

From a daughter of a former Penn State football player, Thank you Joe

November 13, 2011

My home is State College, despite the fact I have never lived there. But as a kid who never lived in a house longer than 3 years, it was the one constant in my life. It is where my Dad grew up, where my aunts and uncles still live, where my grandparents live, where I spend every major holiday, and where I spent countless football weekends. My most magical childhood memories occurred at two places: 700 Cornwall Drive and Beaver Stadium. 700 Cornwall Drive is where my dad grew up, where my grandparents lived until a few years ago. I can still feel the heat of the fireplace, smell Mimi Jane's cooking, and picture every detail of the room my brother and I always slept in, "our room" as I like to refer to it as. When my grandparents sold that house a few years ago, boy did I cry...almost as hard as I'm crying today. This Penn State scandal has rocked my world. Monday I spent the day sorting through hateful articles trying to get a grasp on what was going on. Tuesday, after reading JoePa's statement regarding his retirement, I called my Dad in tears trying to make sense of the enormity of the fallout. "It wasn't supposed to end this way" is I could really get out. And tonight, I received a final blow; Joe Paterno was fired via a telephone call. Everyone seems to have their own opinion on the matter, but unless you grew up a Penn Stater, I really doubt you understand the gravity of what we are going through right now. Even between us there is major division on where we stand (see idiot burning his diploma outside Old Main). But I am going to tell you how I feel.

I am devastated at what Jerry Sandusky did to these children. I am confused as to why more wasn't done in the investigation back in 1998. I am infuriated that the men who walked in (janitor, McQueary) on Sandusky sexually abusing these little boys didn't stop it right then and there, instead of walking away. But I am also supportive of Joe Paterno. Did he do what was legally expected of him? Yes. What was morally expected of him? No. He himself says with hindsight he wished he has done more than tell his supervisor, and I wish that too. Despite that, I am not going to let it tarnish the great things he did with his life. Nor am I going to agree with the way things went down Wednesday night. I could list all the great things Joe Paterno has done for the school as a whole, but there are hundreds of articles where you can read that information. I am instead going to tell you how JoePa affected me. First, he worked tirelessly to acquire donations, and donated millions himself, to a school that my parents, my aunts, and my uncles attended; my grandfather worked at; my cousins went to; my aunt now works at; the list goes on.

Secondly, Penn State football dominated my childhood memories. My Dad joined the Penn State football team as a walk-on, worked his way up to starting on the special teams, and finally to starting outside left linebacker. He was a part of the team that won the National Championship in 1986. My Dad is so proud of his four years at Penn State. Heck, my mom had a mural of the Nittany Lion painted on his office wall. And lucky for me, his love of Penn State, specifically Penn State football, meant I spent a couple Saturdays every year at Beaver Stadium. My Uncle Eric and my grandparents would come set up our tailgating spot at the crack of dawn every home game. The scene is one I can picture perfectly: something hot cooking over the grill, a liquor selection that rivals any bar, all the grown-ups decked out in Penn State gear hugging/kissing/talking, friends and family coming and going, and us kids running around in the stormwater runoff and throwing around the football. Nearing game time my Dad would grab my brother and I, walk us to our seats, and head down to the field to watch the game. When I got a little older my Dad would let me bring a friend, and I loved sharing this family experience with them. And when I went to college, I would drive a whole group of us down for a game or two. They always had such a blast. It is hard to explain to someone the feeling of being inside that stadium; you have to experience it yourself.

Lastly, and most important to me, Joe Paterno helped shape my Dad into the man he is today, and that person is the most important person in my life. My Dad is my biggest supporter, my shoulder to cry on, my voice of reason, my everything. He is why I am where I am today (a 22 year old in her first year of law school!) and who I am today (pretty freaking awesome!). And I bet if you asked my Dad who the most influential people in his life were, one of those people would be Joe Paterno. And lucky for me, because of that great man's guidance, my Dad became the amazing father he is and passed the lessons JoePa taught him down to his three kids. My childhood was filled with, "Joe always said" or "When I played for Penn State," and although I rolled my eyes at the time, I later realized how important his advice always was.

To me, my Dad is the most incredible father/husband/person in the universe. So thank you Joe, for the thousands of boys you helped shape into men who then became some of the most incredible fathers/husbands/people to tens of thousands of others around the nation.

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