

CHRISTIAN HAUPT'S LOU GEHRIG CONNECTION

Nine-Year-Old Laguna Blanca Baseballer's Memories Become Past-Life Book

I have reason to be skeptical about people who have recollections of being a Major League Baseball player. Two such men once spread their stories around Santa Barbara: an old-timer who said he hit a home run off **Babe Ruth**, and another who claimed to have been a teenage pitcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Now there's a woman in town who has written a mind-blowing story about her son's past as one of the greatest baseball players of all time. **Cathy Byrd** says she was initially concerned when her boy, **Christian Haupt**, started talking about being "a tall baseball player" at the age of 2, and he subsequently provided details about this player's life that he had no way of gleaning from books or articles. The man who materialized from his memory was **Lou Gehrig**, the Hall of Famer who died in 1941.

by **John ZANT**

Byrd consulted experts who documented hundreds of instances where young children told of past lives with accuracy that seemingly could only

have been explained by their actually being there. She probed the history of Gehrig's family and the New York Yankees and wrote about her amazing discoveries in a book, *The Boy Who Knew Too Much*.

Christian's story of a previous life in baseball is, in Byrd's telling, quite believable. That's more than I could say about the yarn spun by the late **Ray Wilson**, a city councilmember in the '60s. He vividly described his round-tripper off Ruth, then one of the game's top pitchers. Wilson's story appeared in the paper, only to be revealed as fiction when no evidence could be found that he ever played for the Detroit Tigers, as he had claimed.

About a decade ago, an older man claiming to have been a genuine Major Leaguer, **Chet Kehn**, told an interesting story about how he was discovered by the Dodgers as a 16-year-old. With their roster depleted during the war, he said, they needed him to pitch for them in 1942. Kehn's official bio told a different tale. He was 20 years old when he pitched for Brooklyn, and he was already dead. Even when presented with contrary evidence, the impostor wistfully clung to his fabrication.

There are no contradictions in Christian Haupt's story, though it may be confounding to a rational mind. His current life as a busy 9-year-old—he attends Laguna Blanca School and plays for a traveling youth baseball team—has taken precedence over his identification with Lou Gehrig.

Gehrig's famous quote—"I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of this earth"—could apply to Christian. He displayed a prodigious passion for baseball at an early age, and his mother gave him every opportunity to indulge in it. After she posted a YouTube video that gained national attention, Christian was given a cameo role in the **Adam Sandler** movie *That's My Boy*. At age 3, he became the youngest person to throw the ceremonial first pitch before a Dodgers game. The photo of him cranking up the baseball with his left arm, his gloved right hand pointing toward the plate, his face a picture of concentration, was honored as the top sports photo of the year in 2012. He was befriended by **Tommy Lasorda**, the former Dodgers manager.

Fortune seemed to smile on Christian and his mother at every stop along the way—visiting the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, finding Gehrig's former home, coincidentally attending a game on ALS Awareness Day in honor of Gehrig—and Byrd's reluctance to embrace Christian's unlikely story melted away. She had adhered to conventional religious beliefs but now was open to wider possibilities. She explored her own past life through regression therapy, a journey that lends a mystery-story aspect to her book.



PAUL WILLIAMS

The story also has a *Field of Dreams* quality, and a future movie out of the 20th Century Fox studio is in the works.

Byrd said the message she wants to convey is "that our souls survive this earthly existence and that love can surpass one lifetime. It is a message of unity that I feel is so needed in the world today."

Impressed by Byrd's efforts, **Jack Canfield** of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* fame wrote a foreword. "In addition to being a book about reincarnation," he says, "it's also a book about learning to deeply listen to and trust our children, a book about baseball, and a book about how the universe constantly conspires to arrange events to expand our consciousness."

Separated from her husband—among other things, she said he never understood the mystique of baseball—Byrd moved from Thousand Oaks to Santa Barbara this year with her son and his older sister, Charlotte. Her connection to Canfield, a Hope Ranch resident, led her to Laguna Blanca, a school that would nurture Charlotte's artistic talents.

"We're so lucky to be here," said Byrd, a Realtor at Coldwell Banker. "Stuff keeps happening."

Christian pitched a complete game last week for the Santa Barbara Stingrays 9U team, composed of both Pony League and Little League players. He also plays first base, which was Gehrig's position, but he did not play that card. He appeared to be just one of the boys on his team, easy to get along with.

"I've made a lot of new friends," Christian said. He listed a number of contemporary Major Leaguers among his favorites, including **Clayton Kershaw**, **Corey Seager**, **Aaron Judge**, and **Didi Gregorius**. For obvious reasons, his favorite teams are the Dodgers and Yankees. "I would have liked it a lot if they played each other in the World Series," he said.

As it was, Houston beat both the Yankees and the Dodgers. Christian attended Game Seven at Dodger Stadium with his mom, and his reaction to L.A.'s downfall was a down-to-earth, 21st-century assessment. "It sucked that they lost," he said.

4-1-1 Cathy Byrd, Christian Haupt, and Jack Canfield all will be signing copies of *The Boy Who Knew Too Much* Sunday, December 3, 4-6 p.m., at Chaucer's Books (3321 State St.). Proceeds will go toward the purchase of books for the Laguna Blanca School library.

S.B. ATHLETIC ROUND TABLE: ATHLETES OF THE WEEK

Nov. 12-18



PAUL WILLIAMS

Lourdes Gilbert, SBCC soccer

The first-year player from Ventura got the no.-1-ranked Vaqueros off to a winning start in the SoCal Regional playoffs, scoring two first-half goals in a 4-0 win over Antelope Valley.



BRAD ELLIOTT

Ty Trosky, Laguna Blanca football

The junior quarterback rushed 123 yards and passed for 108, accounting for five touchdowns in a 42-36 upset of no. 1 Hesperia Christian in the CIF 8-man Division 2 semifinals.

Nov. 19-25



COURTESY

Katherine Sheehy, SBCC soccer

The sophomore scored the game-winning goal in a 1-0 victory over Cerritos, sending the unbeaten Vaqueros (20-0-1) into the State Final Four at Sacramento this weekend.



PAUL WILLIAMS FILE PHOTO

John Harris, Bishop Diego football

The Cardinals will play for the CIF Division 6 title at Golden Valley on Friday night, thanks to Harris's huge game (319 yards rushing, three TDs) in a 45-27 win over Saugus.



JOHN ZANT'S GAME OF THE WEEK

12/2: College Men's Basketball: San Diego at UCSB If you're not following the Dos Pueblos Chargers to their CIF Division 10 football championship game at Quartz Hill on Saturday night, check out the Gauchos and their national mid-major player of the week, Max Heidegger. The sophomore guard averaged 27 points in three wins last week. San Diego's Toreros are a strong West Coast Conference team, off to a 5-0 start. Junior guard Isaiah Wright, a transfer from Utah, is a triple-double threat. 7pm. The Thunderdome, UCSB. \$8-\$14. Call 893-UCSB (8272) or visit ucsbgauchos.com.