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**Dreamers**

Little miracles are still happening at that baseball field in Iowa corn country.

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DYERSVILLE, Iowa | The birds are singing on this cool, sunny morning, as Becky Lansing joins her husband, Don, in the dining room.

In the same place where Ray Kinsella first told his wife, Annie, that he heard a voice in the cornfield, Don is trying to explain why people are still coming to their Field of Dreams, 17 years after the movie hit theaters.

"The main thing a lot of people relate back to is the movie," Don says in a deep drawl. "I think it ..."

"Donnie, can I interrupt?" Becky asks.

"Donnie and I always say there are as many different reasons that people come as there are people," Becky continues. "Donnie's opinion will be different. Mine is that people are looking to fill up some void."

Becky knows that feeling better than anybody. About 11 years ago, she made her own pilgrimage to the field. Her first husband had died of cancer, and she was searching for closure.

Strange, but Becky actually found something waiting for her in the corn. She found peace. She found a mission. She found Don.

Together, they care for this patch of land four hours west of Chicago.

"Me and my wife relate it back to a child," says Don, who has spent his whole life on this family farm. "When it was little, we fed it, nourished it, and as it gets bigger, we have to protect it. And that is the hardest thing."

They protect it from commercialization. They protect it from their neighbors. They ask only for donations. Dreams, they think, should be free.

"There are days we'd give this farm away if the right person would ask," Becky says. "Then there are days I would lay down my life and defend this property over one blade of grass. The field is a living, breathing part of our daily functioning. There are days you want to forget about it, but you can't."

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A woman knocked on Don's door in March 1988 and told him she was interested in using his farm for a movie.

She liked his farm, which was covered in 3 inches of snow at the time, and wondered if she could tape some video to send back to Los Angeles.

"Are you guys dreaming?" Don asked.

They were, of course. Four weeks later, they appeared again, with a request. Universal Studios wanted to build a baseball field over Don's corn and film the movie in his house. His mother couldn't believe her ears.

"She sort of thought I was nuts," Don says.

After all, she'd been there forever, too. On March 2, 1906, Don's grandfather bought the place, and three generations of Lansing men have since toiled and made a living from its land.

"There's some nice corn there, you know," Don explained to the movie people.

Like Ray Kinsella, Don listened to the voices and plowed up his crop.

Don hobnobbed with actors during the 15 weeks of filming, but the Hollywood trucks and lights pulled out as quickly as they came. Don was left with a stipend amounting to about two years' income and a baseball field where his corn used to be.

Instead of replanting immediately, he thought it would be neat to let family and friends play on it for a while.

On April 20, 1989, the movie was released. Oddly enough, people did come. Visitors started showing up on Don's doorstep, a few at first and then a steady stream. Don ignored them. They weren't there to see him anyway, he figured.

One day, he saw a man on the field. Don went out to say hi. The fellow was from New York, and he was on his way to California. He wanted to see the field before it was corn again.

"He told me this movie meant so much to him," Don says. "He was wearing a New York Giants hat. He said, 'I want you to have this.' I've still got that hat to this day."

The people kept coming, and Don decided to keep the field. He put up a sign, watered the grass and dusted off home.

Then he waited.

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Becky Lansing and her first husband had watched the movie together. Later, after his death, the movie reminded her of the good times.

In the two years after the funeral, Becky became close with her aunt, Sheila Henning, who was going through a divorce. They bonded over their despair, and together they started on the road to recovery, taking countless trips using Becky's connections as a travel agent.

"The death of my husband caused the universe to literally open and change my soul forever," Becky says. "Because of that, color was different to me. Hills looked different, mountains looked different, my spirit became different."

Somewhere along the way, Becky saw signs, snapshots of the Field of Dreams in her mind, calling her on a journey. Becky couldn't ignore that call, and in late December 1994, she and Sheila left Boulder, Colo., and headed for the field, on the way to visit family in Wisconsin.

"I think she expected something to happen," Sheila says. "Becky is a very spiritual person, and she believes that if you wish for it hard enough, you're going to get it."

They arrived in Dyersville on New Year's Eve, as planned. The field was closed, so they called Don to ask permission to visit the field that night. Don agreed. "Sounds like an old farmer!" Becky said after she got off the phone.

