandatory vacation week, we decided to catch a noon game in the new stadium in Baltimore that we had heard so much about while watching the Home Team Sports broadcasts. There were three features the announcers just wouldn't stop talking about – the B&O Warehouse, the smell of Boog's BBQ, and the bathrooms that were so nice you would want your mother to use them.

So a week or so beforehand, I called for tickets. The "best available" were behind first base in some section with a name of some kind. When I asked what that meant, the lady said, "If you've ever been to Memorial Stadium, it's sort of like the mezzanine." I had indeed been in the mezzanine in that park, and it was a fine place to see a game. I told her we would take the tickets. She then read out the list of the ticket charges, taxes, phone charges, will-call charges, and we were up to \$25 per ticket – an exorbitant amount for a ball game in 1992. I came very close to asking what the second best available seats were, but I decided that since this was the only thing we had planned for a week of vacation, we could swing it.

We parked about a half mile away towards the inner harbor, as we were planning to have dinner there and make a full day of it. So after a trek through the city to the ballpark, I really wasn't prepared to walk in the gates and seemingly go back in time for 60 years. With the architecture and old timey music playing, it was like a little city street between the stadium and the long warehouse that dominates right and center fields. The bottom two floors of the warehouse had been gutted and turned into all kinds of little baseball shops. But naturally, as soon as we got inside the gates, Victoria wanted to go check out the bathrooms right under Boog's BBQ. She said they were OK enough, but it was a bunch of stalls with concrete floors just like any other place, so she didn't understand what all the fuss was about.

We had plenty of time, and I wanted to go on a grand walk to check out all the concessions as is my normal habit, but she wanted to get to the seats first. Understanding that we were on the mezzanine, I started towards the smaller escalator that didn't go up as far, as there were ten thousand folks lined up for the big one that went up all the way. At the bottom though, was a guard. He stopped us and said, "I'm sorry, you need Club Level passes to get past this point." She started to turn around, but I looked at my ticket, and it said something about a club – I thought it just meant ball club or something. I showed him our tickets and he told us to go right on up.

At the top of the escalator you could either turn left and walk up further, or turn right and face two more guards and double glass doors. It was obvious to me that these were the luxury skyboxes and/or the press area, so we started up the walk until Victoria looked up and said that we were headed towards the same spot as the big escalator with everyone else on it. So I said that we just needed to go back and ask these guys. Well, as soon as we got back to the escalator one of the guards stuck up his hand to stop us and said, "I'm sorry, you need Club Level passes to come here." Well, it worked the last time so I showed him the ticket and they each opened the glass doors for us.

Talk about unprepared downstairs walking in the gate, we're now being ushered in to a carpeted and air conditioned area with mahogany trim. I'm wondering just who would build a Marriott inside of a ballpark. The press box is indeed here, as are the luxury suites. In between each luxury box is a hallway that leads to a glass door. Going through the door, we walk into the park and our seats. But that's the inside – looking to the outside of the hall, there are lounges with giant glass walls that overlook the city – and each lounge has two closed circuit TV's showing the field, and later the broadcast of the ballgame. In between lounges are the concession stands. But we're not just talking hot dogs and cracker jacks

here. If you want a roast beef sandwich, they were there to carve the beef in front of you. If you wanted dessert, the cute girl with the tuxedo jacket and miniskirt was there with the liqueur tray. To this day it's still the only time I've arrived at a ballpark and been disappointed that it's time for the game to start, but we finally had to stop wandering and go to our seat. Of course, we walk out of our designated glass door and are greeted – "Hello, I'm Reginald your usher, and your waitress is Theresa." He leads us to our seats, and wipes them with the towel before signaling us that we can sit. In the cup holders is an obnoxious orange piece of paper, but it turns out that this is the menu. You see, you don't get up and go to the concessions, there is no extra charge (other than a tip) as you hold up your menu, she comes and takes your order, and five minutes later she hands you the food.

As for the seats, they were the closest thing to a disappointment that we had in the whole experience, as we were along the right field line and they seemed oriented towards center field so that we had to look uncomfortably to the left to watch home plate. What - you thought we had found the bathrooms a little disappointing? No, those were the ones down there that the normal people use. Up here were the nicest and most plush bathrooms you could possibly imagine in a ballpark. But lest you forget you're actually in a ballpark, there are strategically placed closed circuit monitors so you truly never miss a play on the field. When she started getting a little warm, Victoria just said, "If you'll excuse me, I'm going to go watch this next inning from the lounge," as she went to sit in the air conditioning for a while. When she returned she turned to me, gave me her sweetest smile, and said, "Oh, by the way - don't think for a minute that you're ever going to come back here and sit me in the upper deck."

Note: I lost the original write-up years ago, as it was just put up on a now-dormant discussion board – so this is a 27 year old recollection. I'm pretty sure it was against Milwaukee and I'm fairly confident the Orioles lost, but I will always remember that experience in the ballpark like it was yesterday.