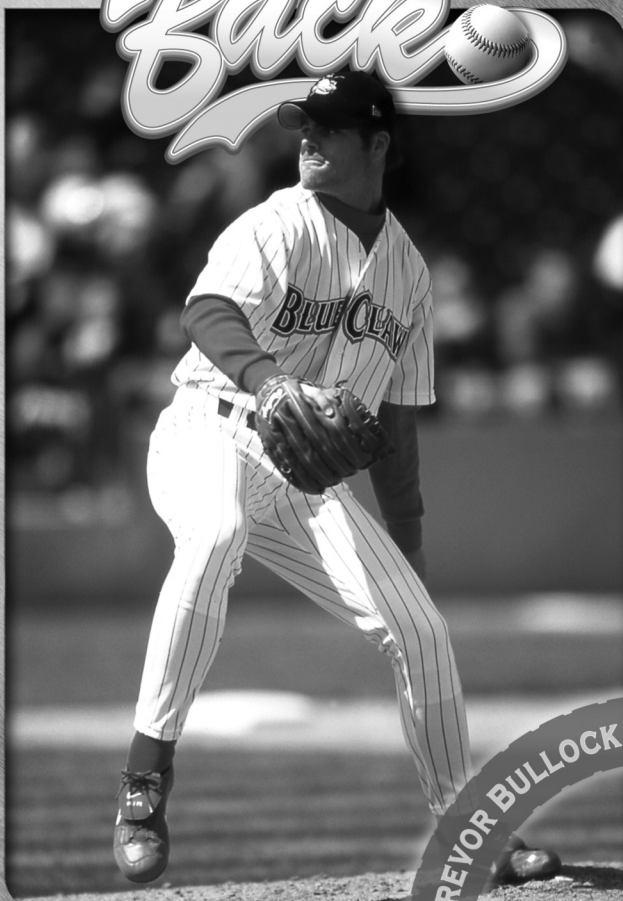


Brushed Back



ETHAN & MARDENE
FOWLER

THE TREVOR BULLOCK STORY



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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

Michael J. Morris

of Lincoln, Nebraska

Michael was an avid Cornhusker fan and an umpire
for the Capital City Fastpitch Association for 10 years.

His enthusiasm for baseball was contagious.

He was 33 when his battle with cancer ended in November 2002.

We wish we could have known him longer.

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The path to completing a book such as this is long. First, the story has to actually happen and be shared. Then it gets filtered through the thinking and experiences of the writers. Then when story meets author and the book meets publisher, there are a multitude of people who deserve to be thanked.

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INTRODUCTION

Duaine Bullock was an athlete. It all came pretty easy for him. He played basketball and baseball. He did track and field. And he was an all-state football player at Dorchester High. He went to Kearney State College in Kearney, Nebraska, but school wasn't his thing. So he dropped out and joined the Marine Corps. Eventually he served his country in Vietnam.

While home on leave he met Ardyce Bechthold, who was dating one of his friends. She was a bright and friendly girl, a little strict about her religion perhaps, but he liked her. Ardyce, a fifth-generation Seventh-day Adventist, had attended Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, and held a degree in social welfare.

The two hit it off. He was a handsome one. (She thought his dark hair was alluring.) He liked her outgoing spirit, and she liked his quiet, steady, no-nonsense demeanor. He was very kind—but you didn't always know it.

They were married in May 1971. They didn't plan on having children; nevertheless, Trevor Duaine Bullock made his entrance into the world nearly six years later.

Trevor was a “marvelous oops,” Ardyce said, a boy filled with marvelous talent and drive. And he was a boy who fell into one “oops” after another as he learned the lessons of life the hard way.

What follows is his story.

Chapter 1



Three hours before game time Trevor strode into the white-washed training room. He strutted on the balls of his feet, just like his father, Duaine, used to walk. His perfectly cropped brown hair, meticulously trimmed sideburns, and hint of a goatee exuded an aura of a cocky jerk. He was handsome, and he knew it.

As he rounded the corner he heard Gene Kurtz talking smack about Anna Boutwell. “Yeah, right!” he muttered under his breath. Anna was beautiful, and most of the guys *wanted* the chance to be in the same room with her, but Trevor was one of the only ones who actually had the confidence to speak to her. Trevor had never seen Gene anywhere near Anna.

“I’m tellin’ ya, Anna wants me,” boasted the sandy-haired center fielder. “I can totally see it in the way she looks at me, especially the way she’s always touching her hair around me. That’s a total giveaway! She digs me,” he said, nodding his head confidently.

Gene had recently moved to the area from Minnesota. One couldn’t blame him for trying to seem cool to all his new teammates, but the pretty girls were Trevor’s turf, and he wasn’t about to concede even one flutter of an eyelash to some other hopeful male.

