

Before I start the eulogy, I'd like to make a small disclaimer:

What I have written here is a collaboration. A compilation of Neil stories and anecdotes that I have collected from many people over the past week. I'd like to thank everyone, especially Neil's brothers and sisters, and my friends, especially Dwight, Richie, and Mike D, as well as so many of you who are here today. As I have said all week, the process of writing this has been like trying to stuff a thousand pounds of stuff into a one pound bag. So if you hear your words here in this narrative, I thank you for your input. And if I have skipped your favorite Neil story, I apologize, but there are a million of them, so just keep the stories coming.

So here is my one pound bag...

To encapsulate a life, any life in only a few hundred words is a particularly humbling task. In most any case, doing justice is elusive, but here it is exceedingly so. We are contemplating the shocking loss of our dear friend Neil Regan, a spectacularly simple/incredibly complex soul whose fleeting time on this earth touched the hearts and minds of countless individuals from NY to California, D.C. to Providence, Dublin to Nepal, Montreal to Banff.

Neil was a unicorn, a creature so pure and unique that it is unlikely that we'll ever see another again. As the Regan clan so aptly noted in his beautiful obituary "There will never be another like him."

Neil was a quiet genius, a master of blarney, an empathetic friend to anyone in need. He was the best – son, brother, friend, godfather, uncle, confidant. I was going to add golfer, but 'best' doesn't really fit there – maybe 'interesting', 'irksome', 'confounding', or 'fascinating'?

What many may not have known is that Neil was proficient at three languages other than English – Ancient Greek, Latin, and Computer Code. In high school he won the National Merit Scholarship Award, a very rare scholarly accomplishment, but he wouldn't fill out the paperwork to receive the scholarship because he felt that it wouldn't be fair since he didn't really need it. He refused to take the place of someone who would need the scholarship more than he.

Neil was always there with a wry joke or a smile and a story, adding spice and color, consolation and simple wisdom. He was an accomplished conversationalist. Whenever you got a phone call from Neil you had to clear your schedule for at least 20 minutes, and usually close to an hour. Inevitably in any conversation you had with Neil you would be confronted with the rhetorical question 'wanna hear a joke?' Neil was a chocoholic –stemming from the days of Ora's chocolate brownies which all of his friends greedily scarfed down in the kitchen of his parents' house...I'm guessing to the chagrin of his brothers and sisters.

Neil began his school days right here at St. Joseph's grammar school, with his lifelong best friend, Dwight McGuirk. He was champion of the underdog all his life, and in his early school years he would spot the uncomfortable kid off to the side, put his arm around his shoulder and bring him into the group of cool kids. And Heaven help anyone who tried to bully the kid.

One thing that a lot of people didn't know about Neil is that he could be a tough, stubborn son of a bitch. Though he would gladly give the shirt off his back to a friend or even a worthy stranger, woe was the person who mistook his kindness for weakness. He never hesitated to stand up when he felt he was right, and he never backed down. This character trait became evident early on. In the fifth and sixth grades at the pickup basketball games in the parking lot when curse words began to creep into the lexicon, he was quick to correct his buddies' language: "Fudge", he would say adamantly, or "Oh Shoot". Thinking about it now, I don't recall him ever using a curse word in the fifty odd years that I knew him.

Neil was an especially devoted son to his parents. In their later years he put his life virtually on hold to be their primary daily caregiver. He was selflessly devoted to making sure they were safe and secure in their own home for as long as they lived. I can't tell you how many friends' events Neil passed up in those years. To him it was an honor to be there for his folks, never a burden. When I asked him if he was okay he would inevitably reply, '**of course, every day is a blessing.**'

As he always did in life, Neil found a silver lining. Eventually he had the help of a bevy of lovely Irish women – additional caregivers hired by his family whom he befriended, and who remain dedicated to him forever.

Neil attended Fordham Prep in the Bronx, where we met and became friends, and where our class of 1974 became legendary amongst the faculty and staff of the school. Not for any particular accomplishment we achieved as a group, but for the sense of camaraderie and the strong bonds of friendship that we all have sustained to this day. I honestly believe, and I know that some will back me up here, that a big part of the sense of unity in our group was the result of Neil Regan's presence.

