

# Thanks For Everything

## Expressing Gratitude To The Man Who Showed The Way

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By Scott Kindberg

Every day I arrive at The Post-Journal and there are cards on the sports desk. Some days there's one, some days there are half a dozen.

### Article Photos



Longtime Post-Journal sports editor Jim Riggs, center, is flanked by Keith Martin, Jamestown Community College athletic director, left, and JCC women's basketball coach George Sisson earlier this month.

P-J file photo by Mark L. Anderson

Every single one of them has the same name - sports editor Jim Riggs - on the front.

At the end of the work shift, I collect the cards, walk to the parking lot adjacent to the building, open the car door and slide the cards above the visor on the driver's side. The next day I deliver them to the mailbox at Jim and his wife Sharon's northside home.

I think what a blessing it is for Jim, 10 days removed from a bone marrow transplant, to be the recipient of all the cards, which, I understand, decorate his room at Roswell Park Cancer Institute.

But the real blessing to me isn't just in Hallmark's finest and the kindness of Jim's many friends. Rather, it's in the way that he has decided to approach his plasma cell leukemia diagnosis and the required treatments, which have been ongoing since August.

It's two days after Christmas, but I received my gift three days before Santa's arrival and it came in the form of an email. In a nutshell, Jim said he is responding well to treatment. With all due respect to Hallmark, I submit no more beautiful words have been written this holiday season.

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My dad was a Jamestown policeman. He directed traffic at Third and Main streets in for the better part of three decades. He loved that job, but he may have loved his first job just as much. You see, growing up a stone's throw from Municipal Stadium (now Diethrick Park) in the 1940s afforded him and my uncle the opportunity to work there selling popcorn and peanuts during Jamestown Falcons games.

It was during those formative years that dad came to love America's Pastime. Decades later, I remember him taking me to a Falcons' game and ultimately escorting me up the narrow stairway that connected the grandstand to the roof and, ultimately, to the pressbox where I met my dad's friend, Frank Hyde, the official scorer and Post-Journal sports editor. It was my first experience getting a birds-eye view of a game and it was my first time that I'd ever met a sportswriter. I don't think I said a word to Frank that night, but the impression he left with me was indelible.

From that point on, I made a habit of reading his weekly columns - "Frankly Speaking" - and I even remember my dad taking me to see Frank at The Post-Journal's old building on Washington Street. By the mid-1970s, the newspaper moved to its current location on West Second Street and Frank remained as sports editor until his retirement in 1979.

That's when Jim, then in his late 20s, took over. And for the last 35 years, he's called the shots just as Frank did. I remember visiting Jim one afternoon in the sports department at The Post-Journal while I was a student at Jamestown Community College. Undecided about my transfer plans upon graduation from JCC, I sought Jim's advice. An alum of Point Park University in Pittsburgh, Jim gave me his best sales pitch about the school, and pulled out a PPU handbook

from his desk so that I could look at the course offerings in the Journalism & Communications Department.

Less than a year later, I was taking classes at the school, located downtown, and enjoying every minute of it. Great education, plenty of opportunities and good friends were all part of my three-semester experience there.

And four months after my graduation - March 9, 1983 to be exact - I walked into The Post-Journal for my first day as a regional government reporter. Eight months after that, I joined Jim in the sports department.

And I never left.

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In the early 1990s, Jim assigned me to cover a Section 6 playoff baseball game at the same venue where I met Frank for the first time 25 years earlier. Accompanying me that day was my 6-year-old son, Matthew.

Armed with burgers, french fries and a couple of soft drinks, we climbed the stairs to the roof - much like I did with my dad all those years earlier - walked into the pressbox and found a vacant booth where we could enjoy our dinner before getting ready for the game.

Before I could sit down, Matthew climbed up on a chair, stared out at the immaculate field, the blue sky and JCC behind the center field fence, looked up at me and said, "Dad, the view from up here is simply breathtaking."

From covering area teams in every corner of the state, to chronicling the successes of the Buffalo Bills during their Super Bowl years, to writing about special people throughout the Southern Tier, the view for me has been breathtaking indeed.

Credit for all that goes to Jim, who gave me the opportunity.

Pierre Omidyar, the founder and chairman of the eBay auction site, once said that, "if you give people the opportunity to do the right thing, you'll rarely be disappointed."

Frank gave Jim a chance and Jim, in turn, did the same for me.

Seventy-five years. Two sports editors.

That's a longevity record that won't ever be broken.

More importantly, Frank and Jim showed the way in how to do the job and do it well. So as I continue to deliver get-well cards to Jim in the days and weeks ahead, I'll need to add another one to his mailbox.

This one will be from me, but I'm not sure even Hallmark will be able to express it adequately. After all, a simple "thank you" hardly seems enough.