

Lowell's Botto remembered as selfless family man, teacher and coach

Beloved former LHS, UMass Lowell baseball standout passed away last month



Lowell native Steve Botto, who starred as a baseball player at Lowell High School and then UMass Lowell, and went on to teach and coach at Greater Lowell Tech, passed away last month at the age of 45 after a courageous battle with cancer. (COURTESY OF BOTTO FAMILY)

By [MATT LANGONE](#) | mlangone@lowellsun.com | Lowell Sun

PUBLISHED: August 2, 2020 at 5:44 a.m. | UPDATED: August 3, 2020 at 6:57 a.m.

Steve Botto was never one to make himself the center of attention.

Far from it.

He was the type of person that wanted the spotlight on others. He didn't want special treatment or anyone feeling sorry for him.

Even on his toughest days while battling cancer, when family and friends would reach out to him via text, or phone, or even face-to-face, he was always "good." And it was common practice for him to flip it around and ask that person how they were doing.

At the age of 45, Stephen M. Botto, Jr., passed away on July 19, at his home, surrounded by his family, after a courageous battle with cancer. In the days that followed, an incredible outpouring of support and condolences could be seen all over social media from the countless people who were honored to have known Botto and knew what he meant to the local community. To many, he was known simply as "4," a number symbolic of his days around baseball.

Botto was a loving and devoted husband, father, son and brother, and a deeply beloved teacher at Greater Lowell Tech and baseball coach at the high school and Little League levels.



“My brother was undoubtedly the strongest, most mentally determined person I’ll likely ever know in my life,” said Botto’s sister, Keri Botto-Boucher. “It sounds so cliché, but it’s the truth. When my day seems tough, all I need to do is think of him, because even on his toughest days, he was always ‘good.’”

“I’ll miss him coaching his son, and my son. I’ll miss him at first base and the congratulatory helmet tap he gave to all his players. To say I’m proud to be his sister is an understatement. There is just no way to describe it, and, of course, I could go on forever.”

Botto was born in Lowell on March 4, 1975, attended St. Louis Elementary School and was a graduate of Lowell High School’s Class of 1993. LHS is where he met his wife, Melissa, and it was also where he developed into an excellent athlete and baseball standout.

Jim Borodawka, also a Lowell native and former star basketball player at LHS and UMass Lowell, became a close lifelong friend of Botto’s when they were in elementary school and playing Little League. Borodawka has “a million memories” of times spent with Botto and his family. But he prefers to shine the light most on how remarkably selfless Botto was.

“Just like any cancer patient, there’s ups and downs. But the one thing that always jumped out to me when I’d reach out to him or check-in on him, I’d ask him ‘how you doing?’ And he’d give a very brief answer and then immediately redirect the question to ‘how are you doing? How’s your family?’ The other day, I was talking to a mutual friend of ours and he said ‘you know what, he did the same thing to me all the time,’” said Borodawka. “We live in a society where everybody puts themselves out there and puts themselves first, and here you had a guy that really lived his life completely opposite of that. In the end, he was probably the most well-liked person that I’ve ever known.”

Botto went on to UMass Lowell, where he played second base and served as a two-year captain for head coach Jim Stone.

“A quiet leader, outstanding young man, came from an outstanding family,” said Stone of Botto. “He had very good hands. We used to kid him about having Bill Mazeroski’s hands, and none of the kids on the team knew who the heck Bill Mazeroski was. I said ‘he was one of the best second basemen, defensively, ever.’”

It was certainly high praise to compare Botto to the great Pittsburgh Pirates’ second baseman of the 1950s and 60s. But Stone says Botto was never concerned with praise.

“He thought about others first,” said Stone. “I think that’s why his teammates thought so much of him to make him captain twice.”

It was that spirit of putting others first and that desire to help that led Botto to become a physical education teacher at Greater Lowell Tech and an assistant baseball coach for longtime GLT head coach Dave MacLaughlan for 16 seasons.

Botto also coached baseball in the Lowell High program.

“There’s not enough positive adjectives in the English language to describe Steve,” said MacLaughlan. “He just had the ability to be friends with everybody, and he had this knack of being able to communicate with the kids. It’s a teacher thing, he had that innate ability.

“If a kid said ‘I have gym’ and he heard that, he’d say ‘it’s physical education.’ He never let you get away with saying ‘gym.’”

Greater Lowell Tech Athletic Director/Health & Physical Education Cluster Chair Mark White also thoroughly enjoyed being around Botto.

“First and foremost, I would say he was a model teacher and coach. His passion for teaching PE and baseball to the kids of the Greater Lowell community was obvious to anyone who had the chance to see him in action,” said White. “His classes would always be full of kids challenging themselves to work together and trying new things on our Project Adventure course. He would always make sure to implore his students, regardless of the success level a given student may have had on one of the course elements, to ‘show appreciation’ for their classmates’ efforts. As a result, all the kids would clap and cheer for that student, and you could see the positive effect it had on them.”

Botto cherished his time together with his son, Matthew, and his daughter, Abigail. He was a true family man.

He began coaching baseball at Lowell’s Shedd Park once Matthew was old enough to play. He joined the Shedd Park Board and recently became the Director of Player Development.

Sadly, Steve's brother, Michael Botto, passed away in 2017. But the strength shown by the Botto family has been remarkable. Support from the local community has also been incredible.

A large group of UMass Lowell baseball alumni gathered to pay tribute, while several members of Lowell High's baseball community lined the streets near Shedd Park to honor Botto during the funeral procession last Saturday.

Botto's youngest sister, Kristine Botto Drust, who starred as a softball player at Lowell High and UMass Lowell, delivered the eulogy at his service.

"I found comfort in you, big brother. I always felt that if I followed you, I'd be OK," Kristine said. "You lead and I follow. Phathead and Phathead Jr. Botto and Little Botto. Botto and Botto's sister. I wouldn't struggle making friends or fitting in because I was with you. I could just watch you and learn how to be a better person and ballplayer. One of my last conversations with you was telling you just this. Thank you for paving the way, the right way."