

Stacey Beck Honors Memory of Rod Beck by Helping Kids in Need

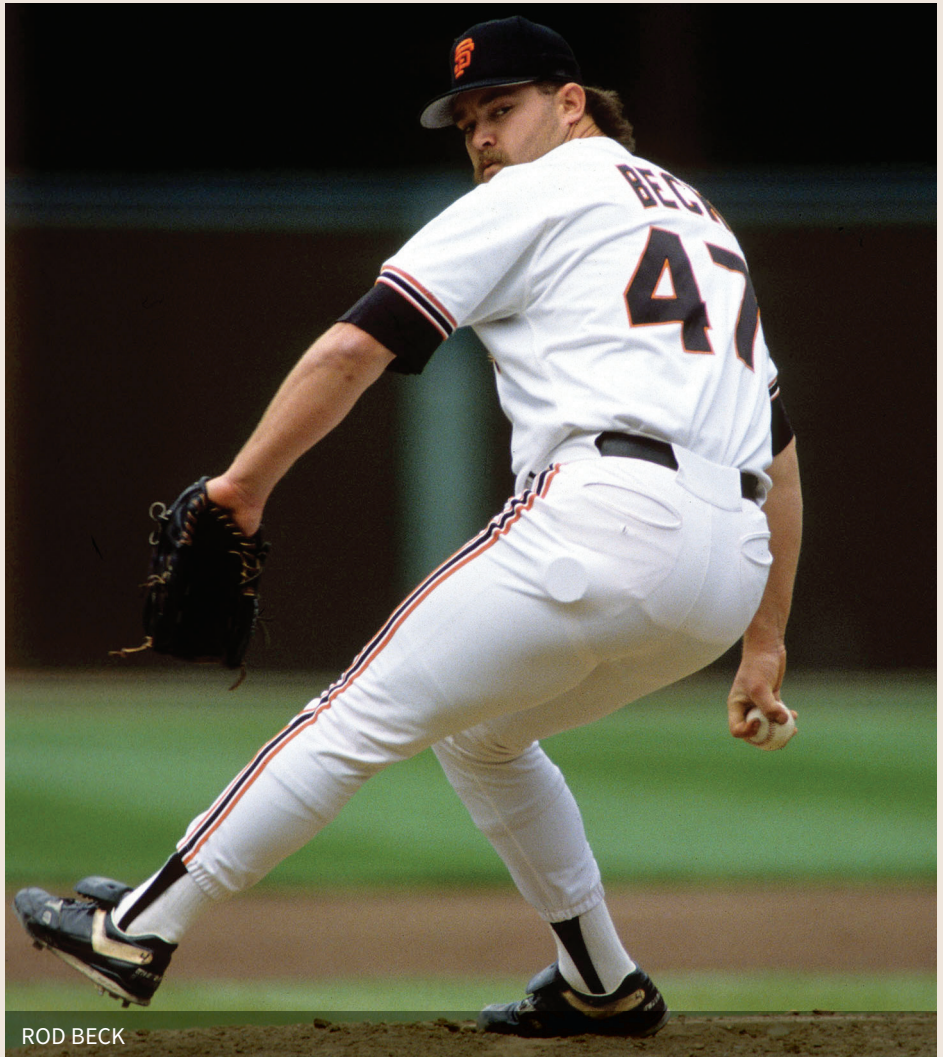
The first time you hear Stacey Beck's voice, in person or on the phone like I did, you immediately feel her infectious spirit. My wife, who has never been shy about sharing her new age soul, would describe what Stacey exudes as "good chi" or, for the layman like me, having positive energy. What I call it is being just downright sweet.

It was refreshing—and, it turned out, a distinct privilege—to meet a person like Beck, still so genuinely warm and gracious, even though she had been through significant trauma in her life. This all came about almost seven years earlier, when Stacey's husband, Rod, succumbed to the disease of addiction at the all too young age of 39. Most significant was the fact that Rod Beck was a one-time All-Star major league pitcher who spent seven of his thirteen big league seasons with the San Francisco Giants, an organization, she said, "through it all has been so great, so supportive, like family."

