



Eulogy for Joe ‘Butterball’ Tamburro
Delivered by Rev. Rep. Louise Williams Bishop
Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul - Philadelphia, PA
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We are here to honor a man who worked miracles for himself and others.
Real life miracles, transcending deep-set social barriers to help a nation create new realms of social progress and acceptance.

Joe Tamburro left South Philly as a talented mechanic and race car enthusiast and became the man who was honored for his civic service by three Philadelphia mayors, the Pennsylvania State House, City Council, NAACP, King Center for Social Change, Philadelphia’s Walk of Fame and so many others. By 1978, he was one of the most powerful FM Program Directors in the country.

He loved classic cars, classic records and food.
But not in that order. Butter and fine food were inseparable.

Butter joined an extraordinary work in progress. The daring civil rights leadership of Bob Klein had already established WDAS Radio as the premiere civil rights and Rhythm & Blues station in the country. Klein’s well documented relationship and work with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. established WDAS Radio as King’s northern ‘office’ for SCLC and the Poor Peoples Campaign. The ‘DAS hospitality and news coverage was extended to Malcolm X, as well as countless other local and national figures. The News Department of Joe Rainey and Jim Klash set standards of excellence for journalism and helped invent ‘civil rights coverage.’ Radio Legend Jimmy Bishop had programmed the station into superstardom, dominating the nation’s R & B music scene, making hits and stars out of the unknown. The station’s ability to hire future hall of famers was absolutely uncanny. Hal Jackson, Jocko, Portia Perry, Hy Lit, Jimmy Bishop, Louise Williams, Georgie Woods, Lord Fautleroy-John Bandy, Sir Lancelot-George Johnson Jr. and Ed Bradley. When you fully grasp that level of talent, it is utterly phenomenal that Butter was able to set his sights and join this World Champion Team. And not just join – he rises to the top of the roster. The style and way he did it, becoming one of the most loved and popular of all the ‘DAS jocks, is astounding.

He rises to the top with his cutting-edge, on-air-technique, his signature, ultra-popular rap and because he has a golden ear. Butter knew how to pick a hit from all the hundreds of records that show up every week, from the grand to the not so grand alike. He knew how to find the diamonds. The list of records that he ‘broke’ is one of the most impressive in radio history. In those days when you ‘broke a record,’ it meant you were the first to play it nationally. One of the best

examples was his choice of Marvin Gaye's 'What's Going On.' Butter knew it was a hit even when Motown's Berry Gordy did not. Butter on AM and DAS's Harvey Holiday on FM broke that record nationwide when nobody else liked it. And that record went on to become a monster hit and set the future tone of WDAS-**FM's** precedent-shattering 'Progressive Soul' format.

But his story doesn't stop there. Butter's enchanting personality and amazing ear and eye for talent were kept company by his own very unique contributions to society. Chief among them, in terms of social progress, were two extremely profound accomplishments. He rose above the obvious and rose above appearances. The mid 1960s were racially turbulent times. These were times of heavy racial segregation, real live 'whites only water fountains' and dedicated marchers putting their lives on the line. As a young, white guy from South Philly, he wanted desperately to work on the radio and work at the station he loved – WDAS. After some 2 years hanging around Bishop and Klein, when he finally makes it to the airwaves – he is so wonderfully embraced, he takes an entire city with him and says 'talent has no color.' "Talent is color blind." "I Love this music. You love this music. We are together in that and so much more." That message leads all of us to higher ground. And then something even bigger happened. At a time when interracial marriages were highly misunderstood, at a time when all kinds of wrong-headed foolishness prevailed, when the racism of the 1930s, 40s and 50s was just beginning to be addressed and dismantled - Butter takes another enormous, BOLD step forward. He decides to stand by another love - his future wife Cynthia. In these racially troubled times, he did not let the negative get in his way. He went with his heart, he went for Love. And when that marriage and that 'vote for love' took place - **again** - he took an entire city with him. Everyone who liked him took that step up to a new and higher plane. He brought everyone to that new table of understanding. That inspired charisma and magnetism, that can take people to higher ground, is a huge blessing for us all. And still, there is another deeply profound lesson that he teaches.

It never bothered Butter that he was from an Italian neighborhood in South Philly and he didn't know anybody at 'DAS or in the radio business. It never stopped him the way it stops so many others. He said, "I really love this music, really love WDAS and I'm going to somehow make this happen. I'm going to join them." And not only did he join, he eventually becomes a radio leader. Not just in Philadelphia, but nationwide. It's a huge leap of faith when that young, white teenager said, "Let me go to this Hy Lit record hop and introduce myself." And he did. He won over Hy Lit, who introduced him to Bob Klein, who introduces Butter to Bishop and suddenly he's at WDAS, seeing far more extensive action than his record hop experiences. The Klein-Bishop view was soup to nuts. [God knows there were a lot of nuts, so all puns intended] From the civil rights movement, to running a news department, commercials, advertising, budgets, production, record play lists. An entire world opened up for Butter and he embraced it all. Big Time.

It is a huge realization. Seeing all that, more than ever, he wants to be on the air, no matter what color he was. Butter's enthusiasm, his verve and devotion convince Klein and Bishop that this was doable. Who cares about color – it's about the talent. And that message going out into the land that day, that year and for future generations, has profound positive implications. It brings us all to the next level. That message brings us all to a new plateau of understanding and cooperation.

Dr. King said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

Butter made that manifest. And he had 5 little children too with his devoted, lovely wife, Cynthia. Nicole, Michelle, Stacey, Christian and Zachary: I want you to know, God sometimes removes our rock, so that we can learn how to be strong. We know how strong Butter could be and he would want that for you as well. We know how important strength is, in this world today. And he gave you a wealth of experiences, a wide array of culture, art and music.

Butter's heart was always a loving heart, a compassionate heart, a giving heart and a caring heart. A heart that carried so much love and concern for everyone he met. Not just his family at home, but *all* of his family here. And that Heart kept him going no matter what the doctors said. No matter what the reports said, it kept him going. We are looking at another big, big miracle.

He defied gravity. He defied old-fashioned social conventions and he *won*. That's a great lesson and blessing for you and all of us. Use what you have been shown and help each other. Take Butter's trailblazing example. Use the revolutionary thinking that Butter demonstrated in the area of social progress and make that happen for future generations to come. That's the best that any of us can do.

God Bless you all.

WYNNE ALEXANDER

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