After the prep, Neil headed down to D.C. where he "attended" Georgetown University. I put the word attended in quotes because I'm not sure how much attendance actually occurred. A whole lot of fun and antics were going on down there. Here again Neil garnered a special group of lifelong, dedicated, like-hearted friends, who I know would give *anything* to not be here today for this reason. Again, Neil is the common factor, and an instigator of these friendships.

"Uncle" may have been Neil's most cherished and ubiquitous moniker. He was 'uncle' Neil to so many kids, both relatives and non-relatives, that he was a virtual

Pied Piper at any family or friends gathering. Anytime that our family was attending, or hosting an event our kids' first question was "will Neil be there?" If the answer was yes, their excitement would intensify by a factor of five or more. He would often be seated separate from the adults surrounded by a group of young children rapt with attention while he told a story or cracked his special brand of clean jokes.

'Uncle Neil' holds a legendary place in the youth of my daughters, as he does in so many children. A short anecdote:

At Kathryn's 3rd birthday party Neil offered to dress up as Big Bird (her idol at the time). When this eight foot tall yellow bird came sauntering out of the woods into the party the children were amazed and astonished. He played games and read stories, until Caitlyn Regan looked up and said "Hey Big Bird, why are you wearing Uncle Neil's sneakers?" He had a tough time talking himself out of that one.

Fast forward eight years, it was the night of one of Doug Metz's legendary Halloween costume parties. I was working of course, and Amy decided to give Chrissy and Kathryn a special treat – their first night as big girls alone for the evening (the party was only fifteen minutes away). They were stocked up with pizza and ice cream and movies and very excited. Neil knew the girls were alone and he decided to surprise them on his way to the party. I think Chrissy is scarred to this day by the incident. He was wearing a massive Gandalf the Wizard costume which made him stand eight feet tall. He knocked on the kitchen windows and put his giant Gandalf face to the glass. Chrissy shrieked and tried to hide inside the clothes dryer. Kathryn terrified, stood her ground. When Neil realized his miscalculation, rather than removing the giant head, he stuck his foot in the air to show them his trademark sneakers. It didn't work right away.

Neil never did anything half-way – it was all or nothing. When he decided to take up bicycling, he trained himself into olympic shape and biked through the Canadian Rockies. When he turned his attention to rock climbing, it led to two separate mountain climbing expeditions in the Himalayan Mountains, though one such expedition ended in tragedy. The leader of that climb Thomas Mutch, after reaching the summit, was severely injured upon the descent. The team tried to save him but he fell into a deep snow covered crevice, never to be seen again.

Neil never wanted to talk about this incident, but I know that it stayed with him forever. He never climbed again.

Neil was an avid sports fan and player all his life. Baseball and basketball in his youth and during high school, and then he developed a manic passion for the game of golf in his mature years. It started simply. Neil was working at the Kittle House as my IT guy, pre-internet and long before IT was even a term, designing from scratch a computerized inventory program for my fast-growing wine cellar collection. The technology that he developed, writing code to combine two distinct software programs into one, was the only one of its kind in the world at the time. At one point he had a venture capital group very interested in bringing this program to market. It was a brilliant system that we still use at the Kittle House today, 31 years later, but Neil was too modest, and could only see the flaws in the system. He declined to pursue the offer.

But when he wasn't working on Kittle House technology, he convinced me to cut out of work and go out to the adjacent Mt. Kisco Golf Club to play nine or ten or twelve holes in between shifts. He had played a bit when he was younger with his brothers and dad, but I don't think he ever took a lesson. Instead he bought a book, Ben Hogans' Five Lessons, the Modern Fundamentals of Golf, and that's all he needed. There was a steep learning curve – I carried the Titleist logo on my shin for years after an errant Neil shot that I wasn't able to avoid. We never kept score, we simply hit shots from everywhere, and putted from every point of every green.

Pretty soon Neil was playing 36 holes a day at every public golf course within fifty miles. And then he discovered Ireland. He bought a new set of clubs and booked a solo trip to pursue his newfound passion. He fell in love with Ireland, the countryside, the people, the culture – and Ireland became enamored with Neil. Three of us got to see this firsthand when he convinced us to join him on a golf trip. Traveling with Neil in Ireland was like travelling with the Mayor. If he didn't personally know the cabbie we were with, he knew his cousin, or his cousin's cousin and by the end of the ride he and the cabbie were best friends. Neil could do that with anyone he met.

Soon after arriving in Ireland, we had stayed out a bit later than planned at the pub, and were late for our first tee time at Ballybunion, one of Neil's home clubs, and his favorite.

