

Inaugural Race

Just before her first Indy,
we took my child to a Penske driver appearance
because my daughter age six not quite seven
wanted to see Helio

With absolutely no awe of celebrity
she bounced right up to him and proudly announced,
“I’m going to the RACE!”
He laughed and said, “Is that right?”
“Yes!” she exclaimed, as he scrawled his name on a card
and we all grinned into a camera flash

On race morning
my daughter with her grandpa
began their tradition of lunching over grandma’s tuna sandwiches
on the mounds near the infield museum
before joining the family veterans in the bleachers
where we have watched leaders dart first out of Turn One
for the past thirty years

My daughter’s wide open eyes absorbed technicolor balloons overhead
and a blurry rainbow of speeding chassis on track
Her Helio flying through the short chute
an orange and white sponsored streak
and her ears through protectively plugged
still pulsed at unmistakable high pitched bellow of Indy engines

My daughter age six not quite seven
did not grow bored as laps increased
She wandered the infield with hand firmly curled around her mom’s
two generations inhaling traces of burgers, stinky beer and coconut sunscreen
while cheering on race cars

As Mr. Davidson’s history will tell you
Helio won his third checkered flag that May
And to this day my daughter claims
that neither Penske’s engines nor his oil stained, fuel thrusting crew members
were Helio’s charms to victory
He won, she says
because she was there

—Melissa Aughe, Speedway, IN

From the author: *I wrote this because my family has gone to every race since 1986, but some of my best memories are from when my daughter started going with us. It has been a joy to pass on the traditions to her.*