



This is the sixth in a series of stories for The Buffalo News by the oldest daughter of Bills great Jim Kelly.

It's that time of year again . . .

Buffalo Bills training camp is in full swing and our team and fans are back together again. For the Kelly Family, there's another reason why this time of year is important. It's a time when a very special group of people is more than just friends sharing life's common challenges, trials and triumphs, but rather a community, a family.

Every year, the Hunter's Hope Foundation, a not-for-profit my parents founded to help children and families suffering from diseases like the one my younger brother Hunter had, hosts the Hunter's Hope Family and Medical Symposium. (See www.huntershope.org for more

information). This annual event brings together families, physicians and scientists from around the world for a week of learning and support.

I see most of these people only once a year. However, when we're together, we pick up right where we left off as if nothing has changed. We hug, cry and laugh. Sometimes words aren't even needed. We seem to understand without explanation, as if life can be lived and hearts shared between the lines. We're no longer people of different ethnicities, backgrounds, social status or beliefs. We're simply a family. Even though this is one of the hardest weeks of the year for me, it is also one of the most rewarding.

Watching your child or sibling suffer and die from disease changes you. It gives you a different lens through which to view life. It revolutionizes your priorities. The meaningless things that once held value disappear as you cling to a hope greater than yourself, a hope beyond this life. Our common brokenness birthed a unique community, a shared suffering and sorrow, but also a great hope, joy and victory.

Isn't that what community and family is all about? Coming together in order to find common ground that allows us to put aside our many differences. Isn't this what our Buffalo Bills community, our "fan-family" is as well? Standing by our team and each other during the tough times? When key guys get injured and marquee players move on we still show up at the Ralph. When we lose a game we should have won, we turn the TV on next week, watch the game and cheer like crazy. When we triumph in the face of continuous adversity with the odds in favor of the visiting team, we cheer loud enough to be heard in their city!

We're a community, because of our love for our team. But more importantly, because of our struggle. A playoff drought of 14 years and the memory of four straight Super Bowl losses have made their mark on Buffalo Bills history. And yet this team has fans that will tailgate in the most severe weather and sit in the same seats every Sunday until the day they die! Why? Because we are the BUFFALO Bills, The City of Good Neighbors, The city that doesn't give up. Not on our team. Not on each other. And that can't be taken from us.

Like the friends we've gained through the Hunter's Hope Foundation, we share our passion, hopes, and dreams as well as our many challenges. We fight from the trenches together in relentless pursuit of our common goal. We appreciate and often times build part of our lives around our hometown team and pay the price to support them in countless ways.

Buffalo just wouldn't be the same without our Bills. The sense of community we share in support of our team can't be bought, borrowed or faked – as a fan you're not only a part of this team and this community, but they're a part of you. If they take our team, they take our fan community!

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