Becky and Sheila stopped at a convenience store on the way to the field, bought two hot dogs and two root beers. When they arrived, it was dark outside and the field was covered in snow. They sat on the bleachers and ate their hot dogs, tough as logs in the winter weather. They slid into the bases and made snow angels as the flakes slowly fell around them.

Becky and Sheila returned the next morning. They saw Don approaching. He was younger than they thought and strapping, wearing a leather bomber jacket.

"He looked fine!" Sheila says.

Becky extended her hand to Don and introduced herself. "Hi, I'm Becky," she said. "I just wanted to thank you."

"Oh," Don replied. "I've been waiting for you."

Don meant that he had been waiting for their arrival after the phone call the night before. Becky convinced herself he meant he had been waiting for her.

Don invited them into the house for coffee. Electricity filled the room. Don, the 53-year-

old lifetime bachelor, and Becky, the 41-year-old widow, began to talk.

"They couldn't take their eyes off each other," Sheila says.

When she left, Becky knew she would be back. She called him from Wisconsin, and they stopped by Dyersville on the return trip to have dinner with Don. By June, Don had asked her to move in, and on July 26, 1995, he asked her to marry him. Becky said yes.

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The field had given Becky so much in a short time, and it wouldn't be long before she had her chance to give back.

Her new neighbors, Al and Rita Ameskamp, had been family friends of the Lansings since 1964, when the Ameskamps bought the adjacent property. The land had always been divided by power lines, which, after 1988 and the movie, separated left and center field from the infield and right field.

When the families realized they had a tourist attraction on their hands, Al and Don had meetings and tried to reach a profit-sharing agreement. They couldn't.

So, today, when you ease up the long driveway, you have two options: Park at "Left & Center Field of Dreams" or "Field of Dreams Movie Site." There are two signs, two gift shops and two sets of bleachers. There's a sign on the Lansings' land that reads: "The souvenir shop at third base is operated by out-of-state private investors and not associated with the Lansing farm or family."

The year after the Lansings got married, the Ameskamps passed management of their side of the field to a private investment company from Milwaukee.

The firm came in with plenty of ideas about jazzing up the field and bringing more people to Dyersville than ever before. They wanted to add more fields and charge teams to play on them.

Don and Becky didn't want that.

He had allowed some commercials to be filmed on the field, including a Buick ad that aired during the 1989 World Series. But Don saw this as trouble. He just wanted the field to remain pure, simple - a place where real fathers and sons could come play catch.

"The first year after the movie was made," Don says, "my phone rang off the wall with teams wanting to come out here and play. I'm so glad I said no. If I wouldn't have, this whole thing would be out of my control."

Becky jumps in, "This place could be a wedding chapel inside of eight months. And that is all we would do. The biggest challenge we face is keeping the field noncommercial. It

is infinitely more difficult to keep it small and simple than it is to let a corporation come in here and fancy it up. Anybody can do that."

Today, Becky doesn't speak to Keith Rahe, a Dyersville native and manager of Left & Center. He doesn't understand her emotional connection to the field.

"We have the ability to draw people from all over the world," Rahe says. "It's a tourist attraction. Why live in such turmoil?"

Rahe says the Lansings live on their own island. He says they don't deal with the state board of tourism, and they turned down an interview with ESPN when the network was doing its "50 states in 50 days" stop in Iowa.

The Lansings say they are just trying to shield their baby from the realities of a modern world. Becky always wanted a child, and now she's got one.

"Protecting the land, no matter what is out there, is very, very important," Becky says. "I believe it's important to the evolution of the human spirit and soul. It's important that we preserve what is falling off the landscape everywhere around us. The field is a little bit of Americana, a little bit of the past."

The two sides haven't changed since 1995. The fight has left Don and Becky exhausted. Don had a mild heart attack a few years ago, and Becky's health has been an issue as well.

"I think it's just been wearing emotionally on both of them," Sheila says. "They've tried to step back and organize their thoughts about it. It's not worth them dying over."

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More than 60,000 people visit the Field of Dreams every spring and summer, each looking for something different out there in the corn.

"We could write a book," Don says.