We had missed our turn in the queue, it was prime time, and the foursomes were backed up in bunches waiting to go off on the first hole. We were scrambling to get our golf shoes on when Paddy, the caddy master spotted Neil from forty yards away. ‘Neil Regan’ he shouted. You’re on the Tee. Get your shoes on and get down here.’

With that he shooed off the stunned foursome who had already teed up the first ball, and made way for the VIPs. Four bleary eyed, disheveled Yanks. ‘Who are those guys?’ We imagined them muttering.

Back in America Neil found his nirvana at Winged Foot Golf Club, where he became a member and proceeded to permeate the culture of the club, at first quite imperceptively, with his own special brand of wit, humor, and reverence for the game and the course. In the history of golf, nobody had ever heard of the ‘two putt birdie’ on a 450 yard par four. And whenever he announced before he teed off that he was about to accomplish this, which was fairly often, people would scratch their heads. You see, in order to get a birdie with two putts, you obviously would have to hit the ball onto the green on the first shot, which is physically impossible. But this was a Neil Regan Riddle. He hit his drive a respectable 275 yards, but was still 175 yards away from the green. No problem. He took out his putter, and from that distance ‘putted’ the ball to within six feet of the hole and then consequently sank the putt for a birdie. Just for the heck of it, Neil once played an entire round of golf with just his putter, and nearly broke 80.

He befriended Doug Smith the then historian of the club, whose position he would ultimately inherit. His penchant for history led him to spend hours upon hours sifting through the ancient and neglected photos, letters, and maps that dated back to the founding of the club. He discovered long lost aerial photos of the course, depicting each of the original shapes of the greens, and realized that over the past 90 years they had been encroached upon by superfluous growth. He was already fascinated with the greens as he played them and studied them intimately, but now he had a new mission – to return them to the original Tillinghast form of 1921.

In anticipation of the 2020 US Open at Winged Foot Neil’s quest was joined by the majority of club members. Renowned golf architect Gil Hanse was hired by the Winged Foot board for the project. Upon his hiring, he told the Winged Foot Board that the only way he would accept the job was if he could count on the close

collaboration with club historian, Neil Regan. Neil had a mental map of what Tillinghast had intended in all aspects of every hole on both east and West courses, and Hanse relied on that to help him with his redesign work. And if you ever find yourself on the 11 East green, look for the treacherous ridge that traverses the upper half – that is called ‘Regan’s Ridge.’

Neil had one last big project in this past year, which was another example of his unique vision for the world around him, and a result of all he learned about landscape architecture at Winged Foot. Over the past several years, ash trees in the Northeast have fallen victim to a terrible Emerald Ash Borer. Half the trees on Neil's large property in the woods of South Salem were ash trees; he lost over 40 of these trees over the span of just a few years. When this past Spring arrived, Neil was determined to create an arboretum-like environment on his property. He cleared all the dead trees – some over 100 ft tall – to make way for his new project.

We all thought, "He's Crazy!" But Neil had a vision. Late this Fall, after hundreds of hours working with an excavator Neil's vision became reality.

When Neil first got started breaking ground for the project I brought my grandson Will to the site. He was thrilled to sit on ‘uncle’ Neil’s lap in the excavator, and the two of them moved massive boulders and logs into place. I was happy, envisioning Neil greeting a whole new generation of children waiting to know their fascinating uncle.

As the project neared completion Neil implored me to bring Will back to see. ‘It’s a little kids wonderland, he’s going to love climbing and jumping and exploring everything.’ I never did get Will over there for Neil. But I did bring him there this week, and of course, Neil was right. Will was climbing the logs and jumping on the benches and running in pure delight. Then he stopped and asked me. “but where is Neil?”

“He had to go away.” I said.

“Why?” he asked.

I thought a moment. “Because he loves to play golf, and he went to find a warm, sunny place to play for as long as he wants to.”

“Oh, Ok.” Will said.

And so here we are, confronting the shock of losing our cherished friend. But rather than saying goodbye to Neil, I’d rather just say ‘Thank you’, for the joy, the wisdom and the perspective on life that you have given me. Just look to your left, and to your right, and you will see Neil here in this church, and everywhere you go in life when you encounter kindness, clean humor, subtle wit, and boundless generosity. And just remember ‘Every day is a blessing’

Thank you.