

Field of Dreams Book

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) - Brett Mandel succumbed to the magic the moment he stopped his car at the Field of Dreams movie site.

The manicured infield and the corn surrounding the lush outfield grass seem to call out to him. So he grabbed his glove and raced onto the field to join the pickup game already under way.

"It really did look like showing up the day after the movie ended," Mandel said. "I was expecting the Kinsella family to come out of the house and the ballplayers to come out of the corn."

At this point, it would be a great story to report that Mandel was so inspired he wrote a book. But that's trouble when dealing with fact. It just wasn't so.

Mandel already had started researching the book and had traveled to the famous field near Dyersville in northeast Iowa from his home in Philadelphia to interview visitors.

His work produced "Is This Heaven? The Magic of the Field of Dreams," a book that tells the stories of people who found peace, hope and renewal at the baseball diamond carved out of a cornfield for the 1989 movie "Field of Dreams."

"It makes people feel like they want to be kids again," said Mandel, director of financial and policy analysis for the Philadelphia controller's office.

"Senior citizens bring a glove even though they haven't thrown for ages. Guys who haven't swung a bat for years step up to the plate. Somebody in a wheelchair is being pushed around the bases. There's something very neat about this field. It brings out something in people: 'I'm going to actually participate.' "

Mandel's book recounts the story of the Pennsylvania father whose son was killed in the crash of United Flight 232 in Sioux City on July 19, 1989. The family had gone to see "Field of Dreams" two months earlier, on their son's 12th birthday.

Nearly a year after the crash, the family visited the movie site and Jim Bohn placed his son's bat, his glove and baseballs they used to play catch with in the corn beyond the outfield.

Then there's the story of Becky DuBuisson, who after a dream in 1994 felt, for some inexplicable reason, that she had to be at the Field of Dreams at midnight on New Year's Eve, eating a hot dog and drinking a root beer.

She did exactly that and seven months later, she married Don Lansing, who owns part of the field and lives in the white farmhouse featured so prominently in the movie.

Mandel also tells of Takeshi Horie, who journeyed from Osaka, Japan _ a 17-hour trip _ not to see the Grand Canyon or Yankee Stadium, but solely to visit the Field of Dreams.

A Minnesota man told Mandel he thought he could see his grandfather, dead for 15 years, standing in right field. A woman felt her dead mother's presence at the field and thought, "You've been here, haven't you?"

At the end of the movie, farmer Ray Kinsella, played by Kevin Costner, reconnects with his dead father, who shows up as a young, handsome catcher. In real life, Mandel found a Florida man who whose first meeting with an 18-year-old son he had never seen took place at the field.

"It just seems to be that kind of place," Mandel said. "It draws enough people who are willing to discuss something incredible. They come looking for something to happen and they actually feel something."

Mandel, who also has written a book about minor league baseball and another about the city of Philadelphia, was contacted by an agent in 1996 about doing a book on the Field of Dreams movie site, which had become major tourist attraction drawing 75,000 people a year.

He liked the idea but did not find a publisher until 2000. With that arranged, Mandel intensified his research and visited the field. Once he finished pitching batting practice and taking a few cuts at the plate, Mandel dug out his tape recorder and notebook and started talking to visitors.

"Some of the stories, when I encountered them it was almost like I had to pinch myself," Mandel said "I'd find myself saying, 'This is great.' "

Others he encountered did not want to talk about their experience on the field because it was too personal.

¶ "They were like, if I tell you, you tell the world and then it's not mine anymore," Mandel said. "I respect that."

Along with turning Dyersville into a tourist mecca, the movie has rekindled interest in Shoeless Joe Jackson, who was banned from baseball after the 1919 Black Sox scandal. In the movie, Jackson is the first player to appear on the field that Kinsella builds.

The line "Is This Heaven?" is still used in promotional materials to this day. Iowa's state slogan is "Fields of Opportunities."

And in Chisholm, Minn., two \$500 scholarships are given each year in the name of Moonlight Graham, who spent 50 years as a doctor in the town after playing a half inning in one major league baseball game and never getting to bat. In the movie, Graham comes back as a young player and gets that chance to face a major league pitcher.

The scholarships are funded through the sale of Moonlight Graham baseball cards. Sales spike every time the movie is shown, said Mike Kalibabky, who oversees fund raising.

"I'm expecting something from the book, too, depending on the success," Kalibabky said.

Mandel is an unabashed fan of the movie and, after his visit, of the field.

"You can run up the stairs of the Philadelphia Art Museum like Rocky did, but it's not the same feeling," Mandel said. "At the Field of Dreams, if you are willing to suspend disbelief for a second, you can almost convince yourself you've stepped into the film."