

Yankee Stadium, June 1, 1976

Paul Carlson
June 12, 2023



Soon enough, the massively anticipated Yankee Stadium event rolled around. Hundreds of members had been working in New York City for months, plastering the area with bicentennial themed posters, and inviting the public. MFT teams, and state members, and many from Oakland, came into NYC as June 1st 1976 approached.

The team I was on drove from Texas up to Joplin, Missouri. I think we all fasted, for a day, as a spiritual indemnity condition.

I recall fundraising at a traveling carnival, which was unusual. The manager bought flowers for all the ladies on his crew, but at a much reduced rate. That was appropriate, I suppose.

Then we headed for Springfield, Illinois, and stayed at the home of team member Nancy B's parents. This was a refreshing experience, to meet folks who were knowledgeable and supportive. Cynthia and her band of negos hadn't managed to convince everybody, far from it.

Soon I was back at the New Yorker, with a 'sleeping bag room' on the upper floors, and got a white jumpsuit with the rally's God Bless America logo on it. (I'd hoped to save it, but it got lost in the shuffle.)

One day I participated in a campaign, part PR and part community service, to help clean trash from those urban streets. Boy was there a lot of trash. NYC is so intensely unionized, even as volunteers we were allowed to do just so much, but not other things. We'd pile up the trash, then union members only, would put it into garbage trucks. I remember chatting with one elderly local man, who pointed out that the trash would be just as bad again, within days. I said, yeah I know, but this is meant as an example, and a hopeful gesture. He told me that he'd suggest that his son to look into our movement.

On the day of the rally, rain showers were forecast. There are many sources of information, also videos on YouTube, so I won't go into much detail. Later on, I heard strange versions, from people I met fundraising; and I even told church members more of what I knew, that they'd not heard before.

I was assigned to do security, kind of informally, way up in the highest bleachers. The stadium ended up about half full, amazing given the bad weather, and I sat and chatted with a Puerto Rican family. I dared not miss anything, in my area, so I 'held it' and got as close to a burst bladder as I ever have in my life.

Aside from Rev. Moon's actual speech, the most memorable event was when a storm front swept through, just before the program started. Decorations were messed up, and plans to float a large balloon got scotched.

It began to pour down rain, and from below, the refrain of You Are My Sunshine could be heard in the bleachers. Every church member there joined in, and we loudly sang the chorus several times, until the rain stopped for good.

The next day, I discovered that my mother had been the one to lead that song, with support from her Oakland Family contingent, which occupied seats just behind home plate. An American brother, who I eventually identified as Tom McDevitt, was singing along with mom.

Mom had known rain might come, and she'd already led them in singing that particular song, so they were ready on the spur of the moment. As this unfolded, and can be seen on video, a dozen or so other brothers leaped up to help, standing in a line, literally overlooking home plate. This later caused some confusion, so I have always taken pains to give credit to mom, as is due.

That night, though I was not called to help, our members stayed up very late and took down every rally poster in the city. This made a tremendous impression on the locals.

The following day, everyone gathered at Belvedere for a celebration. There was a gigantic cake, shaped like the stadium, and SMM gave an unusually brief talk. Then he got people three times more energized, announcing that another rally was to be held in Washington DC -- in September. An almost impossible goal, but our movement became specialists, of necessity, in these massive fast-paced organizational efforts.

In the following years, we'd show such skill at this, our church leaders (men and women) would be offered secular management positions, as far away as Russia, because they demonstrably knew how to get big things done.

It was at Belvedere that mom told me about events of the previous afternoon, and I added that I'd joined in the singing, from my lofty perch. Then I was off again, with my MFT team, while mom returned to the Bay Area.