Rod's demise, however, didn't happen overnight and not before putting his family through the waking nightmare of watching his addiction steal from them the man they loved.

"It took me a while to realize that Rodney's problem was a true disease. Drug addiction isn't merely about choice. It's a disease that actually hi-jacks you."

Rodney is what Stacey still often calls him when she speaks of him. At the time of his death he left behind an equally young widow and two pre-teen daughters. With many families, this is where their story might come to a screeching—and well-justified—halt. For the Beck girls, the death of the husband and father put them on an unexpected whole new life path, opening up a world none of them ever thought they'd experience.



ROD BECK

Time has pushed the most painful memories away, but you can still hear and feel Stacey's grief, especially as her piercing blue eyes well up, even after all these years, when she speaks of what happened to her high-school sweetheart. "I loved him with my entire heart, but I heal a little bit more each time I'm asked to tell the story."

There's another far-too-often used phrase I admit to, well, using far too often: when you're dealt a life full of lemons, you make lemonade. Without sounding trite, this epitomizes the life of Stacey, Kelsey and Kayla Beck since the ballplayer's shocking death rippled through the close-knit baseball community. Out of the well-documented demise of Rod's life, following a path that went from an arc of triumph on the field of professional sports to an all-too-early grave, came three survivors.

Led by Stacey, the amazing women have taken it upon themselves to re-direct their collective lives into one of service.

It catapulted toward this new direction when early on Stacey put Kelsey and Kayla into a ground-breaking, experimental intervention program for kids, which Stacey proclaimed was "the best but not the easiest gift I ever gave my children." The girls emerged from the four-day program, held under the guidance of the world-renowned Betty Ford Clinic, with the tools necessary for them to understand and reconcile their father's disease and his pre-mature passing.

"When they came out of the weekend, it literally transformed them. Kelsey told me, 'Daddy can't die without helping somebody.' The profoundness of her statement floored me but I knew right

then and there I had to do something.”

Within three years of burying her “soul mate,” Stacey, along with a healthcare professional by the name of Bobbe McGinley, formed Pitch4Kidz. To this day, it’s still an extremely unique intervention program that provides support to children who are the victims of parental drug or alcohol addiction. She’s proud to say not only is Arizona its home but shared the news it will soon be expanding into more states.



“Eleven-million children in the U.S. are affected by addictions in the home. Seventy-to-eighty percent of the cases the Arizona Department of Child and Protective Services encounter each year are due to addiction. That’s a tragic number and there’s nobody there, no organization, to give the children affected by this disease the professional help they need, except ours.”

She proudly recounts for me from memory the success stories and the metamorphosis that takes place, sometimes within the first few hours of the three-day program for six-to-twelve year olds held over a single weekend in her North Scottsdale clinic. “Pictures children draw during the program using art therapy have provided breakthrough moments for them, some even getting the chance to express how they feel about their parent’s addiction for the very first time.”

The whole idea for Pitch4Kidz came about from what Stacey said can only be described as “some sort of cosmic or divine intervention I’m sure Rodney had something to do with.” Her statement sounds anything from being a stretch when you see the far-away look in her eyes, believing her deceased “best friend,” another description she also once fondly called him, is still affecting her life from beyond.

“I launched it on the third anniversary of Rodney’s death. I chose that day to, in some small way, honor him.”

But Stacey’s own vision and countless hours to grow Pitch4Kidz (she’s since earned a master’s degree in counseling) is much more than what she will give herself credit for. That’s truly the most endearing part of her sweet nature: her un-ending desire and self-less approach to help children who suffer personally and societally from the after-effects of a life filled with parental addictions.

“The stigma that comes with acknowledging someone in your family has a substance abuse problem is still rampant in our country. There’s no marching community with a walk for addiction out there like there is for other causes, which, thankfully, has brought about so much good, so much positive attention to those issues. With the disease of addiction people are still not supported about coming out and talking about and accepting their addictions. Especially in professional sports.”

