

It was an honor to be the father of "My Son, Mickey". It was a true honor to have learned from him for 28 1/2 years.

That's correct, I learned from My Son. In fact, we all learned from Mickey regardless of how old we are. Over the years, we used to say that people of all ages loved Mickey, the very young and adults alike. What we never realized was that every time we were around Mickey, he was teaching us a lesson, but we never knew it.

He taught us that you don't have to be a star athlete to be a role model, just be kind to people; show you care and most of all love unconditionally.

Mickey could never understand why, with all of the problems in the world today, people could just not get along. Through his example and in his own way, he got along with all people. An example we should all learn from.

Mickey taught us that you don't have to make a lot of money to be rich. Mickey loved his job, did it to the best of his ability and excelled by being himself and loving people.

Mickey taught us 3 simple words "I love you". He would say them often and with meaning. He understood the true meaning of love and lived each day loving everyone.

At a very young age, when Mickey learned that he was going to undergo another surgical procedure, Kathy was upstairs in our home crying about what Mickey was about to face.

Mickey, hooked up to an oxygen mask and physically unable to exert himself, found a way to crawl up the stairs and ask Kathy, "Mom why are you crying?" When Kathy told Mickey he was going to need another operation, Mickey replied, "That's OK Mom, I still have two arms to hug you".

Mickey taught us to never give up. He never lectured this to us. He showed us how to do it each time he went into surgery or a catheterization. He approached it with a positive attitude and would tell me and Kathy, "I will be back". Over the years I have been told by people when faced with their own personal surgery that they went into it telling themselves that if Mickey can overcome his many operations so can they.

He taught us how to overcome adversity in our lives. Each time he faced zero percent or 2% odds of coming through surgery, he found a way to do it.

At the age of 17, after surviving a very long and difficult surgical procedure, Mickey suffered a stroke, leaving him completely paralyzed on one side of his body; no eye vision and no movement of arm or leg. The doctors said Mickey would gain nothing back; something back or all of it back--it was all up to him at this point.

Mickey's physical therapy called for rigorous exercises 3 times per week. Mickey made up his mind to do it 7 days per week and 5 months after his stroke, Mickey walked into Commack High School, his senior year, with 100% recovery. "Never give up".

When making the funeral arrangements for Mickey, I was asked a number of questions by the funeral director and realize now that I answered one of the questions incorrectly.

The question was, "Was Mickey ever in a war?" My answer was "No".

Mickey indeed was in a war every day of his life. He fought 8 open heart surgery battles and 55 cardiac catheterization battles and won them all. He even carried the scars to show for them.

He received no medals of honor for his bravery; just a simple lesson in life, and that was no matter how difficult things may be, they can be overcome.

May 14, 2010, was one of the proudest days of my life.

Mickey was asked by the American Heart Association to be a "survivor" speaker at a fundraising event. Mickey welcomed the opportunity, despite never speaking in front of an audience.

A distinguished physician in the cardiology field was being honored that evening in front of 500 people during a black tie event. This evening was considered the biggest fundraiser event for the AMA.

As the evening program progressed, Mickey was introduced following dinner. The usual clamor of dishes being removed from tables and people talking was expected.

Mickey began his speech and there was total silence. Kathy, Tracey and I stood in the back of the room and watched this audience filled with healthcare professionals; business people and attorneys listen with 100% focus on the words Mickey was speaking.

What was it that captured their complete attention? He was talking about himself for the first time in his life and his simple words served as an inspiration to others.

When he was finished he simply walked away from the podium to a standing ovation.

18 years ago, I was asked to be a speaker at a United Way campaign kickoff meeting in front of 200 people. I asked Mickey if he would like to come with me because I was going to talk about him.

Mickey said yes, but asked if he had to say anything in front of the audience. I told him "no", but I would ask him to stand when I was finished with my speech because I wanted to introduce him.

When the time came for me to introduce Mickey, he stood and then proceeded down to where I was standing at the podium and asked if he could say a few words to the audience.

Mickey simply said the following: You know everything my Dad said about my life is true. Things haven't been easy for me with the operations on my heart. All I am asking you today is find it in your heart to give to United Way to help others. Mickey stepped away to a standing ovation and donations to United Way that year set an all time record.

Mickey never complained. He never asked why did this happen to me? For 28 years I tried to determine why Mickey?

This week, I understood why Mickey?

Mickey was given to us for a reason. He was here to tell us don't fight among one another because life is too short. He told us to find the good in people. Live every day to the fullest and appreciate what we have. Set a good example for others to follow.

These are the lessons my son taught me.

What we can take away from Mickey's life is to continue the good things he taught all of us. He would have wanted it this way and through the continuation of his good work, his memory will last forever.

Yes, it was a true honor to be the father of "My Son".