“So you think Anna wants you?” Trevor scoffed, perching on the edge of a table. “Who are you kidding? Anna doesn’t like you! She’s probably scratching her head, trying to figure out how to get away from you.” Looking bored, Trevor gave his head the slightest questioning shake. “Do you hear yourself, Gene? Anna thinks you’re an idiot! She’s told me so tons of times. She told me so *today* at lunch.”

Gene launched himself from the bench and thundered, “Bullock, you need to shut your piehole before I shut it for you!”

Trevor looked up. “Are you trying to scare me, Gene?” he said

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indifferently. “Because you don’t.” He looked through Gene as though he wasn’t even there.

It was infuriating. “You arrogant piece of trash!” Gene screamed. Raising his fist, he sent it crashing into Trevor’s mouth, knocking him off the table.

The mineral taste of blood immediately flowed over Trevor’s tongue, and he could feel one of his teeth protruding through his lower lip. A moment of stunned silence filled the locker room.

At the sight of blood Gene’s face switched from rage to panic as he realized that he had just sucker punched the team’s stud pitcher. “Oh, man! Oh, *man!* Trevor, are you OK? I’m sorry, dude. I didn’t mean to—”

“Oh, shut up already, Gene!” Trevor spat a mouthful of the thickening blood into a towel.

“Dude, I’m taking you to the hospital!” Gene blurted. Because of his unchecked fist he knew he might lose his starting center field position, maybe get kicked off the team.

“Well, if you’re thinking of taking me to the hospital you might want to do it now!” Trevor seethed.

Gene reached out his hand to help him up and offered to steady him with his shoulder, but Trevor pushed him aside. “It’s my lip you broke, you idiot, not my legs. I can walk to my car. It’s a good thing you did this while Coach McLaughlin wasn’t around; otherwise, you might not be walking yourself!”

As the two approached Trevor’s Chevy Z24 Cavalier coupe, Trevor tossed the keys underhand to Gene and continued to rant. “As you know all too well, I *am* this team. Without me this team would be *nothing*. Our best chance of getting anywhere this postseason is with my left arm—and you staying out of my way.”

This wasn’t actually true. Trevor’s best friend, Aaron Madsen, was also an impressive lefty pitcher. Many people thought Aaron was even better than Trevor. But what use was the truth when Trevor was mad?

Gene leaned across the front seat and pushed open the passenger door. Trevor slumped into the seat, his frustration nearly spent. “By the way, did I tell you you’re an idiot?”

Gene didn’t respond. He was already threading the car out of the parking lot and into traffic.

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At the emergency room entrance a technician met them and gave Trevor a perfunctory once-over. “Hey,” she said, “I think I know you . . .” She grinned. “You’re always in the paper—aren’t you one of Southeast’s awesome lefty pitchers? You always look like you’re about to stuff the baseball down the batter’s throat or something.”

“Well, it’s nice to know somebody still reads the *Lincoln Journal Star*,” Trevor said dryly. He was not in the mood for this. “Seems like I sure have to answer a lot of stupid questions from all those flabby, soft, wannabe sportswriters. So, hey, it’s nice to finally meet someone who actually follows high school baseball.”

“I only follow Lincoln Southeast. My little sister goes there. And I graduated from there five years ago,” the technician stated matter-of-factly. She motioned Trevor into an examining room and added, “You’re in luck! We’re not that busy, so we’ll get you patched up before any of your girlfriends miss you!” she teased. Then she took Gene by the arm and led him to the waiting area. Leaning toward Gene, she advised, “You might want to call your coach.”

“I might not,” Gene muttered under his breath as he flopped into a chair. He could hear Trevor in the examining room, shouting to no one in particular, “Hey, I’m the starting pitcher for Southeast. We play against Northeast High at Sherman Field in less than an hour. C’mon, folks, let’s get moving! It’s the first round of playoffs!” Sliding deeper into the chair, Gene began to hope the doctor would stitch Trevor’s punky lips all the way shut.

Fifteen minutes and six stitches later, Trevor and Gene sped back to Sherman Field.

“We’ve got to hurry up!” Trevor yelled. “Pretty soon my mom is going to freak out, and my dad will send the whole Lincoln police force out looking for me.”

They shot into a parking space, and Trevor sprinted to the locker room to grab his mitt. Gene lagged behind. He was in no hurry to face Coach McLaughlin. The rest of the team was already on the field warming up, and he could see that Steve Rivera was in center field. He’d be watching his team today. He found a seat in the dugout and rested his chin in his hands.

Trevor saw Aaron warming up on the mound. With their matching

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build and dark hair, people often commented that the two bore a striking resemblance to each other. Aaron might be the better pitcher, but seeing him on the field made Trevor unhappy. He really wanted to pitch this game. “Hey, Coach! There’s nothing to worry about!” he insisted. “The doctor stitched me up, and I’m good to go! This is my start.”