Her sense of self-less dedication to the cause and of making a life-commitment to deal with the problem head-on completely fills the air as she goes on. “If you really want me to get on my soapbox, the truly sad part is that even though health insurance in many cases covers treatment for the addicted person, it doesn’t cover treatment or getting help for the victims of the disease.”

At that point she shared a part of her persona that probably says more about her promise to do something than any other statement when she said that if children from a family coping with this disease can’t afford the Pitch4Kidz program, she’ll find a way for them to attend, getting the funding in “unique ways.” Far from sounding boastful, her sincerity and devotion to her cause in



STACEY BECK

helping these kids actually felt palpable when she said, “I’ve never turned away a child who needs help.”

But financial change is in the wind. After receiving benchmark funding this past July from The Hope Network, Stacey has been able to realize her dream of working full-time for the organization, preparing and teaching the weekend sessions, along with preaching the gospel of Pitch4Kidz through her numerous speaking engagements. She’ll quickly tell you, though, that more importantly the Network’s angel funding has allowed the program to expand from four-weekends-per-year to twelve. And Pitch4Kidz first ever formal fundraiser, a one-day golf tourney scheduled for November 17 at Scottsdale’s Westin-Kierland Resort, will attempt to raise even more private funding from their planned celebrity-filled charity event.

“One thing we don’t have yet are corporate sponsors for the organization as a whole. That’s a dream of mine and one of my biggest goals.”

Ending our interview, it was hard to imagine that more good news wouldn’t be coming right around the corner for Stacey and Pitch4Kidz. And if Rod Beck is involved with some type of new-age cosmic intervention from the beyond, then I’m sure in his historic role as a dominant closer for so many years in major league baseball, this will be one he’d be proud of having a hand in getting the save.

Russ Ortiz Dedicates Himself to Building a Legacy of Service

Russ Ortiz's very last comment from our interview may have been his most poignant of the many he made during our time together. It speaks volumes of who the man is and summed up what the former San Francisco Giants pitcher's life has been all about. "It's about building a legacy of helping people."

The soft-spoken Ortiz, who turns forty this year, retired from baseball in 2010, and makes Arizona his home with his wife Stacy—"My biggest supporter" he calls her—and their three children.

"We decided to make Arizona our full-time home right after our first spring training here with the Giants. We loved it that much." The Ortiz family has since lived at various times in Scottsdale, Gilbert and now Mesa. Drafted by the Giants in the mid-90s, his path toward devoting much of his free time to charitable organizations all came about from advice his pitching coach gave him in Giants A-Ball in San Jose.

"The coach pulled us aside and told us that when the day comes and we make it to the big league club the very first thing we needed to do was get involved, get out into the community, and meet and help people. When I made it to the forty-man [roster] one of the very first things I did was to ask the folks in the Giants front office what I could do to be involved in the community."

That bottom-to-top commitment to service is an ingrained philosophy within the Giants organization and is no accident as ownership continually strives to help and promote its players, past and present, to be involved outside the game, just like Ortiz's A-Ball coach had so wisely suggested.

It's quite obvious too that the Giants organization thinks a great deal about Ortiz and the legacy of his charitable work.

Not only do they call on him to this day (nearly two decades since they signed him and almost half that since they traded him) to help with various goodwill events but while playing for the Giants the front office nominated him twice for the highly coveted Roberto Clemente Award. Considered one of Major League Baseball's most prestigious awards, it is given each year to the one player who most personifies the benchmark charitable work done by Clemente, which, sadly, resulted in his untimely death in a plane crash while attempting to deliver aid to earthquake victims in Nicaragua.

"I cherish those nominations as one of the greatest things that ever happened to me. But really, the Giants made it easy for me to be involved. They made it easy for me to give back. It's the great people there in the organization who really made it all able to happen. They're the ones who should be thanked."

