

The Seventh Son of a Seventh Son

by Al Oldroyd

Former major league baseball player and longtime college coach, Danny Litwhiler, considered one of the greatest innovators in the sport, died on 23 Sep 2011 at the age of 95. As a player, he was a National League All-Star in 1942 with the Philadelphia Phillies, the starting left fielder in 1944 for World Champion St. Louis Cardinals, and the starting left fielder for the Boston Braves on 15 Apr 1947 in the game when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major league baseball. As a coach at Florida State and at Michigan State, he amassed 678 victories in his 28 years at the helm and led 3 of his teams to the College World Series. He also coached the United States Baseball team to the world championship in 1968. His entire statistical record as a player and as a coach can be found online. Among the more notable of the 100+ innovations in the sport were the radar gun for measuring the speed of the pitch and Diamond Grit for keeping the field playable in rainy conditions. He also authored six books on baseball and served as an ambassador for baseball around the world.

Daniel Webster Litwhiler was born and raised in Ringtown in Schuylkill County, but his

family's roots were in the Roaring Creek Valley in Columbia County. He was the seventh son born into the Stephen Litwhiler family, who was the seventh son born into the Henry Litwhiler family. Stephen Litwhiler was a farmer in Locust Township and in Franklin Township until his declining health resulted in his relocating to Ringtown to operate the Exchange Hotel & Restaurant. Nine of Danny Litwhiler's siblings were born in Columbia County and many were baptized in the St. Paul Reformed Church in Numidia. Five of these siblings died in infancy or in early childhood and are buried in the St. Paul Reformed Church Cemetery. Another brother, adopted by his parents when their first five children failed to thrive, died at the age of 18 and is also buried in Numidia. Also buried in the St. Paul Reformed Cemetery in Numidia are Danny Litwhiler's parents: Stephen & Mary Lucetta (Yeager) Litwhiler; his maternal grandparents: Henry & Mary Ellen (Walter) Yeager; his maternal great-grandparents: Henry & Anna Sophia (Snyder) Yeager and John & Rachel (Helwig) Walter; and his maternal great-great-grandparents: John & Catherine (Harner) Yeager, Solomon & Regina (Diehl) Snyder, and Jacob & Catherine (Brobst) Helwig.



Daniel Litwhiler, Bloomsburg State Teachers College Yearbook - 1938

Danny Litwhiler attended Bloomsburg State Teachers College from 1934 until graduating in 1938, earning a degree in Science & Social Studies with a minor in English. He also excelled in baseball with the baseball field at the college being named in his honor. He received the Distinguished Service Award from the college in 1948 and was a member of the Athletic Hall of

Fame at Bloomsburg University. Three of Danny Litwhiler's older brothers (Archie, Truman, and Woodrow) also attended Bloomsburg State Teachers College and also excelled in athletics. During his major league career, Danny Litwhiler returned to the area during the off season, where he worked as a substitute teacher in the area schools. From 1948 until 1954, he lived in Bloomsburg, first at 483 West Main Street and then at 180 Spruce Street. His fourth child was born at the Bloomsburg Hospital and his older children attended the local schools. For a time, he was also employed by several car dealerships washing and waxing cars, working with Robert John "Bobby" Rhawn, another local major league baseball player. Danny Litwhiler's brother, Woodrow, also lived in Bloomsburg and taught in the local schools from 1939 to 1947.

The seventh son of a seventh son is said to possess special powers (the ability to heal people by touching them and to foresee the future), and to be bestowed with good luck. Danny Litwhiler did not have the power to heal people by touching them (his father went blind at an early age, his first wife died young of emphysema, and he himself was color blind), nor did he have the ability to foresee the future. He was, however, a gifted problem-solver, as indicated by the number of innovations with which he has been credited. Many of his innovations had a profound impact on baseball and are still part of the game today. Danny Litwhiler lived a long and productive life. Good luck may have played a small part in his success, but most of his success should be credited to natural talent, hard work, and proper planning. Danny Litwhiler was but one of many area people who have used these attributes to rise from humble beginnings to prominence.

Sources:

Book – "Danny Litwhiler: Living the Baseball Dream" – Bloomsburg Library
U.S. Census Records from 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920 and 1930 – online
St. Paul Church Baptismal Records (Numidia) – CCHGS
St. Paul Church Baptismal Records (Ringtown) – CCHGS
St. Paul Church Cemetery Records (Numidia) – CCHGS
Bloomsburg City Directories for 1939-43, 1947, 1949, 1951, 1953 – CCHGS
Ringtown Area Obituary Book (1950-1995) – CCHGS