If I had the opportunity for a do-over maybe I would pick the Yankees. But I love where I am in my life and love serving as a dean.

— Dr. Joel Levine, SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE

BY ANDREW GARCIA

Southwestern 1, Yankees 0

Teenage Joel Levine had a tough choice — sign with the NY Yankees or accept a prestigious music scholarship.

For two grueling weeks he kept sticking. Levine never liked him as a pitcher, but also liked his control and saw his powerful arm as an asset in the outfield — possibly as a replacement for Mantle himself, who in 1956 was battling through the final season of his Hall of Fame career.

Levine took fly balls and fungo in the outfield, stripping around the Mantle sprinkler and gliding in front of "Monument Park" where broome and stone-bleachers stand erect through snow-blowing Yankee-green Miller Huggins, Babe Ruth, DiMaggio and a short time later, Mantle. He played fly balls by the mighty right field in the 1950s, threw from the same places DiMaggio had hit down home run hitters in the 1940s and guarded the gap like home run champion Roger Maris early in the 1960s.

After a frightening spell of restless workouts, the Yankees returned the field down to 10 times who had risen above the roof. Levine was left standing. The New York Yankees wanted to sign him.

Levine said he was ecstatic, but his mother confirmed. She was proud of Joel for being offered a spot in the Yankee organization, but concerned about his spot at Manhattan School of Music and his scholarship. She had never liked the sport and he had been an obsessed baseballiac who did not help, chain smoking in front of the TV, watching every possible Yankees and Mets game.

Young Joel said he still remembers the bright Bronx morning when the phone rang at 5 a.m. At that time of the year sunlight reflected off the fifth floor Emerson across the alley into the Levine tiny.

"Yes, Mr. Levine," he said.

"Mr. Levine," he said. "I've spotted some opportunities for you in the music business. You have an eye on Levine, too, and invited him to a tryout the summer after he graduated from high school. He grabbed his glove and spikes and headed to The House That Ruth Built, the Bronx baseball cathedral of Yankee Stadium.

"Almost 100 high school and college baseball standouts were invited to the tryout. Most were sent home after the first day.

Levine stuck. And he kept on sticking.

Levine was a first baseman at Manhattan School of Music, an honor that would precede his music career.

Levine had offered a job in a month while, and even to the Amistad Island. He turned it down to work in low-income, minority Spanish Harlem. "I don't think that ever made it was great," he said. "I think that taught me so much about injustices in our education system and what we need to do to elevate disadvantaged communities."

Teaching in NYC's barrio communities helped open doors to new opportunities, and in 1968, he became a decades-long devotion to developing critical thinking skills in underprivileged students on Natan American reservations and borderlands schools. He took that mission with him to Pittsburgh, Massachusetts to the East Bay area of Berkeley, to work for the Band Council of Mission Indians (dalonek who now refer to themselves by their ancestral name of Kumeyaay).

"I've always been interested in music and I think that played a key role in opening doors to new opportunities, and in 1968, he became a decades-long devotion to developing critical thinking skills in underprivileged students on Natan American reservations and borderlands schools. He took that mission with him to Pittsburgh, Massachusetts to the East Bay area of Berkeley, to work for the Band Council of Mission Indians (dalonek who now refer to themselves by their ancestral name of Kumeya).

Levine arrived at SC in 2006 as dean of Language, Literature and Humanities. He came with Professor of Reading and Curriculum Sarah Garcia-Navarrete and Instructor Yvonne Perez Ybarra to develop an award-winning curriculum "My Reading Tools," that has spawned successful handbooks and sessions for workshops and classes around the globe. Levine also serves as a mentor and advisor for doctoral students at San Diego State University where he serves on dissertation committees.

Levine is also a prolific speaker, and a keen advocate for the music industry.

"I actually think I'm better now than I ever was," he said. "That makes sense because learning should be continuous. We can all continue to learn at whatever we like to do as we grow older."