

In almost a year of sudden change and underlying fear, the man's declaration of "I got Center Ice!" could not have been more welcome. The War Memorial in downtown Syracuse, home to ice shows and hockey games, once enjoyed freely, with popcorn and crowds and sticky floors, was destination X for my first COVID Vaccine shot this January 2021. Masked and packed with juice, hand sanitizer, provisions for a day waiting in line, insulin, cell phone, vaccine card, and hope in my heart, I arrived early-I'm usually late for everything- and waited with hundreds of others to fight this new invisible threat with a simple shot. This was my first time in a crowd of strangers, gathering of more than 10, in almost a year. Most of my days are safely and quietly at home with my growing children, glued to screens, teaching from a corner of my bedroom, grocery shopping from my phone. I am a Type 1 Diabetic, a high risk factor in succumbing to COVID, a mother, a protective mama bear type, a daughter, aware of my aging parents risks, and a wife, not wanting to risk the loss of my partner, a story we have seen unfold over and over again each morning on the news since March of last year. "Hey, I got Center Ice" - his joke was good, and worth repeating to every helpful nurse and county employee stationed at the ground floor of the event center. Every time he said it he smiled and boomed. I smiled too. I was, for once, surrounded by the public who I knew took this virus seriously because they were here with me. Taking the shot, wearing their masks, ticking off that they currently had no symptoms. The nurse, who dutifully asked the questions, smiled with her wrinkled and makeuped eyes, was careful, kind, assured. This is the process, this is the new way, this is the middle of the war zone that our world suddenly fell into. This place was safe, for just a moment. I could breath with the flutter of hope in my chest that things might just be looking up. It was a short wait, no need for snacks, 15 minutes of making sure the dose wouldn't harm me, and off I went again, into the world. He was right, the view from center ice was perfect.

Kelly Chambala