

2009

Weather



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TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

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WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

Gump-like

From Page One

seat. He acknowledged he was, and moved over to his own seat. The two struck up a conversation and she began questioning him about what is special about the park and attending a Red Sox game.

"He asked me, 'Why are you asking all these questions?'" she recalled in a telephone interview Friday from her home in St. Louis.

Mrs. Weber explained that she was trying to get at the heart of the Red Sox experience. She told him she paints sports stadiums, in an effort to capture the special connection people have with their sports teams.

"He told me, 'Then I need to show you my Red Sox and my Fenway,'" she said. "I scampered after him and he took me on a 45-minute tour of Fenway."

The two went up on the Green Monster left field wall, saw the Pesky pole that marks the edge of right field, the red Ted Williams chair marking a long home run the Hall-of-Famer hit, and he pointed out where the initials of former owners Tom and Jean Yawkey are spelled out in Morse code on the scoreboard. At one point, he pointed down to the warning track in the outfield and asked her if she knew what it was.

"I said, 'It's the warning track,'" Mrs. Weber said. "He said, 'No. It is where I scattered my father's ashes on opening day in 2005 when they unfurled the World Series banner.'"

John F. Casella, a writer and educator, died in 2001. One of the stories Sgt. Casella told Mrs. Weber was about attending his first game at age 7, with his father and brother to watch the Red Sox play the Minnesota Twins.

With the tour and the comments she received from Sgt. Casella and other fans about their memories of the Red Sox, Mrs. Weber said she thought she got the full Red Sox experience. But there was more.

"The best part of it was the game was incredible," Sgt. Casella said.

When the Red Sox were ahead 2-1 late in the game, he apologized to her, saying Red Sox fans are at their best when the team is losing. But the White Sox went ahead 3-2, and later the game was tied in the eighth inning, when Jason Bay hit a home run into the Green Monster seats. The crowd went wild.

In her write-up to go along with the copies of the painting, Mrs. Weber wrote, "I sang 'Put Me in

Coach,' as the Red Sox took the field and 'Sweet Caroline' in the eighth. The Sox came from behind to warrant the joyous, 'Dirty Water' and 'Tessie.' I danced a jig as I left the stadium."

Mrs. Weber told Sgt. Casella he would receive the number one copy once she finished the painting. What she did not tell him when she danced out of the ballpark was immediately apparent when he opened the package she sent him with the painting. He and Mr. Lefsyk, from Indian Orchard, were prominently featured in the painting cheering as Red Sox catcher Jason Varitek gets a hit during the game.

The 28-by-36-inch copy of the painting now hangs in his office in the Athol police station. Sgt.

Casella has a hard time explaining why he seems to have a gift for finding special moments, but part of it is through the momentum he creates to arrive at those places. He was in Mr. Kennedy's office on inauguration day because he contacted the office and asked for tickets. They could not supply any, but then invited him and his wife, Mary, to join them in a Senate hearing room to watch the ceremonies on television. They had such a good time they decided to walk over to the senator's office to

thank his staff. The staff greeted them, inviting them to watch the inaugural parade from their balcony. As the Casellas looked down from the balcony to where the parade would soon begin, Mr. Kennedy's staff learned he had suffered a seizure and collapsed at a congressional luncheon with the president. They ushered the Casellas out and closed the office to be with Mr. Kennedy.

The stint on the Letterman show was the result of his going for a walk in Times Square and over-hearing someone quietly offering people tickets to the show. He asked for them, and when they were standing in line, Mr. Letterman's staff asked if anyone had any talents. Sgt. Casella volunteered that he could balance about anything on his nose. His skill won him a second visit to the show and a chance to perform.

His love of baseball has also resulted in his being at the game when the Red Sox clinched the 2005 Eastern Conference Championship, at the longest game in baseball history, at the game when Red Sox outfielder Jacoby Ellsbury broke the team's record for stolen bases and, of course, at the opening day when the team raised the 2004 World Series banner.

All the moments add up to an interesting box of chocolates.

Sgt. on Sox canvas

Athol Police Sgt. Christopher S. Casella with his D'Anne Gastorf Weber Red Sox print, numbered 1 of 999, at the Athol police station.



Sgt. Casella is pictured in the lower corner of D'Anne Gastorf Weber's painting of Fenway Park.

Gump-like Casella picks a chocolate

By George Barnes
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

ATHOL — To steal a phrase from the movie "Forrest Gump," for Athol Police Sgt. Christopher S. Casella, life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get.

Jack Borden, a retired television newsman, refers to Sgt. Casella as the Forrest Gump of Athol, and there may be something to it.

Mr. Borden, an Athol resident, was a news anchor for WBZ-TV for 21 years. He has seen many great moments in his career, but like Forrest Gump, the character played by Tom Hanks in the film based on a novel by Winston Groom, Sgt. Casella also has a knack for being in the middle of things, often purely by chance.

Sgt. Casella has appeared on the David Letterman show displaying his talent for balancing things on his nose, was in U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy's office when the senator collapsed Jan. 20, just after President Barack Obama's inaugural ceremony, he was on a flight back from Italy that landed in London July 7,

2005 — the day of the London terrorist bombings, and, while in the military, he was living in Spokane, Wash., and found himself covered with a pretty good coating of ash when Mount St. Helens erupted.

"I've seen a lot," he said, understating a life filled with interesting encounters.

Sgt. Casella's latest Gump-like moment came Aug. 25 at Fenway Park, and he now has a permanent place in Red Sox lore. His image has been included in a painting of the park, and 999 copies of it are being sold through Bed, Bath & Beyond stores.

A serious fan of the Red Sox, Sgt. Casella said he gets to Boston about 10 times each year. He was there that night with his brother-in-law, Tom Lefsyk, to watch the Red Sox play the White Sox. Prior to the game, sitting in an empty seat to get a better view, he was approached by D'Anne Gastorf Weber of St. Louis, Mo. Mrs. Weber said she thought he was in her

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