“OK, Trevor,” McLaughlin conceded, “but I’m not going to let this game get away from you.”

From her seat near the dugout Trevor’s mom heard her son confront the coach. She stepped closer and held him in a worried, penetrating stare. “Stitched you up? What happened?” she demanded.

“You mean nobody told you?” Trevor was surprised and, frankly, a little hurt. Nobody was talking about what happened? The team’s best pitcher gets his lip busted and nobody is even talking about it? He shook his head in frustration. “Listen, Mom, don’t worry about it. I’ve got to go warm up now. I’m fine, and I’m going to send Northeast home in a hurry,” he called over his shoulder as he headed to the mound.

Ardyce went back to the bleachers. She had come straight to the game from her job at College View Seventh-day Adventist Church. So no, she hadn’t heard any talk of Trevor’s afternoon. His lip looked awful, and she was going to worry whether he liked it or not.

As he ran onto the field Trevor hoped his dad wouldn’t blow a gasket over the whole thing. It wasn’t always all that great having a cop for a dad, sort of an enforcer in the middle of his life trying to solve all his problems.

But none of that mattered now. He wanted to focus. Turning to the catcher, he threw the ball. *Hard*. “Hey!” Nate yelled. Nate Leuders had played catcher with Trevor since they’d been small. Stocky, and with a penchant for smart-aleck commentary, he was also Trevor’s cousin.

“So the two ladies’ men were fighting over a girl,” Nate cracked. “No surprise there!” He stroked the small accumulation of fuzz on his chin. “It was Huggy Bear trying to fend off David Hasselhoff. I hope neither one messed up his hair.”

Trevor ignored him and continued loosening up his arm.

Coach McLaughlin jogged out to the mound to check on Trevor. “I’m not happy about what happened,” he boomed. “And I want you to

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know that Gene's on the bench. As far as I'm concerned he can stay there until the bench rots." McLaughlin kicked some dirt to make his point. "What a fool! Anyway, Steve's playing center now." He thumped Trevor's shoulder a couple times, then trotted back to the dugout.

Trevor surveyed the scene from the mound. It was a warm Nebraska spring day, and the crowd was dressed in the lightweight clothing of summer. He noticed a couple girls from Northeast High. No matter where he was, he sure could spot the hot babes. Catching himself, Trevor turned back toward the black-and-gold colors of the Lincoln Southeast stands and found his girlfriend, Sam. She really was beautiful! And she drove a cute little two-seater BMW. (Her dad owned the dealership.)

"OK, man, you can take these guys!" Nate had arrived on the mound for a last-minute pregame chat. "A lot of these guys were behind your pitches the last time we played. And now your changeup and curveball are coming around. You can get them with your fastball, too. This is going to be another great performance for you. . . . Maybe you'll have a chance to get the digits for that blond over there in the pink halter top." Nate gestured toward the Northeast stands. "I saw you checkin' her out. If you want her kisses, you've gotta focus on my mitt." Nate gave Trevor a silly grin. "My mitt, her number. It's that easy."

"OK, I gotcha." Trevor gave him a shove back toward the plate. "Trust me, I'm focused. Get your fat behind back to the plate, and let's get this thing going!" The afternoon had been long enough; he was done listening to Nate's wisecracks.

Trevor stepped onto the mound. He put on his game face—like an angry pit bull. Nate flashed the signal for a fastball up and in, and Trevor nodded. Northeast's leadoff hitter was Joey Raines, a left-handed batter who struck a wiggly pose, bat and hips shifting side to side. Trevor's fastball sailed right by him for a strike.

Raines scowled. He hated Trevor's windup. He hated the way Trevor turned his back on the batter before uncorking the ball. Pulling his batting helmet down a little farther, he fixed Trevor with an icy stare. Trevor looked in for the sign. An outside curveball. Raines's bat sliced the air violently as Trevor's pitch landed in Nate's glove with a hearty *thwop!* Strike two.

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Frustrated, Raines stepped out of the batter's box and glared at Trevor before turning to the third-base coach for a sign. The coach signaled for a bunt. Raines didn't want to bunt. He wanted to rip Trevor's pitch to outer space. He shook his head and looked back at the coach. Still a bunt.

Raines stepped back into the box. He turned and squared for the bunt—and nearly fell on his face as he reached for Trevor's pitch, low and outside.

"*Steeeee-RIKE!*" the umpire bellowed, sending Raines back to the dugout.

Trevor was on fire. He retired 18 of the next 20 batters, and walked two. He had 10 strikeouts heading into the last out of the game. Southeast carried a slim 2-0 lead, and Trevor's blood was pumping in anticipation of his first high school no-hitter.

