

Family First, Even From Afar»

For one NYC father, the job of his dreams means living apart from his wife and kids for much of the year. The couple tells us how they make it work. **By Bethany Braun-Silva**

Baseball season is coming to an end, and that means it's time for Queens native Anthony Iapocce, hitting coach for the Texas Rangers, to finally return home to his family here in New York.

Anthony fulfilled his lifelong dream of working in Major League Baseball when he was hired by the Rangers last fall. However, the job requires him to be with his team for long stretches of time. His wife, Suzanne, was accustomed to him traveling for work—including stints in the Chicago Cubs and Florida Marlins organizations—but this was the first time they faced a long-term separation.

Somehow over the past year, the Iapoces were still able to buy a home, have a second baby—and there's a third on the way now, too—and look completely unfazed (at least on the outside) by these major life events. I know the family personally—our kids went to school together, and I am friends with Suzanne—and I can attest to the fact that the Iapoces make living apart look easy, although it obviously is not. I talked to them about how they keep it all together and manage work and family time while one spouse lives away from home.

Making It Work

Suzanne and Anthony Iapocce met as kids growing up in Queens. Their mothers were very good friends, so they found themselves drifting in and out of each other's lives as they got older. Anthony made a career for himself in baseball and traveled quite a bit as a result, and it was through the help of Facebook that he and Suzanne were finally able to make a romantic connection. Cut to a few years later, and they are now married with two beautiful daughters, 4-year-old Lily and Abby, who turns 1 this month, and a baby due in the spring.

Anthony says even though he's achieved his personal goal of working in the Major Leagues, what's more important to him is being a great dad—and that balance takes a bit of figuring out. The key to making it all work is “great family and friends,” he says, and for the Iapoces, that includes Suzanne's parents, who took Lily to and from school every day last year. When Anthony is away, the family uses FaceTime frequently, allowing Lily to connect with her dad by talking to him and showing him artwork and pictures from school.

Since welcoming Abby in the fall, the family has been faced with the expected challenges that come along with having a new baby



The Iapocce family visits dad at his workplace.

and being a family of four. This put extra pressure on Suzanne, who also worked full-time as teacher. “I remember being worried about my girls, thinking, *How am I going to pick up the slack?*,” she says. “Anthony is such a hands-on, active dad, even when he's not there. He's so engaged with them and so present with them, and his presence is extremely powerful, so I was worried about picking up the slack of him being absent.”

For Suzanne, taking on double duty as a parent meant letting other chores go, at least temporarily. For one thing, the self-proclaimed “neat freak” chose to let dishes pile up in the sink in exchange for some quality time with her girls, which she says was well worth it.

Hometown Home Base

One of the biggest decisions the Iapocce's faced upon receiving the new of Anthony's new job was where to live. After some back and forth, they made the decision to keep their home in New York and not move to Texas. Anthony has been with four organizations during the past 10 years, so the family would be faced with potentially frequent moves if they relocated every time he took a new position. Plus, he travels with the Rangers, so the couple figured it would be best to keep the girls and Suzanne near their family in New York.

“We decided to stay with our support system,” Suzanne says. “My parents are here and they are so active in our daughter's lives, and it was important for us to be near them.”

Even with Anthony being away, the couple managed to purchase their first home this summer. With some creative scheduling, Anthony was able to make it to the closing, and the Iapoces were

able to check off another important milestone for their family. Suzanne and the girls spent the rest of the summer traveling to Anthony's games. “Taking the opportunity to travel to him as much as possible is what we are going to be doing to make it work, we are learning as we go with this baseball life,” she says.

Setting Great Examples

Anthony is a testament to what working hard and never giving up will get you. As a kid in Queens, he never stopped playing baseball, which included teams at St. Joseph's Elementary School in Astoria and St. Joseph's Catholic Youth Organization, and then in high school at Monsignor McClancy Memorial High School. He continued in college and transitioned to the Minor League, but the goal was always the Big League, Anthony says.

When the Rangers came calling, Anthony and the family were excited, but he knew he was going to have to be away more than before and that was always in the back of his mind. “It's tough because as far as a personal goal, like where I've wanted to be my whole life, this is it, but now it's also that I want to be a great dad,” he says. “So I'm trying to figure out how to balance that.”

Anthony hopes that this fulfillment of a lifelong dream will inspire his girls to pursue their own passions. “The thing with Lily and Abby is trying to show them that you can get to where you want to get, you just got to keep going and believe in yourself,” he says. When it comes to his girls he wants them to “believe that anything is possible.”

With the Rangers holding a comfortable lead in their division as of our press time and widely expected to go deep into the playoffs, Anthony's return home is likely to be delayed a bit this year—albeit for all the right reasons. Still, he, along with Suzanne and the children, look forward to spending some time living in the same place for a while, until it's time for Anthony to head back to work for next season.



Abby and Lily Iapocce sporting Texas Rangers gear.