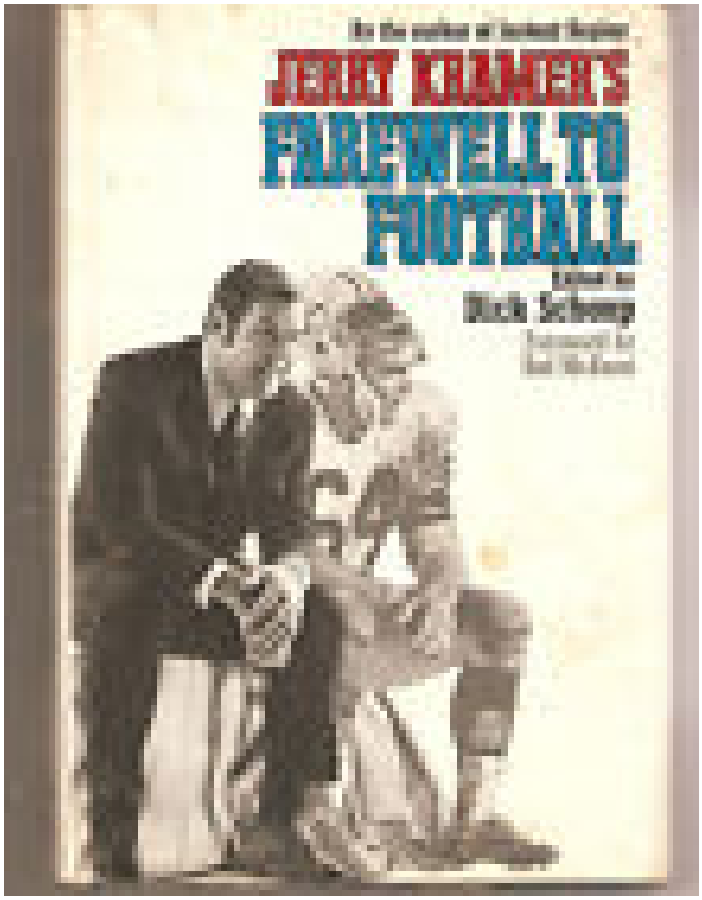

When I was about 10 years old I was going through a closet full of books in the upstairs closet of our house in Oberlin. I had always been an avid reader, but up until that point my taste ran from Judy Blume (Then Again, Maybe I Won't), S.E. Hinton (The Outsiders) and the Encyclopedia Brown series.

The books were my parents' and were a small part of their extensive library. At that time my mother had been a member of some book club or another for most of her life, and she had the huge eclectic collection of books only a book club member could build...an extensive array of books from all periods and genres.

There, looking past the Arthur Haley and Nabakov missives I saw something I had never noticed before while looking through this particular closet for something to read...a big guy in a football uniform, sitting on a small wooden bench staring out at the field. I was intrigued.

When I was seven years old I spent a week with my cousin, Jeff Short, in Brecksville. During that week he turned me into a sports fan through listening to this crazy guy on the radio, Pete

Franklin. Jeff was a Washington Redskins fan at the time, but the Skins were his only out-of-market passion. He was a rabid Cavaliers and Indians fan, and we would spend the evenings during that week looking through his baseball cards, listening to Franklin's Sportsline on the radio and talking about sports. That week changed my life, and I have been a sports nut ever since.

Back to the closet, the book I found was Jerry Kramer's Farewell to Football, the story of an aging offensive lineman for the Green Bay Packers that was going through one of his last seasons of professional football. It was written diary-style and I finished it in a day or so. This impressed my mother because Farewell to Football is a pretty thick book, not intended for the 10 year-old reader. She always encouraged my reading and immediately started looking for more sports books for me. She gave me Ken Dryden's The Game, and when I finished that brought me Ball Four by Jim Bouton.

Pretty soon I was on my own, hitting the library or going to garage sales with her to see what books I can find. And I still remember, fondly, all of the books I devoured during this period of my life: Confessions of a Dirty Ballplayer by Johnny Sample, They Call Me Assassin by Jack Tatum, The Long Season by Jim Brosnan and Instant Replay – the first book Jerry Kramer wrote that led him to follow up with Farewell to Football.

My grandmother even got into the act, taking me to the mall whenever I came over to visit and buying me whatever I wanted (within reason, of course). I usually ended up with a sports book.

At the time I was just enjoying reading and learning about things that went on in sports, but what I didn't realize was that this habit of mine, this propensity to read every sports book I could get my hands on, would be a lifelong ambition. Not only that, it also led me to my chosen profession...writing about sports.

I love sports writing and appreciate those that do it well. Some of my all-time favorites are still at it today...one in the area. As much as I hated his broadcasting, long-time Pittsburgh Steelers announcer Myron Cope was one of the greatest sports writers in history. Bill Plaschke at the Los Angeles Times is superb, one of the finest columnists you will ever find. As far as beat writers go, Jason Lloyd, the Akron Beacon Journal's Cavaliers beat reporter, is amazing and it would not surprise me to see him at a major paper in one of the biggest markets someday. He's that good.

When I was young I was kind of an aimless kid. I didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life and didn't take school seriously...even through high school. I went to Kent State for a couple of years and did poorly, enjoying the bars much more than the classrooms. I eventually ended up leaving school, getting a job in a factory and accepting my lot in life.

A couple of years later my mother's mother passed away. She was a wonderful woman and, really, my best friend when I was a little kid. I was working at the time, hating my job and trying to figure out how to get enough money to go back to college (where I planned to take it seriously this time around). It looked hopeless, but the two women I could always count on up to that point in my life...my mother and my grandmother...came through for me, yet again.

My mother asked me to come over to her house to talk about something, and when I got there she told me, "Grandma wanted to make sure you could finish college, and she left enough money to get you through."

I didn't know how to take it. My grandmother was an amazing woman, born out of the Depression Era. She was the kind of woman that would always take her extra food home with her from a restaurant. She never felt like she was above bending over to pick up a penny she found on the sidewalk, or ironing aluminum foil so she could use it again. She was a housewife her entire adult wife and raised five children on my grandfather's salary and pension from Bendix.

How, when she passed away, she had something put aside for her children and grandchildren is beyond me. But she did, and I was able to get my degree because of it.

My mother and her mother made me the person I am today, and my wife is another woman who has meant more to me than I could every say. She is an incredible mother, wife and friend, and sometimes I forget to remember how lucky I am to have her as my partner in life.

Mother's Day is not just another Sunday, it is a time to pay tribute to those women in our loves who have been there all along...those that wiped our noses and bandaged our skinned knees when we were little kids, those who were the guiding hand in making our mothers who they are

and those who have the most important job in the world, who made the sacrifice of bringing our own children into the world and being to them what our mothers were to us.

We celebrate Mother's Day once a year, kind of a small reward for everything they do for us. Heck, if we aren't thinking about and thanking our mothers, through words and deeds, every possible moment we can we aren't being very appreciative children. But they will forgive us for that. They always forgive us, love us unconditionally and do whatever they can to enrich our lives.

So thanks Margaret Lauffer, Joyce Perry and Christy Perry. Without you I would be lost.