

# THE CROWD MENTALITY

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Recently I had the opportunity to reconnect with Ron Wolford, a boyhood friend who I had not seen in almost 50 years. Our families lived next door to each other and as such the two of us interacted in a number of ways. At present Ron is a homebuilder and on his website it states that he began his career upon graduation from college. Yet as the two of us recalled old times I reminded Ron that his career really began in the summer of 1961 when we both were ten years of age.

That summer Ron Wolford organized a group of boys from our neighborhood to build a baseball diamond and a figure eight track in the field back of both our houses. The baseball diamond had inset bases, base lines cut out from dirt that extended into the outfield, a grass surface that was mowed regularly by Ron, and finally a wooden backstop that eliminated the need for a catcher. Most days that summer boys of all ages gathered to play pickup baseball on the newly built field. And each of us felt a particular degree of pride as to the sturdily constructed backstop that stood behind home plate.

However, one day late that summer a group of us gathered to play baseball and discovered that the prized wooden backstop had been knocked over. It was now more difficult to keep a baseball in the playing area than before. All of us who had come to play were upset as to this and wondered how and by whom the backstop had been upended. At that moment Ron as our leader spoke up and indicated that he thought a boy named Joey was the guilty party. Since Joey did not play baseball with the rest of the neighborhood it stood to reason that perhaps his feelings had been hurt by not being included.

The collective anger of a group of neighborhood boys was now directed at Joey. We had all worked hard to build the backstop and did not appreciate our efforts going for naught. Yet it was at this point that I began using ten-year-old logic and wondered if Joey could have actually done it. To begin with, Joey was but three years old. As such Joey was constantly being watched by his grandmother and never allowed to leave his yard. Even if Joey had been able to leave his yard, he was not nearly big enough to have upended the backstop by himself. Finally, I realized that even though I was much bigger than Joey I was unable to move the backstop solely by my own efforts.

There was now genuine doubt in my mind as to Joey's guilt. Yet I didn't have the moral courage at that age to speak out in Joey's defense. After all, Ron Wolford was a leader in the neighborhood who as a rule stuck up for the underdog. As such I deferred to Ron and to the group at large. I therefore reached the same conclusion as my playmates. If Ron said Joey did it—HE DID IT!

Fortunately, no action was taken by the group as we simply reset the backstop and continued playing baseball. As it turned out the collective feeling towards Joey was largely due to his grandmother being protective of him to the point of her not always acting in a pleasant manner toward the neighborhood boys. Becoming older allowed all of us to better understand why Joey's grandmother was so protective.

And we also discovered to our surprise that his grandmother became more amiable towards each of us as Joey got older.

How many times in life have we found strong leaders making assertions that upon using logic we find their statements to be inaccurate and/or unfeeling? And unlike Ron Wolford, who soon went back to his usual demeanor of sticking up for the underdog, these persons can potentially inflict long-term damage on both individuals and society at large. As we enter a time of “change and challenge” as described by our national media let us be open to change and at the same time be respectful of all persons and viewpoints. Doing so may well require a degree of moral courage. During the recent past there has been a call by many to “Make America Great Again.” I would offer a small change as to that message. It would be the following:

*“Make America (and each of us) whole again.”*

Sam Denny  
Seneca Class of 1969