



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

Week 7, Day 5: “12, Friday bro, man I remember all those Friday lunches we had during the season - good stuff. And yes, we always have to mention how they sent the table and chairs we always sat at to Super Bowl 26 for Friday lunch, still can’t believe they did, but even more still can’t believe it didn’t put us over the edge to win ha ha.”

“One of the things I remember about those Friday lunches is how at the start of every lunch you would always ask me about, ‘The girls.’ You knew as a young new parent I was excited about our little baby girls, and you always knew I had some story I had to tell you. The fact that you would ask and patiently listen further accentuates your great upbringing and the closeness of your own family to the point that you fully understood how important it was to me, even though you had yet to become a parent. You are a good man Jim Kelly!!! . . . Love ya bro! . . . 14”

During the long, seven-week stretch of my dad’s cancer treatments, he received a text from his former backup QB, Frank Reich, every day. This started out as a simple note of encouragement to my dad. However, these messages ended up impacting our entire family. Every text was applicable and incredibly moving, but this one seemed to impact me on an entirely different level. Not only was I encouraged, I was motivated. Motivated to hold on tightly to traditions, to appreciate the value they hold and recognize what a gift they are.

Yet at the same time I wonder: What would happen if tradition was lost? What would happen if you could no longer enjoy something that has been incredibly meaningful for the last 50 years? What if you were no longer able to participate in something that has created more memories than you can count?

What would happen if the Bills left Buffalo?

One thing I know is this ... if the Bills did leave Buffalo, this city, and thousands of Buffalonians and die-hard fans, would be stripped of treasured tradition. The Kelly clan has its own set of traditions when it comes to Sunday football at “The Ralph.”

From the time my dad played, the Kellys rallied on game day. He comes from a family of five brothers and lots of extended family and friends that we would consider “family.” So I’m sure you can imagine what football Sunday was like. They were ready to tailgate, party, and, win the night before the game. It all started with Aunt Tony’s legendary spaghetti sauce. Everyone knew the protocol on game day. Uncle Danny’s infamous chili and Uncle Ray’s continuous entertainment were Sunday favorites. Add to that hot chocolate for the kids, and a special recipe of the same for the adults. Everyone knew exactly where to park, exactly what food to bring, the time, the place, everything - because they had done it before. Season after season. Year after year.

After tailgating in the same place every weekend (which is where we still tailgate), friends and family all piled into the stadium ready to watch Jim, Thurman, Bruce and Andre lead their team to victory. Of course we can’t forget the notorious parties held at my dad’s house after every game! Can’t say I ever experienced one, but I’ve heard the stories and I imagine the real thing was even better.

These were traditions that remained from the first pass my dad threw in the NFL, until the day he hung up his cleats. To this day, I can’t imagine tailgating anywhere else or sitting anywhere other than where our family sat when daddy played. It’s tradition. And it matters. For the die-hard Bills fans, Ralph Wilson Stadium is our second home. The place where deeply-held and long-lasting memories are made among family, friends and fans. This is our team, our home, our tradition. If they take our team, they’ll take our traditions.

If you’d like to share your game-day traditions, you can email me at kellyfanjournal@gmail.com