



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

Why Buffalo?

My parents have been asked on a number of occasions that very question. Why Buffalo? After my father retired from the Buffalo Bills in February 1997, we could've moved and lived wherever we wanted. But we chose Buffalo.

Buffalo is home. It's where I was born and raised. It's where I hope to raise my own family someday. It's where my heart is, where I belong.

But when you think about it, life isn't just about where you live, but how you live, how you invest your life in the place you call home. That's one of the vital lessons my parents have lived out in front of my sister and me – being a part of something bigger, living beyond your comfort zone in order to encourage and impact people's lives.

Today, as I write, it's a few days shy of the closing ceremonies for the 27th annual Jim Kelly Football Camp. My dad is still very weak from cancer treatments, but he was determined to be there this week for the campers. He wanted to throw the football around with all he's got because the kids need to see not only the athlete and leader, but also Jim Kelly, the warrior who never gives up. He loves the kids and wants to see them succeed, whether they go on to play in the NFL, as some have, or choose other careers.

These kids will more than likely each face their own Goliath someday. And it just might be that in their own unique uphill battle, they'll remember my dad, and his courage. In that struggle, his words, example, and resolve might pierce the darkness of their own fight and, like a light, offer hope and inspiration that no matter what the odds against you are, no matter how great the struggle, never ever give up.

What I've been a part of all these years through watching my dad at football camp has taught me much about being a football fan as well. And I'm convinced it's about more than just the game. Don't get me wrong, the game is amazing and when football season ends I'm already counting down the days until the NFL Draft and minicamp. But, the older I get, the more I realize and learn that there's got to be more. For those of us fans who live here in Western New York, it's an investment in not only our entertainment and joy but in the community that we call home.

Being a Bills fan is taking a passion for our team and pouring it into this city and the people. Sharing common hopes (like maybe a playoff run this year) builds that sense of community; it helps our roots deepen as we invest in more than the hometown team. Sometimes it's an investment in the lives of friends and neighbors as you watch a game together and throw in for pizza and wings. Sometimes it's a great tailgating experience, purchasing jerseys from a local company, or even participating in football camp.

One thing I am sure of, being a Bills fan can mean much more than just catching the game – if you want it to be. It can mean much more, when it becomes an investment in the people around you. For us, there's no place like Buffalo. When we focus on the greater gift found in living beyond ourselves, there's no telling what we can do together.

To respond on what it means to you to be a Bills fan, reply to kellyfanjournal@gmail.com.