

## Missy Foote's Memorial Remarks

### PETER KOHN

I've spent a good part of the last 27 years - almost half of my life- thinking about Peter Kohn; trying to figure him out; his life, his family, how it all fits together. I've wondered about that force field thing he had around him and how he never seemed to get hit by balls as he stood next to the lacrosse goal. I've worried that he might not have had enough to eat, or might be cold at practice. I've hoped he'd wipe his nose or fix his hearing aid so it wouldn't ring. I've been nervous that he'd be hit by a car crossing the street and I felt sad when he started to look old. I've pondered how in the world he knew just the right thing to say over and over again to my teams before a game...not just the rah-rah thing..but the "I somehow know just what you've been focusing on all week with your team even though I haven't been to a single practice and I'm going to nail it right here" thing. I've sung many a song with Pete, marveling as he threw his arms up in grand gesture. I've said thousands of "Thank you Peter's" in unison with other athletes when he's finished a talk, or handed out a towel or gum, or personally washed all 6 dozen of our lacrosse balls before a National Championship game. I've asked him, "What time it is, Peter?" I've eaten with him, I've picked him up at his hotel or his High Street house, tv blaring in the background, to run errands, to get newspapers, or photos,.. oh the photos. And I have spent a lot of time watching other people watch Peter; doubtful at first of this unshaven, toothless man with a bird feather in his baseball cap, clothes hanging from his thin frame, \$50 bills falling out of his pockets. But I've seen him endear himself to these doubters with his politeness and his shy smile. I've watched countless young women 10 or 20 times a season stand in the frigid Vermont Spring air, with the Green Mountains as backdrop more focused on Peters words than I would guess they ever are in any college lecture. Over these 27 years I have even speculated that Pete could be a Christ figure with his prophetic benedictions, his magical qualities, and his sacrifice... that maybe HE came into our lives to remind us that the essence of the human spirit is loving kindness, generosity and humility.

In short, Peter was the sort of person who left a mark on people. I know I'm not alone in my musings about Peter. Ask anyone in this chapel about Peter Kohn and without hesitation they will draw a vivid picture of Peter and their relationship to him. Many of us might recall how it pained Peter to ever have to say that one thing was superior to or better than the other. Ask him which was better, the Yankees or the Red Sox, Manhattan or New England clam chowder...and oh what torment for him. He would elaborate for quite some time on the virtues of each, proclaiming both winners in various categories.

But, let's face it, truth be known, the men's lacrosse team was Peter's pride and joy. He was loyal to us, the Women's Lacrosse team, and made a valiant effort to make sure he divided his time evenly between the two teams. Even though he was one of the few men to be allowed entrance into the sanctity of our locker room, even though he would explain in great detail why he couldn't be with us on a day when the men's team had a game, we knew that at those moments we couldn't begrudge him his time with the Men's Lacrosse

team where he allowed himself to bask in that camaraderie which one can only guess was sorely missing in his life for decades, because of his differences.

So after 27 years of observing Peter Kohn what was it about this man that made such an indelible impression on us? Here was a man who because of his physical disabilities could easily have been stereotyped, marginalized, made fun of, or worse yet overlooked. Peter would admit that as a young man, he was lost, maybe lost in much the same way that many of us are directionless at times in our lives. But Peter, by being no more than a truly good person made a difference in hundreds of lives. It was that he was genuine and authentic. He performed the most menial of tasks with humility and pride. It was that he never said an unkind word towards anyone. It was that he saw everyone's contributions and had the ability to make everyone around him feel important. It was that he recognized the value of every person; opponents, trainers and teammates. It was his goodwill towards everyone that helped us see the world in a different light. And when I watched you, the countless athletes whom he spoke to on those Spring afternoons I know that you did not see the physical shortcomings of Peter Kohn, but instead saw the sheer goodness that flowed from inside and that is what drew us in. There was something about Peter that made us want to elevate him to the status of legend. I would ask that you resist that temptation to put him on that pedestal and remember today that extraordinary goodness of an ordinary man.