Ortiz is being modest, a quality that comes across from the moment you meet him. Not an imposing figure, it's hard to imagine how someone with such a soft exterior could have been so effective during his thirteen seasons on the mound, a place where many times staring down the batter with intimidation is necessary for success.

But don't let his shy exterior fool you. Inside is a person driven by a need to help others and not afraid of hard work. "I could have always just written a check when I was asked for help. But that was never the point for me. I always felt that giving time was the most valuable thing a ballplayer or anyone can give. I want to be involved intimately and get my hands dirty in a project. It makes it so much more rewarding."

That first call to get dirt under his fingernails came when he connected with the YMCA in the Bay area and their Building Futures Program. Ortiz was the first ballplayer to get involved and introduce the program to the Giants.

"They [the Giants] opened their arms to the program and just said to let them

know what they could do to help me make it happen."

And happen it did. Ortiz and the Giants eventually created a first of its kind "48 Friend Zone" where children were brought to the ballpark, many for the first time, to meet players up close and personal behind-the-scenes, then enjoy food, beverages and the game in the section named after his jersey number.

"I never had the opportunity in my life to commit to something like this and help make a difference in kids' lives until the Giants said yes."

But that commitment to the kids, most of whom came from broken homes or domestic situations where they never knew their father, like Ortiz, didn't come without some heartache.

"When I got traded unexpectedly I wasn't worried about what would happen to me but it did tear at me to think that these kids, whom I made a commitment to, committed to be there for them, that I no longer could keep that commitment. Here are these kids who all they've experienced their entire lives were broken promises and I couldn't keep my promise to work with them any longer."

It wouldn't be long before his unbridled compassion and hunger to serve would be put to good use once again. In each city he went for the rest of his career he immediately became involved in charity work there in some manner. An especially rewarding relationship developed when he landed back in his home state of Arizona with the Diamondbacks.

"I was introduced by the Dbacks Community Relations Department to a lady by the name of Kathleen Rubi, the director of Best Buddies AZ. When I learned about the work they were doing and how they went about it, using high school and college age mentors, well, what a terrific organization, I thought. I was thrilled to be connected with it and give my time."

Started by Kennedy family member,



RUSS ORTIZ

Anthony Shriver, Best Buddies is a network of organizations that provides volunteers to develop one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

“I’m proud to say that through the efforts of my charitable work with Kathleen and her local chapter here, we were able to start the first middle-school program for Best Buddies in Arizona. It was, and still is, an incredible group, doing incredible things for these people in need.”

But Russ’s charity work hasn’t stopped there. Not only has he started his own charitable foundation, appropriately called “The Ortiz Family Foundation,” but he has recently launched two more

benevolent-driven endeavors, “2ndGuy-Golf” and “2ndGirlGolf,” both of which donate all of their revenue to charity.

On top of all that, he doesn’t give the credit to himself or his organizations, but credits the Giants for what this has all become. “It’s a testament to the Giants and their organization. They gave me the opportunity to make a commitment. It’s because of the people in the organization, the type of people they are. I’ve always felt that without their interest and support, from the owner on down to the grounds crew, with their interest in my welfare and well-being that I wouldn’t have had these opportunities I have today to give back in these ways. They supported me and made it easy for me to succeed in

this area. Just like a family does. And with them it truly is about family, and I continue to be involved with them in any way they ask, small or large.”

Right before we met, Russ sent me text telling me he’d be the guy in the orange collared shirt. I didn’t need to know that. I could tell it was him the moment he walked into the coffee shop, the smile of contentment all across his face. That’s what it looks like to live a life of giving and being thankful to the ones who gave you the opportunity to do it.

Pascal Marco is a freelance writer living in Scottsdale, Arizona. His award-winning debut novel, “IDENTITY: LOST,” tells the story of the fictitious murder of the last surviving team member of the 1919 Black Sox. A second novel is forthcoming. More at www.pascalmarco.com.