

PAUL McCARTNEY AND THE GIRL IN THE BLACK BERET

“And, in the end, the love you take,
is equal to the love you make.”

The Beatles “The End”

Kelley was a nineteen-year-old who was suffering from brain cancer. She'd endured rounds of treatment, but the disease continued to spread. When doctors run out of options, they often call the Make-A-Wish Foundation and ask them to step in. When they asked Kelley, “What would you like more than anything in the world?” she responded, “My dream is to meet Paul McCartney.”

While most sick children request a trip to Disney World, this request would be much harder to grant. Paul McCartney was the biggest rock star in the world. When Make-A-Wish called me to ask if I'd help fulfill Kelley's request, I told them I'd try. But this was a real long shot. I inquired, “Does Kelley have a Plan B?”

“No,” they replied. “This is all that she wants.”

I must admit that I was skeptical that a teenager was truly a Beatles fan. If I was going to lobby McCartney's “people,” I needed to hear it for myself. That evening, I called Kelley's home and spoke with her and her mom. On the phone, Kelley was soft-spoken, shy and remarkably poised for a wom-

an who'd been diagnosed with a terminal illness. I asked her when she first heard Paul's music.

"My mom was a child of the '60s and '70s, and I grew up listening to the Beatles and Wings. I know those albums by heart."

"Let's play a game, Kelley," I suggested. "Imagine that I have a machine that can print concert tickets for any artist. Who would you choose?"

"My friends think I'm crazy," Kelley admitted. "But I'm a huge Paul McCartney fan. I just love his songs and even have a stuffed Paul doll on my bed." Kelley convinced me that she was sincere. We spoke for another ten minutes before Kelly had to leave. This gave me a few moments to chat privately with her mother. "I will do everything I can to give Kelley a special experience," I assured her. "In your opinion, is this really what she wants?"

Without missing a beat, Kelley's mom answered, "Nothing would mean more to her than meeting Paul McCartney."

"Okay. Let me go to work. A lot of people must sign off on this request before it gets to Paul. I'll make some calls and keep you posted." While I really wanted to make this happen for Kelley, I knew that her chances were slim and none. Still, it was hard to manage their expectations.

As luck would have it, McCartney's tour was passing through Seattle the following month, March of 1990. This would be his first show in America since John Lennon was murdered on the streets of New York City. I had heard that Paul was keeping a very low profile and preferred to stay well under the radar. I didn't want to disappoint Kelley. But getting a private meeting with Paul would be a real challenge. I sent letters to McCartney's manager and followed up with phone calls. I explained that Kelley had only months to live and

her final wish was to meet Paul McCartney. I poured it on, "It would mean the world to her if Paul could spare a few moments." I went back to McCartney's record label and begged his PR agency. But no luck. The answer was the same. "Sorry, but Paul has asked for privacy and is not meeting people on this trip."

I called Kelley and told her that I had played every card that I could, but the chances of meeting Paul were looking grim. Kelley and her mom took the news graciously and thanked me for trying.

Never one to accept defeat, I took one last shot and begged McCartney's management again. I appealed to Paul as a father of a nineteen-year-old daughter (Stella) and hoped that he'd sympathize with Kelley's plight. A few days later, I got the call that I was hoping for. A rep from McCartney's firm, MPL Communications said, "Paul has agreed to see Kelley at 3 p.m. on the day of his Seattle concert, right before his sound check."

I was bursting inside. His rep went on to say, "We will arrange for three backstage passes for you, Kelley and her mother."

"That's perfect," I gushed. "Thank you so much."

"However," his agent said, "Paul has one stipulation. Nobody can know that he's doing this. He doesn't want any press people there when he meets Kelley. Mr. McCartney wants this to be a private meeting, as it should be. No reporters can be present. He's meeting Kelley because he cares, as the father of a teenage girl."

I excitedly called Kelley and her mom and gave them the good news. "You're not going to believe this, but Paul McCartney said yes! He will meet Kelley on March 29th before he goes on stage." They squealed with delight.

My plea clearly struck a chord. McCartney had a reputation as a family man who made his four daughters and son a priority. Kelley's terminal illness must have resonated with him, and Paul was making a special effort to see her. Make-A-Wish and I agreed to tell no one until after Kelley's private meeting with her idol. We all agreed that the man showed tremendous class by agreeing to see her, for all of the right reasons.

On the afternoon of McCartney's sold-out concert, I rendezvoused with Kelley and her mother at the backstage entrance to the Kingdome. We had never met in person, only spoken by phone. So I was anxious to get to know this young, strong-willed Beatles fan. Kelley stood about five feet tall, and she was rail thin. She was soft-spoken and shy, but her smile was infectious. Kelley had lost all of her hair after exhaustive radiation treatments, but still looked terrific in a black beret. She beamed, "My mom took me clothes shopping, and I picked out this patterned dress and beret. I hope Paul likes it."

"You look adorable, Kelley," I said. "Let's go meet Paul McCartney." With that, she clutched her stuffed Paul doll under her arm along with several photos and album covers for him to sign. I escorted Kelley and her mom inside the concrete and steel dome, and they were overwhelmed by the enormity of the empty stadium. The floor was lined with thousands of empty folding chairs, filling what was usually the Seahawks' playing field. We dodged the crews who were setting up Paul's equipment onstage, hanging lighting trusses and preparing for his sound check. In just a few hours, this cavernous dome would be packed with 50,000 screaming McCartney fans. But for now, we would have Paul and the Kingdome to ourselves.

