



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

The last line of my father's Hall of Fame acceptance speech: "The toughest person I've ever met in my life is my hero, my soldier, my son, Hunter. I love you Buddy!"

It's a moment etched indelibly on my soul, a moment I'll never forget. I was with my family and a sea of Buffalo Bills fans during my father's speech at the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.

In my 7-year-old mind, the sheer volume of red, white and blue No. 12 jerseys among the thousands of fans packed into Fawcett Stadium seemed endless. With great pride and excitement I sat on the edge of my seat in the early August heat taking in all the action. I listened

intently to Daddy's every word. Before I knew it, he was talking about me swimming and how, "one day she will make our country proud." Whenever I reflect on that moment, I can't help but laugh because it wasn't long after that my swim trophies and medals began collecting dust and I was out in the driveway practicing my jump shot.

As moving as his speech may have been, it wasn't my father's nostalgic recollection of playing with the Bills or his thanks to teammates, coaches, family and friends that people remember. It's those last two sentences and the tears that went along with them. Those sentiments are why I believe my dad's Hall of Fame speech will endure as one of the most memorable induction speeches of all time.

His words spoke of the impact his only son had on his life and who he became as a result. The fact that Hunter was sitting there on that day wearing his dad's jersey mattered infinitely more than the Hall of Fame jacket or ring or all the other accolades and fanfare. His speech was a testimony to who he is more than what he had achieved. His words reflected his character, humility and toughness on and off the field. That is what people remember most – who you are, not just what you do.

Andre Reed finally was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame Saturday – a long-awaited and much-anticipated celebration. As is customary of the '90s Bills team, they're together, rallying to support their brother, No. 83. Yes, Andre will always be remembered for making catches that seemed impossible and scoring touchdowns that made fans jump out of their seats. More than that, Andre Reed will be remembered for his character; who he is as a man off the field. Although I never was able to witness him catch a perfect spiral from No. 12, I have watched him sit by my dad's side in the hospital and stop by our house, just to make sure he's doing OK. He's a down-to-earth guy who will make you laugh uncontrollably but isn't afraid to cry openly when he sees his teammate struggling through cancer.

Aren't these the things you will remember about the people you look up to – the ones who mean the most? Aren't these the things we as a community are reminded of whenever one of our

players is inducted into the Hall of Fame? There is a sense of pride that comes with such an accolade – a pride that the fans have not only in the player but the team and the city as well. We come together on game day but rally even harder hoping for a solid glimpse of who these players are when no one is looking. For isn't it the leaders, the playmakers, the fighters, the men themselves that are awarded this prestigious honor? Their achievements might put their names in the record books, but it's the men behind the stats that we are endeared to.

My excitement and enthusiasm seeing Andre inducted into the Hall motivates and encourages me. Hopefully, one day, some of our current players will wear the prestigious gold jacket with pride, representing the Bills organization, their Buffalo fan family and our city, carrying on the legacy of leaders that came before them. But more than that, hopefully they will humbly uphold the tradition of leadership and integrity that marks a man off the field.

email: kellyfanjournal@gmail.com