He stepped off the mound and looked around. He wasn't going to rush himself with this final hitter. As he looked toward the first baseline, he saw his dad occupying his usual space. Duaine Bullock was an intimidating force. A dominating, no-nonsense kind of man, he'd been on the Lincoln police force for more than 30 years, the past 10 as captain of the narcotics division. He'd been a high school pitcher himself, and he sensed Trevor's nervousness. He whistled and raised his chin in a sign for Trevor to focus and take care of business.

Trevor caught his cue. Well, all right. He'd have to try to keep his cool. Stepping back on the mound, he cocked his head and shook out his shoulders. Judging by the ever-rising chatter of cheers and clapping, he knew he had the crowd's attention.

Eddie Larkin had smacked eight home runs so far this season. He'd flown out deep to center and left field on his two prior at bats. Trevor *was* nervous about Larkin, and Nate sensed it. He called a timeout and ran out to the mound. He didn't want some wiry punk with fantastic bat speed to get into his cousin's head. It was obvious that Trevor was feeling the pressure of being one out away from a no-hitter. And the buzz of anticipation coming from the crowd wasn't helping.

"Hey, forget about the no-hitter," Nate told him. "It's not worth worrying all this much for. Remember, wins mean more than no-hitters. Just take care of business, and we'll talk history later."



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“Look, I know what’s on the line. I also know what a good story my no-hitter would make for the Lincoln media types,” Trevor retorted. “Just get back behind the plate, and let’s get this over with.”

Larkin kicked at the dirt in the batter’s box. He bent his knees and sneered at Trevor. “C’mon, pretty boy, give me your fastball!” he begged under his breath.

Trevor pretended not to notice Larkin’s antics. He sent him an outside curveball. Larkin ripped it foul along the third baseline for a strike. Undaunted, Larkin glowered at Trevor and stayed in the batter’s box.

Nate signaled an inside changeup, and Trevor delivered. Larkin swung well ahead of the pitch. Strike two. The Lincoln Southeast fans roared with glee and stood up in unison to support Trevor in his no-hitter bid. They began stomping their feet on the metal stands, chanting “Bull-ock! Bull-ock! Bull-ock!”

Northeast coach Don Stancy had seen enough. Motioning to the umpire for a timeout, he called Larkin back toward the dugout. “Now, you know what he likes to pitch in this situation!” Stancy barked. “His strikeout pitch is the down-and-away fastball. You practiced hitting that pitch yesterday. You can do this—he’s hittable, so just relax and nail him!”

Larkin walked back to home plate.

Trevor looked in for Nate’s sign: a circle changeup. Trevor was tempted to shake him off. He’d just thrown a changeup. Was it really such a good idea to send one in again? He wasn’t sure. But Nate had been calling this no-hitter so far, and Trevor decided to go with him. The ball came in smooth and slow. Larkin swung with all his strength and spun all the way around before Trevor’s pitch even made it to Nate’s glove.

A no-hitter! Turning toward first base, Trevor pumped his fist toward his dad.

“Oh, you got the ladies tonight, don’t you, big boy!” Nate teased as he ran out to bump chests with Trevor. Then they were engulfed in a celebrating flood of Southeast players and coaches.

“I should punch him in the lip before every game,” Gene muttered as he stalked back to the locker room.

Chapter 2



Trevor may have finished off his senior year at Lincoln Southeast High with a dramatic no-hitter in baseball, but things had been shaping up much differently that summer before his senior year. Then, everybody thought he'd be Southeast's starting quarterback. He had the charisma and arm to lead the Knights into the playoffs. . . .

"Boy, it must be nice to be the big man on campus," Trevor's dad said, giving him a punch in the chest. They were watching an afternoon preseason football game between the Kansas City Chiefs and Washington Redskins. "I mean, you can have any girl you want, right?"

"You got that right," Trevor agreed with a wide grin. "The chicks dig me. I'm *the* starting quarterback. And they like me for my body."

"Oh, for cryin' out loud!" Duaine snorted, rolling his eyes. "Listen, to be truly ready for this coming year you've gotta get your head in gear. You've gotta lead your team and make plays as the quarterback. This isn't about how many passes you can make with the ladies. You got it?"

"Chill out, Dad," Trevor sulked. "I've got everything under control. There's nothing to worry about—I've been training for this for a long time." He'd always liked football and was looking forward to the coming season. "I'll make you and Mom proud. Just wait and see."

"Well, you better," Duaine grumbled. "The guys down at the station think you're going to fall flat on your face leading the Knights this season. Spriger said your line is so weak you'll probably get sacked too often to show off your arm." Duaine drew in his breath for what Trevor could only guess would be a solemn concluding note. "I just don't want you to hurt that pitching arm. It's your only hope of getting out of here."

