

Sports from the Women's POV by Carlotta Schmittgen



I love baseball. It actually started back in the 60s in New England. I was raised in a neighborhood consisting primarily of boys my age so I quickly learned what baseball cards were used for. I excelled in a game where you flipped a card against another person and the best combination flip would get to keep both cards. I won some great cards and I kept them in one of my Dad's cigar boxes ... Sandy Koufax, Don Drysdale, Brooks Robinson, Hank Aaron, Willie Mays and Harmon Killebrew. In the late 60s, we moved to Houston as the "Eighth Wonder of the World," the Astrodome, finished completion.

I became an Astros' fan and revered legends such as Rusty Staub, Jim Wynn, Joe Morgan, Bob Aspromonte and Larry Dierker. Fast-forward to the fall of 1986 when I moved to the DFW area and started working the Texas Rangers' baseball charters for Delta Air Lines. The following spring found me talking hubby Rick into replacing our ski vacation with spring training in Port Charlotte, Florida. Spring training provided a more relaxed atmosphere where you got to meet the players. In late 1988, to the thrill of Ranger fans and to the dismay of Astros fans -- especially my Mom -- Nolan Ryan signed on with Texas.

That man's arrival created almost as much excitement as winning the lottery. The Rangers' charters became "prime real estate" on the bid sheet and flight attendants senior to me who didn't even care about baseball were infiltrating my turf! Nolan was self-conscious with all the attention coming from the media and fans.

The following year, Mom, who was in her late seventies, asked me to take her to spring training. We flew into Sarasota-Bradenton. I got goofed up leaving the airport and after some time found us heading south toward Naples instead of north to Port Charlotte! By the time I got turned around, we had reached the city

limits just before nine p.m. The restaurant on the wharf wouldn't seat us, as they were trying to close. Needless to say, we were now pretty hungry even by central time standards! A good flight attendant (as well as former Brownie/Girl Scout) always has a Plan B to put in place. I knew of a small restaurant that the players frequented and stayed open late. As we perused the menu, Mom excitedly told the waiter how I worked the Rangers' charters for Delta. He smiled and told us that one of the players was there --- Nolan Ryan.

I quickly scribbled a note and gave it to the waiter to give Nolan. A few minutes later the waiter returned and said Nolan wanted to meet Mom. He then escorted us back to a banquet room. Mom was finally going to get to meet Nolan Ryan! She was beside herself! There stood Nolan and another gentleman. I introduced Nolan to my mom. He, in turn, introduced us to Craig Reynolds, a former shortstop for the Astros. Mom immediately dropped Nolan's hand and threw her hands up to her face. "Oh, my! Craig Reynolds! I can't believe it!"

Now, according to Nolan, Craig never let him forget that moment --- a fan getting more excited over Craig than Nolan! Later that year Mom had knee replacement surgery. When she died and I went through her things, I found in her mementos a Get Well card Nolan signed for her. Yep... Mom dumping Nolan for Craig was just a momentary lapse in judgment.