There's the minor-league catcher who got hurt and never made the big leagues. There are the two brothers who came to the field to mend old wounds and, by the end of the day, were playing catch. There's the father who lost his son in a plane crash.

"Are you going to tell the one about the twins?" Don asks Becky.

Becky thinks it over for a second and decides that she should.

"I will cry about this," she warns.

One afternoon, she walked out of the house to see Don sitting on the bleachers, talking

with a couple. Tears were streaming down his face. That shocked Becky because Don never shows much emotion.

Reno and JoAnn Bianco had come all the way to Dyersville from Philadelphia. It was the one-year anniversary of the day their twin boys died. The Biancos had tried to have children for 10 years, but Joseph and Jeffrey were born prematurely and were gone within hours.

Reno was carrying a large backpack at the field. In it were infant-sized baseball gloves, one for each boy, decorated in ribbon with the children's names sewn into the mitt.

"If this is heaven," Reno thought, "the boys can come and play on the field."

With the family's permission, the Biancos placed the gloves on the house's porch swing and let them sit for 24 hours, plenty of time for two brothers to play baseball.

Each glove had a note attached to it. Reno's note to Joseph read, "For that perfect catch in that perfect field, now and in the future. Love, Dad."

Becky couldn't let go of the Biancos' story after they left. Three weeks later, she sent hand-written letters to the children.

"Dear Joseph," she wrote on one. "God, it was wonderful having you at the field today. I'm so glad you could join us and play."

The time spent at the field was just as much about helping the parents as it was the kids. The families have kept in touch. They e-mail and talk on the phone from time to time, and last year, the Biancos came back and ate dinner with the Lansings.

"Jeffrey was only alive for an hour, and Joseph was alive for a day," Reno says. "It was one of the worst experiences of my life, and a year later, it became one of the best. Whether you believe in that stuff or not, it helped us move on."

For years, Becky felt like she was running a confessional at the field. She embraced that part of the job, perhaps too much.

"Helping people relieve themselves of their pain is hard," Becky says. "It is a massive responsibility that weighs extremely heavily on me. I take this stuff in and I hang, and I cling to it.

"It's hard because, sometimes, I think people expect that Donnie and I are going to go, 'You're absolved.' A bartender must feel this way."

After so many sad stories, Becky decided she needed separation from the field. They started looking for a second house in Dyersville, and they found one, right down the street.

After more than 90 years of Lansings living in the white country home with the white picket fence, Don and Becky Lansing moved out.

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It's early March at the field, and winter is on its way out. There are no stalks of corn that reach above your shoulders, only rows of mud and yellowed plants surrounding the field.

Soon, Don will plant this year's crop, starting the cycle all over again. Soon, people will come, hundreds per day, starving for a glimpse of the past and a glimmer of hope.

Some will just play catch. Some will bring a bat along and take infield. Some will walk to where the outfield meets the cornfield and stick their hand out to see if it disappears. Some will sit on the top of the bleachers and, if they look closely enough, see the heart Ray once carved for Annie.

Those who choose the Lansings' site will drive up the gravel road, the one from the end of the movie, the one Becky Lansing is looking at right now through the dining-room window.

"Listen to the birds," she says. Becky pauses momentarily, taking it all in. "This is heaven out here."

Becky followed her inner voice here 11 years ago. What if she didn't listen?

"I think Becky's where she ought to be," Sheila says. "I don't know if you believe in fate, but she's helped keep that dream alive. Although there have been problems, she found her spot, and she wouldn't give it up for the world."

Don and Becky have done their job well. The field is 17 years old, and all the battles haven't left any noticeable scars. The grass is somehow green, despite winter's lingering, and good luck getting the red clay dirt off your shoes.

"It's about as simple as it gets," Becky says proudly. "The field is not fussy. There's nothing pretentious about it. It's a baseball field in a cornfield."

The Lansings opened the field Saturday, and it will stay open until the last dugout has cleared in late October. More people will come this year than last.

Don and Becky don't spend as much time here as they used to, because of the move. But every spring, they still fight over who gets to mow the field first, and their eyes brighten just thinking about the season ahead.

"Donnie and I have that childlike wonder about the world," Becky says. "We see everything like we're seeing it for the first time."

"This is who we are. The Field of Dreams has made us who we are."