

The Love in the City of Brotherly Love

On Sunday, I experienced firsthand the love in our city during Game 3 of the Padres and Phillies wrap around series. I was fortunate to be selected as one of three finalists in the **Major League Baseball/People All Stars Among Us** - how exhilarating to envision the possibility of representing Philadelphia in the All Star game! This thought, coupled with my experience on Sunday, propels me to share my thoughts in a city so full of love, in our own Philadelphia – the city of Brotherly Love!

The Phillies treated myself, the two other finalists (both of whom do inspiring work) to a world class baseball experience on Sunday. What a treat to have a press conference with Scott Palmer and the Phanatic in the same room where so many phenomenal players and coaches addressed the audience in good times and bad. I was presented with my own Phillies jersey and was impressed at how a *twelve letter last name* could fit so nicely on its back! I could have chatted forever with Rob Charrity from 610 about the contest and the non-profit organization I founded, **Crossing the Finish Line**. Jim Jackson withstood the park wind tunnel in the pre-game show and how exhilarating a grand finale to sit with Tom McCarthy and Chris Wheeler as I tried to concentrate on answering their questions but was more in awe of the beauty of the baseball diamond! Of course, I felt as a guest on the Phillies own version of Love Boat (there is that word Love again) with our cruise director Meghan and her colleague Jess from the Phillies organization, both of whom ensured that every detail and every need was addressed promptly and effectively. Yes, our entire group felt like **All-Stars!**

A question posed by a young gentlemen during the press conference got me thinking :

“How did I feel when I learned that I was one of only ninety people selected as an All Star Among Us in the entire nation?”

And it was in my contemplation that I thought, *“I was born in Philadelphia, did all my schooling in Philadelphia (LaSalle and Temple) and enjoyed the typical Philadelphia vacation – visiting the infamous Jersey shore, specifically Sea Isle City each summer and tending store in my parents bakery, Maryann Pastry Shoppe.”* So when my husband died at the too young age of 30 and only after five years of marriage, who but to the rescue but members of the **Philadelphia community**. I was desperate, sad, depressed, lonely – how else are you when your fairy tale of marriage ends like Cinderella’s stroke of midnight – and then, to my rescue, were those in my Philadelphia based circles of friends and families that came to pick me up – to give me hope, to make me laugh, to help me live each day and love again!

So yes, there is much merit in the love within our Philadelphia slogan. This Philadelphia love helped me and has helped hundreds of Philadelphia families paralyzed by cancer. Together we have created a caring community with the organization Crossing the Finish Line. On Sunday, the Phillies, Major League Baseball and People honored me as an All Star because of my work with Crossing the Finish Line. Once again, the Philadelphia community comes alive in creating an organization with lots of love in its start...

My husband was diagnosed with testicular cancer and the prognosis “poor” (not what you want to hear in the same sentence as cancer). How does a community help a 29 year old male that upon first glance, looks so healthy and happy, but yet, underneath that skin and smile, is in the battle for his life? So it

was our Philadelphia family and friends that banded together and hosted a “Philadelphia” beef and beer in our honor. With funds generated from this evening, we embarked on a respite vacation like none other – laughing and loving, making memories, having fun – all away from the rigors associated with cancer. When Pete died only months later, I vowed to offer this same respite vacation to other young adult cancer patients and their loved ones. Vowing is one thing – but survival is another. I was lonely and distraught and once again, the **Philadelphia community** rose to the occasion to pull me out from the depths of my despair and to help me turn my greatest loss into the greatest gift for other families traumatized by cancer. With arms outstretched, the Philadelphia community embraced the call to help others in the battle for life.

For ten years, this city community has served over 800 adult cancer patients and their loved ones facing the crisis of cancer. **Talk about the love of a stranger** – and today, thousands of Philadelphians donate to CFL to help their neighbors and strangers, anchored by one premise – **helping one another in crisis**. We have built an organization that truly encompasses the notion of brotherly love.

And fortunately, I too have found love again. Yes, it was within this community that I met my husband Mark (who works tirelessly behind the scenes for CFL), and the two of us are blessed with two small girls, Maura (7) and Rose (5). Maura has asked if in being an All-Star I can ask Chase Utley to visit her classroom (*“my teacher would fall over”*, she explained) – and Rose commented last evening as to why I didn’t wave to her while on television.

So going back to the reporter’s press conference question – I am humbled to be a MLB/People All Star Among Us and at the same time, so privileged to be a representative of a remarkable city known for its Brotherly Love, to be a potential All Star for the first rate Phillies’ organization, but most of all, to be just one player on an entire team of Philadelphians that have given time, talent and treasure to make Crossing the Finish Line a home run success!

Visit www.peopleallstars.com to cast your All star vote and help CFL gain national exposure. Thank you...I truly feel the love.