**Show Them**

A Personal Essay by Martin St. Louis

*Excerpted from The Player’s Tribune online Journal*

We were losing to Pittsburgh three games to one in the second round of the 2014 playoffs and were flying into Pittsburgh for Game 5. As we were beginning our descent, my phone rang. In all the travel I had done throughout my career, my phone never rang while I was still in the air. It was the worst phone call I have ever received. It was my father calling to tell me that my mom had suffered a heart attack and had died. She was only 63. Most men make this assumption that they take after their father. I recognize many traits I have that come from my dad, like my work ethic and athleticism, but when I look deeper inside, I see just how much of me and my success can be attributed to my mom.

My mother was always my biggest fan even though she didn’t know much about hockey. Very little, actually — there were times when she’d watch a game and have no idea that I’d even scored until my father told her. What she did know was how important hockey was to me, so she did everything in her power to support my pursuit of it. She wanted my sister and me to find success, but more than that, she really wanted us to be happy. She made it her goal to help us feel better, be better, even if that meant having or taking less for herself. She radiated kindness in all that she did and said. But she was also a worrier, which didn’t always fit well with me playing a sport as physical as hockey. On the plus side, getting hurt always meant the royal treatment. To this day, whenever I’m not feeling well, I immediately wish she was here to take care of me. I guess she spoiled me.

To become a professional hockey player, you absolutely need to be able to shoot and skate at a world-class level, but that’s not enough. What my mom gave me was the mental toughness to not let anything stand in the way of my dream. Every night when she put me to bed as a child, she’d stay in my room for a little while and say the same thing: “Show them! Don’t worry about what they say about your size. Go out there and show them how good you are!” Here was the thing: I believed her. The fact that she had such confidence in my abilities made me feel invincible. She wanted it for me as badly as I wanted it for myself, and helped me develop the mindset that would allow me to go the distance.

She’d do these little things to keep my confidence high, even as I got older. One of the biggest turning points of my career was back in 2000 when the Tampa Bay Lightning decided to give me a shot at making the team. I should have been more nervous, but I remember being at ease because my mom told me, “Oh yeah, the cards said you’re going to make it. Don’t even worry about it, it’s done.” She was a big believer in tarot cards, and she had been told I was going to make the team. Now, for all I knew, she was making it all up. But it was just the pick-me-up I needed. Oddly enough, according to her, every single reading seemed to indicate that I was going to be successful and achieve everything I wanted. Imagine that.

Mom’s card-reading (or, more likely, her undying belief that her son had the ability to make it big) turned out to be true. There are plenty of very talented players that come through the league, but sometimes the difference between a long career and a short one is getting the right opportunity at the right time. For me, that was the Lightning. In a lot of ways, Tampa Bay was where I grew up as an athlete and as a man. I arrived there as a newlywed, barely holding on to my NHL dream after failing to stick with Calgary. And when I left, I was a father of three who had enjoyed just about every kind of success you can experience in this game. I have been incredibly blessed. This game has given me some of the most memorable experiences of my life. From playing in the Frozen Four with the Vermont Catamounts, to hoisting the Stanley Cup with the Lightning, to riding around on Mike Smith’s shoulders in Sochi after winning a gold medal, to scoring an overtime playoff goal in Madison Square Garden with the Rangers — there’s nothing I would change.

Mother’s Day came three days after my mom passed away; we were on the brink of elimination against the Penguins, down three games to two, and I was incredibly emotional. With my dad and sister in the stands as well as my wife and my boys, I took to the ice and experienced one of the most memorable moments of my life. Three minutes into the game, I scored. It was a play that I would typically call a lucky bounce, but with that goal, it was something higher than luck. My teammates surrounded me and we were in a pile celebrating. I was kind of in shock, but they were all so happy for me. All I could think about was that I wanted to keep that puck. I knew I wanted to have something to remember that moment. As soon as my teammates started skating back to the bench — and I have no idea how — the puck came to my skate and rested right there on the ice in front of me. In that moment, I knew my mom was there. She had helped me score that goal. I felt her with me, smiling down. I’ll never forget that. That puck will forever rest next to my mother’s ashes in a mausoleum in Laval.

We ended up coming back to win the series and, as fate (or mom) would have it, Montreal came back to win their series as well. We played Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Finals against the Canadiens in Montreal, which not only allowed me to be home to attend my mom’s funeral but also made it possible for my entire team, as well as some of my closest former Lightning teammates, to show their support. I can’t imagine it wasn’t part of some greater plan. I was humbled by the outpouring of love and support I received at my lowest moment.

It was difficult having my mom’s death play out so publicly, but in a way, I’m thankful that it allowed her to get the acknowledgement she deserved. She would always shy away from being the center of attention, but she deserved to be talked about because she was such an amazing person. Without my mom I wouldn’t have scored my first ever goal at my hometown rink, let alone a goal in the NHL playoffs alongside my Tampa Bay teammates. I couldn’t be more proud to be her son and I’m so proud of what we accomplished. I hope I showed them for you, Maman.

[**MARTIN ST. Louis**](http://www.theplayerstribune.com/author/mstlouis/)

*\*Note: A portion of this essay has been removed for the sake of time. The full essay can be found by visiting the link below:*