

The Washington Post

March 7, 2005 Monday
Washington Post Sports Section
By Jim Hage

THE CHAT

David Lander, 57, played Squiggy, the greasy, doltish truck driver on "Laverne and Shirley," which ran from 1976 to '83 and lives on via cable. In real life, it turns out Squiggy is a seamhead: He's an associate scout for the Seattle Mariners and at one time was a part-owner of the Class AAA Portland Beavers.

After having multiple sclerosis diagnosed in 1984, Lander kept his condition from the public for 15 years. In 1999, he released "Fall Down Laughing: How Squiggy Caught MS and Didn't Tell Nobody." Lander is an ambassador for the MS Society and will be speaking on Saturday at the Marriott at Metro Center.

About the book title: I get the 'fall down' part, but what's funny about MS?

My wife said the same thing: "I see you falling down, but I don't see you laughing so much." You've got to keep your sense of humor, and I wanted to make that clear in the book.

What do people with MS prefer to be called?

I call them MSers, but my spellcheck always wants to change it to misers. MSers share a unique experience, even speak our own language, which is why I enjoy talking with them.

Don't MSers use steroids as part of their treatment? Were you disappointed that Jose Canseco didn't rat you out?

They do make you cranky, but steroids can get you back on your feet in a hurry. As for steroids in baseball, I don't know. No steroid gives Barry Bonds his hand-eye coordination.

ESPN's Jim Rome went off on Squiggy when the Mariners signed you as a scout. What's up with that?

Romie, I don't blame him. He probably saw it on the wire and jumped on it. Hiring Squiggy is a joke -- he's just a character I used to play. But some other scouts told him I actually have a good baseball mind. I went on his show later and we had a wonderful interview.

Is it tough to be accepted as a baseball man when a lot of people still see

you as Squiggy?

Before the show, I wrote a piece on the Pirates for True magazine. The next season, after "Laverne and Shirley" became popular, I saw the same players and they said, 'How can you be a writer if you're an actor?' But they opened up more quickly to me as an actor -- I guess they didn't trust me as a writer, but that's really how I started in television, too, writing for "Laverne and Shirley."

When Bert Blyleven was feuding with the Pittsburgh press, the reporters knew he would talk to me so I was sent in to ask a series of questions.

Let's say Earl Weaver needs a pinch hitter, looks down the bench and sees you and the Fonz. Who's he gonna call?

I did stand in once against Goose Gossage and they made me wear a helmet, of course, but also a catcher's mask and a chest protector. I never even saw the pitches, much less got the bat off my shoulder. So me or the Fonz? They should send in Patsie.

Portland [Ore.] gave Washington a scare when baseball was deciding where to send the Expos. We're not bitter -- we got the girl -- but is Portland major league?

I must admit, that's Seattle Mariners territory with the cable setup and fan base. They can't play big league baseball in that stadium, either. And it almost always rains at 6 o'clock. But that's better than the old domed stadium in Seattle. Every time I walked in there, I said, man, it looks like rain.

So what do you think of the Nationals?

At least they'll know where home is. The Expos, your Nats, have a way of surprising people. I like the players they've added, like [Esteban] Loaiza and [Jose] Guillen. No matter what, it'll be a lot of fun.