The three of us were guided through several corridors to the backstage area and led to a twenty- by twenty-foot

greenroom. It was sectioned off with aluminum pipes, long, red drapes and ugly green astroturf. Not very quaint, but it didn't matter. This moment was all about Kelley getting her wish. We sat in folding chairs in the center of the room, our hearts racing. Kelley nervously asked, "I know that Paul is an advocate for world peace. So I made him a peace pin. Is it okay if I give it to him?"

"Of course," I replied. "I'm sure he'll love it."

Moments later, the curtain parted and Paul's smiling face peeked out. He looked our way and smiled, "Are you Kelley?"

Stunned, Kelley turned to face Paul and meekly replied, "Yes."

My heart leapt when Paul McCartney pulled back the curtain and walked right over to Kelley. She stood up and put out her hand. Instead of shaking it, Paul threw his arms around her and hugged her tightly. Then he and his wife Linda sat down on either side of Kelley and made her the center of attention. Her mother and I looked on as the McCartneys focused all of their attention on Kelley.

At one point, Paul took Kelley's hand and complimented her, "I love your beret. Do you think I'd look good in one?" Then he picked up the stuffed likeness of him that Kelley had brought. Paul held the doll next to his face and playfully remarked, "Which Beatle is this?" He made Kelley laugh when he joked, "Does it look like me? I thought I was supposed to be the cute Beatle."

I've met many stars at backstage "meet and greets." Usually, you're rushed through a receiving line and only have time to say a quick hello and get a handshake before being ushered away. I was hoping that Paul would spend a few quality minutes with Kelley.

Taking her cue, Linda reached into her bag and handed Kelley a stuffed bear they had brought for her. “Here Kelley, this is for you,” said Linda. For a few precious minutes, the frail young woman forgot that she was fighting brain cancer. She savored this moment, closed her eyes tightly and pulled the stuffed bear to her chest. I looked over at Kelley’s mom and saw that tears were streaming down her face. The sight of her daughter realizing her greatest dream was overwhelming. I felt a lump in my throat as I watched Paul and Linda, who were thoroughly engrossed. They could not have been more sincere and genuine. For now, Paul McCartney was not a rock star, he was a caring dad lifting the spirits of a young girl.

After about thirty minutes, Paul asked, “Kelley, what is your favorite Beatles song?” She responded “‘The End.’ I love where you sing, ‘The love you take is equal to the love you make.’”

“It’s really true, isn’t it?” Paul added, “I’ve spent years talking about peace on earth, love and understanding. Do you believe in peace, Kelley?”

“I do. In fact, I brought something for you.” Kelley reached into her purse and pulled out the pin she’d made in the shape of a peace sign and handed it to Paul. He turned it over in his hands and pinned it to his jacket lapel. “Darlin’,” he said. “I’m wearing this onstage tonight.”

With that, Paul stood up and reached out his hand to Kelley and winked, “Now follow me.”

Paul led us back out into the arena and headed for the merchandise tables. They were piled high with McCartney shirts, jackets, sweatshirts, caps and posters. In a few hours, the crowd would make a dent in those piles and spend thousands of dollars on concert gear.

Paul turned to Kelley as she took in all of the cool McCartney swag. Then he asked, “What would you like?”

“Uhhh, can I have a shirt please?” Kelley replied.

Paul smiled, “I think we can do better than that, luv. Here, put out your arms.” He proceeded to lift stacks of clothing from the tables and drape them over Kelley’s outstretched arms. Literally dozens of items. Kelly thanked Paul profusely, as she handed the pile of clothing to her mother.

“We’re not finished,” Paul said. He took Kelley’s arm and led us toward the stage and seated the three of us in the front row. Then he jumped on stage to rehearse a few songs while Kelley watched in awe. We were the only people in the Kingdome—and she was getting a private concert from Paul McCartney! He played “Hey Jude” and “Band On The Run,” and he winked impishly at Kelley throughout his sound check. When he played the Beatles’ classic “Get Back,” Paul changed the character’s name (Jojo) and sang “Get back, Kelley.” She was swooning, her eyes sparkling.

After the rehearsal, Paul jumped down from the stage and walked straight toward Kelley. “I’ve got to go now and rest up before the show. Do you have concert tickets for tonight?”

“No,” Kelley replied. “We tried to buy some but they were all sold out.”

“Well, I can fix that. Tonight, you are my guest,” McCartney said as he reached into his pocket and handed Kelley a pair of “all access” passes. “You’ve got the best seats in the house. We’ll put special seats on the sound mixing board in the center of the arena.” Kelley was stunned by his kindness and at last the tears started flowing. After a few more hugs and pictures, Paul disappeared into the caverns of the Kingdome—and we headed back to reality. It was a mind-boggling experience for me, much less a teen cancer patient. An hour after entering the Kingdome we were back in the parking lot wondering, “did that really happen?”

Two weeks later, I received a FedEx package with an autographed photo, signed from Paul to Kelley. I am told that he insisted on writing a message to Kelley. It read, "To our Kelley, lots of love, babe!"

Six months later, I received the phone call that I'd been dreading. Kelley's mom called to say that Kelley had passed away peacefully. "You should know that meeting Paul McCartney was the highlight of Kelley's life. She cherished that day and never let go of the stuffed bear that he gave her."

I hung up the phone and felt the cold slap of reality. It didn't seem fair that a brave young woman only lived to nineteen. She never got to experience adult life or have children of her own. But she did experience something special...the humanity and humility of Paul McCartney. And for that brief moment, Kelley's dream came true.



Paul McCartney wearing the peace sign lapel pin that Kelley made for him