

And so Joe Sullivan of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, went. "And the guy asked me to throw the ball. And I could throw pretty hard. And I could throw a fairly decent curve."

One thing leads to another "and they wanted to sign me."

If this were the made-for-television version of the life of Bishop Joseph M. Sullivan, this is where the big turning point would come: he chooses God over baseball. He gives up a brilliant pitching career to go to bat for the souls of men.

But as it turns out, Bishop Sullivan never really liked the baseball life that much anyway. "It was essentially a boring life," he remembers of his one summer canvassing the South in a beaten-up bus and throwing for the Americus Phillies in Georgia. "You played all night ball in the minor leagues, and you'd kind of lounge around most of the rest of the time."

He had always loved the church, however. He was a standout in the choir. He missed being an altar boy only because he was much too proud to stoop to asking Sister Blanche, the nun who made the recommendations. ("Quite bluntly, I felt I wasn't going to kiss . . . you know . . . you know?) But even as a young boy and through high school, he almost never missed a daily Mass at St. Ephrem's. "I mean," he said, "I bought Catholicism as a young kid. I really believed."

So the real turning point in his life, one not of his making, came much later, after he had spent four years at seminary and three years as the pastor of his first parish, Our Lady of Lourdes in Queens Village. The bishop needed social workers.

"I got a call on a Tuesday night to see him Wednesday morning. And I was registered for graduate school in social work by Thursday morning. I didn't know what a social worker was."

He adds: "When I went to school and they asked me, 'Why did you choose social work?' I said, 'Because the bishop appointed me.' The social work people's reaction to that was that I was hostile. I said, 'Well, it's the truth. I don't know whether it's hostile or not.'

"So then they asked me if I wanted to be a social worker. And the answer was, 'No!'"

He pauses for a little dramatic effect. "Best thing that ever happened to me."

Yesterday, Bishop Sullivan, an imposing, tough-talking, immensely friendly man, was sitting in a makeshift television studio in Bishop Ford High School in Brooklyn. He was preparing for a live cable show in which he would talk about the centennial, this month, of Catholic Charities of the Brooklyn-Queens Diocese, now the largest Roman Catholic human-services agency in the country, covering America's most populous diocese.

Despite not knowing what a social worker was back then, Bishop Sullivan has devoted 38 years of his life to the job, serving in welfare offices and hospitals, rising to direct the charities and now serving as vicar for human services, overseeing the charities' vast operations with their director, Frank DeStafano. (Mr. Stefano couldn't resist a dig at the boss yesterday as a reporter sat down: "Not the baseball thing again. He was only on the team for three days! Myself, I was always dedicated to the poor. No time for any kind of fund like that.")

Bishop Sullivan's message to the cable audience yesterday was that he could hope for nothing better during the next 100 years of Catholic charity work than for one message to be hammered home: "To be a practicing Catholic means to be involved in the lives of others."

But as he relaxed after the show he had another, angrier message not about personal but about public responsibility: welfare reform. He complained that too few people are talking about its effects now, which he says have hurt the poor in Brooklyn and Queens as much as anything he has seen in three decades of tumultuous change in the boroughs.

"I agree," he said, "that it had to be reformed, and I agree that there had to be a change in the culture that work must be more important than relief. But I radically disagree with the way it was done."

Four years ago, he and another bishop managed to wangle an hour and 15 minutes in the Oval Office with President Clinton, to try to talk him out of signing the welfare reform legislation. Mr. Clinton said he understood them. Then he signed the measure anyway.

"But I will tell you," he said, his face coloring, "that I think most of what is being said about the success of these programs is hype including here in this city. To me it's a sham. You look at the food lines at Catholic Charities. You look at the food lines at parishes. You look at the people trying to pay their rents."

He added: "They haven't heard the last of this. We're only into the third year, and the reality is that there will always be dependent people who can't work."

As he socked on a snap-brim hat to run out and give a speech about health care, he was asked whether it ever disheartens him—approaching his 70th year, his 44th as a priest, and nearly as long as a social worker—that there are still so many people suffering.

"It might not make any sense but it doesn't," he said. "I really think this job as heaven on . . . way to heaven. It doesn't come in the end. It begins here."●

#### THE "LEOPOLDVILLE" DISASTER

● Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, in a few days a small group of veterans will gather at Fort Benning, Georgia to commemorate one of the least known tragedies of World War II.

On Christmas Eve 1944, the Belgian troopship *Leopoldville* was transporting 2,235 American soldiers from the 262nd and 264th Regiments of the 66th Infantry Division across the English Channel. They were destined as reinforcements for units fighting the Battle of the Bulge. Many soldiers on board were singing Christmas carols as they watched the lights along the coast of liberated France.

The ship was designed to carry fewer than half the number on board, and the Belgian crew did not speak English. Reportedly, many of the American soldiers were not issued life jackets. Just five miles from its destination of Cherbourg, France, the *Leopoldville* was struck by torpedos from the German submarine U-486. Two and a half hours later, the ship capsized and sank. According to many survivors, the crew abandoned ship in the lifeboats and left the American soldiers to fend for themselves. Unable to free the ship's life rafts, many of the troops jumped to their deaths in the frigid heavy seas. The British destroyed HMS *Brilliant* saved some 500 troops. However, be-

cause it was Christmas Eve, no one else seemed to be around to help. By the next day, Christmas morning, 763 American soldiers were dead, including three sets of brothers. The dead represented 47 of the then 48 states.

Mr. President, seven of the victims were from my home state of North Dakota. Among them was my uncle, Pfc. Allan J. Dorgan. His body was never recovered, and neither were the bodies of 492 other soldiers who died in the incident. It was weeks before my family and the families of other victims heard the fateful knock on the door and were given the telegram that said their sons, brothers, uncles, or fathers were "missing in action in the European Area." It took months more before a second telegram informed them their loved ones had been "killed in action in the European Area."

Due to wartime censorship, the disaster was not reported to the news media. Survivors were told by the British and American governments to keep quiet about what happened. American authorities did not even acknowledge the sinking of the *Leopoldville* until two weeks after it went down. Later, after the war, the tragedy was considered an embarrassment and all reports were filed away as secret by the Allied governments. Some say that the American and British governments conspired to cover-up the incompetence involved in the incident. For whatever reason, details of the disaster were withheld from the public for over fifty years. Some of the victims' families never learned the truth about how their loved ones perished that night.

For over fifty years, the young soldiers on the *Leopoldville* were denied their due, and never accorded the honors and respect they deserved. Finally, a few years ago, thanks to the efforts of *Leopoldville* survivor Vincent Codianni, former New York City police investigator Alan Andrade who wrote a book about the incident, and the Veterans Memorial Committee of Waterbury, Connecticut, the U.S. Army agreed to provide a site for a monument to the tragedy.

The Leopoldville Disaster Monument was dedicated on November 7, 1997 at Fort Benning, the "Home of the Infantry." On the monument, the names and hometowns of those members of the 66th Infantry Division who lost their lives on the *Leopoldville* and the names of those who survived the tragedy, but were later killed in action, are etched in stone. This was the first official recognition shown to any of the victims or their families. It was long overdue.

It is almost 55 years since the sinking of the *Leopoldville*. When the survivors and their families gather again this week in Georgia, they will honor their comrades who have passed away since their first reunion two years ago. I hope all my colleagues will join me in expressing our appreciation for their