

OUTLOOK BY THE BAY MAGAZINE, Winter 2014

Name Droppings: Close Encounters with the Famous and Near-Famous

By Charles Ota Heller

Abbott Press (2013)

There's an old joke about a man who claimed to know everyone. The man is called Larry or Bubba or Bob.

His name might well be Charlie Heller. In *Name Droppings*, the Annapolitan's latest book, the author recounts fourteen run-ins with celebrities he has had while pursuing the American dream.

While Heller's first book, *Prague: My Long Journey Home*, was a memoir recalling his childhood in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia, *Name Droppings* is a light book you can enjoy in little morsels, while sitting in a doctor's office or riding the Metro to work.

The book reveals America's changing attitude toward race. Raised in a Europe devastated by racial phobia, Heller is shocked by the prejudice of his idol, Henry Iba, his basketball coach at Oklahoma State University.

Most people remember Jackie Robinson, but few have heard of Larry Doby, the first black man to play in the American League and first to hit a homerun in a World Series. After seeing a movie about Doby as a teenager, Heller idolized Doby, and wore Doby's number (14) or its reverse on his team uniforms. As an adult, Heller's business gave him the opportunity to meet his hero and tell the Hall of Famer how much he had meant to a young immigrant boy.

Local residents will enjoy anecdotes about Maryland history. Annapolitans familiar with Weems Creek may not realize that this

unlikely body of water is named after the Father of Celestial Navigation, Naval Academy graduate Captain P.V.H. Weems.

If these men aren't "famous" enough, there's the guy at the end of the bar who joined Heller and his golfing buddies each Thursday. He became a renowned actor and director. Or the bombshell singer a young Heller took on a tour of his university. She seemed more interested in her escort than in seeing the OSU campus. Heller shared a flight with a little package of dynamite; she was famous for her sex talk. Then there's the young neighbor Heller tried to talk out of a career in music; he became a 70's rock star with his own eponymous band.

Name Droppings is fun to read, written with Heller's characteristic humor and humility.

Marilyn Lee Recknor