By now, you've read all the vitriol, hate, indifference, sadness, and happiness regarding the death of former Cleveland Browns owner Art Modell. His move of the Browns left a gaping hole in the hearts of Cleveland fans.

And for that, I thank you, Art Modell.

I was nine years old when the Browns were moved to Baltimore, so I have next to no recollection of the events other than what I've read, been told, or the reaction I got when saying that four-letter word "Art Modell". I had no real allegiance to the Browns, and, in fact, was a Raiders fan because I really liked Howie Long and they had Bo Jackson in Tecmo Super Bowl. My father had been a Cowboys fan since the 70s when Tony Dorsett and Roger Staubach ran the offense and his favorite player, Bob Lilly, wreaked havoc on defense. As a result, I never got pushed to root for the Browns, had only been to Municipal Stadium a couple of times, and I'm pretty sure I never even owned a Browns shirt or hat. My dad did regularly buy me Troy Aikman and Emmitt Smith stuff, though, I never was a Cowboys fan.

I did, however, love the Cleveland Indians. The ragtag bunch that had their best season in 21 years during the year I was born, 1986. I wouldn't catch passes in the yard pretending I was Webster Slaughter or Ozzie Newsome. I wouldn't run holding a football telling everyone I was Eric Metcalf. What I did do was hit wiffle balls that my father pitched to me pretending I was Candy Maldonado.

In 1994, Jacobs Field opened. The strike-shortened season kept the Indians from their first playoff berth in 40 years. In 1995, the Indians captivated the city, making it to their first World Series since 1954. They lost to the pitching-heavy Braves, but had created something special in the city. That something special became even more magnified on November 6, 1995.

It was on that day that Art Modell announced that he would be moving the team to Baltimore following the conclusion of the 1995 season. Fans were, understandably, irate. The next day, voters had unanimously approved a ballot measure to remodel Municipal Stadium, which had been one of Modell's sticking points in the negotiations to leave town. But, it was too late.

From 1996-1999, there was no NFL in Cleveland. During that time, the Indians sold out all of their home games. Companies who may have had to decide between purchasing Browns tickets or Indians tickets now had no decision to make. Suites at Jacobs Field were full. Club seats were full. Lower box seats were snatched up in a matter of minutes on the day that tickets went on sale. With incredible attendance figures, a new ballpark, and a successful team, the Indians were finally the toast of the town after 40+ years of irrelevance.

Dick Jacobs could increase payroll. He could afford to get the supplemental pieces that the team needed. He could afford to keep who he needed to keep as their salaries escalated. There was no firesale. There was a solid, consistent roster of very good players.

Art Modell was partially responsible for the renaissance of Cleveland Indians baseball. The economy was good in those days and people had disposal income to spend on sporting events. Clevelanders weren't nearly as spread out in those days as they are now. Now, people commute from places like Medina, Madison, Conneaut, Akron, Avon, and Brecksville to go to sporting events in downtown Cleveland. Modell moving the Browns was just another element of the perfect storm that led to the glory days of the Indians. In the lifetimes of most Clevelanders, those were far and away the best times for Indians baseball. Former diehard Browns fans became diehard Indians fans. Former Browns season ticket holders now bought quarter, half, or full-season plans with the Tribe.

With the Browns out of the picture, the Indians were front and center. The 455 consecutive sellout streak, which began on June 12, 1995 and ended on April 4, 2001 may not have been possible without the relocation of the Browns. Is it any coincidence that the bottom fell out for the Indians shortly after the Browns returned? After five straight trips to the playoffs from 1995-1999, the Indians fell short in 2000. In 2001, they had one last stand before the rebuild

began in 2002.

The Dolan family bought the Indians after the 1999 season. The Browns had just returned and played their inaugural season with the second coming of the franchise. In my opinion, the Dolans underestimated just how much the bubble would burst. Escalating salaries and fewer fan dollars put the Indians into the downward spiral that has plagued them for much of the last 12 years. Dick Jacobs got out just in time. I have to think part of his timing for selling the team was due to his foresight about the return of the Browns and what it would mean for the Indians.

The Indians averaged 41,724 per game from 1995-1999. In the 13 seasons since the Browns returned, that number has fallen drastically to 26,573. External factors have played a role, including the personnel rebuilds, the recession, and an exodus of families to outer suburbs that are barely described as being part of the Cleveland Metro area. Corporate investment in suites, club seats, and lower box seats has gone down significantly. The return of the Browns also definitely played a role.

Meanwhile, the Browns, who continue to be the city's lovable losers with two playoff appearances since 1999, draw just fine. From 2006-2011, the Cleveland Browns Stadium averaged 95.95% capacity. Meanwhile, the Indians drew just 23,603 per game, or somewhere around 56% of capacity.

In my formative years as a fan, basically from age nine through nearly age 13, there were no Cleveland Browns. It was at that time that I developed my love for the Cleveland Indians and continue to have a passion for them, in spite of the many things that are wrong with my beloved team. I watch the Browns on Sundays in a very casual way. I don't get pissed off if they lose. I generally bet against them or bet against them scoring points by taking the under. I don't dislike them. I don't particularly like them. I'm ambivalent towards them. I go to one game every couple of seasons.

On the flip side, every Indians game is a chance to be happy or pissed off. I don't bet on or against them because I don't want to be additionally upset if they lose and I don't want to root against them. I still go to games in spite of the product on the field. I was a season ticket holder this past year for the first time, after averaging 30 or more games every year since 2006 when I had the means to take myself to a game when I wanted to go. They're like my alcoholic uncle who needs an intervention but I still love him anyway. The Browns are just my alcoholic uncle who I rarely speak to and don't really care what happens to him.

What happened with the Indians while the Browns were gone is undoubtedly part of the reason why I am such a big Indians fan today. The excitement of those teams. What it meant to be lucky enough to go to a game. Now, I can walk up and buy a ticket for any game I want to. Back then, it was something you circled on the calendar and looked forward to for days, weeks, or even months. I developed idols on that team. I developed a love for baseball watching that team.

And I have Art Modell to thank for that.

I don't know if things would have gone the same way if the Browns had not left and I'm not interested in playing that game. I also realize that I'm definitely going to be in the minority, as a lot of people are still furious about losing the Browns 17 years after it happened. That was evident with some of the comments in the wake of Modell's death. Not to mention, my age plays a big role in all of this, as I wasn't alive to develop the apathy towards the Indians that so many people who were alive in the '60s, '70s and '80s have.

I hate Art Modell because, as a Clevelander, I'm supposed to. I have my strongest allegiance towards the Indians. I don't root against the Browns. I'm in favor of whatever helps strengthen Cleveland because I was born and raised here. The Browns winning helps morale, helps the local economy, and gives Cleveland something to be proud of. I've never been anti-Browns. I just don't associate myself with them the way that most Clevelanders do. I don't live and die with Sunday afternoons and I don't have a desire to punt the dog on Monday morning after a disappointing Sunday Browns game.

My worst memories as a Cleveland sports fan aren't the Browns 1995 move or the January 2003 playoff game collapse against Pittsburgh. They're not Red Right 88 or Dwayne Rudd's helmet toss. They're the 2007 ALCS and the 1997 World Series. They're the day Victor Martinez was traded and having to tell my fiancée that Jake Westbrook, her favorite player, had been traded. They're the day that I came to the realization the baseball economics give the Indians very little chance of competing on a regular basis.

So, thank you, Art Modell for helping to mold me into the Indians fan that I am today. Now, kindly, go rot in hell.