

Michael A. DeLeo Eulogy

We come together this morning to celebrate a life....the life of Michael DeLeo, a life that touched each one of us here....

Over the last few days I've asked many of you, "What comes to mind when you think of Mike?"

It won't come as a surprise to you how often I heard he was a gentleman. It's not just that he was a gentleman.... He was a "gentle" man. Mike was the only child of Anna and Anthony. Anna told me last night how Mike was always known for being kind and gentle, even from his earliest years.

Mike's father died young as well, leaving Mike with the responsibility of caring for his mother. Even in these later years when the responsibility grew substantially, he did it faithfully, with care and kindness.

Now certainly Mike was a good Italian who could show passion on a topic and even get a little heated about it.

- My fellow neighbors will recall when we had the hail storm a couple years ago. We'll recall how Mike showed his "passion" when the construction company left pallets of shingles on his roof for three weeks straight without doing any work.
- When the boys would be washing Mike's hot sports car (a regular ritual at the DeLeo home!), Mike could show his passion if he found a spot that was missed.
- Or how about when Mike was watching sports. Let's say it's 3rd down and 20 and the Bears call a running play. I can almost hear him now, showing his passion for how the coaches don't know what they're doing!

Yes, Mike could show passion, yet even in his passion, Mike DeLeo was a gentleman.

As I asked friends and family about Mike, a common response was that "Mike was a family man" in the truest sense of the words. He was

fond of telling how he met Shelley in the cafeteria at work, and how she knocked him off his feet.

His love and admiration for Shelley were clear long after that day in the cafeteria. I cannot recall a single time he ever spoke poorly about Shelley. He honored her publicly and privately. Shelley, it's clear Mike was crazy about you.

Tony, Bobby, and Vanessa were true joys in his life. Some kids grow up with fathers who are too occupied with work to truly be involved in their kids' lives. That wasn't the case with Mike. How often can we remember Mike out in the yard or over at the park throwing a football or baseball with his boys or helping Vanessa with her soccer?

Both Tony and Bobby told me they appreciated how their dad made a point to be at every game he could. As my children's involvement in sports grows along with my work and personal commitments, I know first hand how difficult this is. It doesn't just happen--Mike made it happen. With only days to live Mike was still dishing out baseball advice to his boys.

Together with Shelley, Mike had a passion to instill the same values in his children that were taught by his father:

- To be respectful of other people. Anyone who knows Tony, Bobby, and Vanessa knows they are extremely respectful to others.
- To be kind and helpful. Check! They have it!
- He wanted them to realize that money was something earned, not simply expected. Got it.
- He believed in the importance of education and wanted to make sure his kids got the same opportunity to learn that he did. They're well on the way to this, and we can help make sure this happens by contributing to the family's memorial fund.

As an only child, he learned a different side of *family* when he married into the Wisniewski family. Suddenly there was no such thing as a small family gathering! Over the years our cul-de-sac has seen a growing number of nieces and nephews drive up in cars with license plates sporting all sorts of combinations of "WIZ".

Mike loved this idea of a big family, and the Wisniewski's were excited about this new guy who loved their Shelley and introduced them to many beautiful Italian traditions and dishes. Mike enjoyed talking about his Italian background, his relatives in Calabrese, and his "paisan" buddies. He was proud of his heritage but, as his family told me, he always said that Polish people were great too!

Family meant the world to Mike--he was, indeed, a true family man.

On a typical day in late July you could often find Mike working his garden. He loved his tomatoes and Swiss chard and his world famous Habanera peppers.

In addition to gardening, Mike loved to cook. Though his mother Anna swears she didn't spoil him, I could rarely find an Italian restaurant that quite lived up to Mike's standards. Mike had a lot of his own favorite recipes that will bring many happy memories to the family in the future.

Mike loved sports, especially football and baseball. He was a devoted Bears and Cubs fan, which brought many spirited discussions with neighbors who somehow made the mistake of being Packer fans! Some of them are here today--you know who you are!

Mike also loved music--all different kinds of music. He was partial to the guitar, which he learned to play when he was young. He loved going to Milwaukee's Summerfest and elsewhere to see bands from the 60's, 70's, and 80's still doing their thing.

Mike was proud to be a leader at Baxter, and took his work and research very seriously. Over 25 years Mike certainly saw a lot of changes but he continued to have a passion to see Baxter do well (to the point that it bugged him when he had to use Abbott products in the hospital)! He demonstrated his commitment to his profession by serving as president and board member of the Academy of Surgical Research.

Over the last 7 months, we witnessed another side of Mike as well: he was a fighter. Everyone that visited Mike and Shelley at either Good

Shepherd or Evanston can vouch for how they were fighters together in this challenging battle.

It was both a blessing and a curse for Mike to have such a strong medical background. Though he knew up front what sort of odds he had stacked against him, he was a fighter. In the last weeks he found it funny and inspiring to live up to his blood type: **B Positive!**

Even in his last days of life, when things were obviously near the end, he leaned over to Shelley and said, "I'm still fighting...."

Against enormous odds, Mike demonstrated his ability to be a fighter, and an example for us all.

A couple Friday nights ago I had the chance to sit alone with Mike in the hospital. We talked about a lot of things, but at one point I asked him, "What have you learned through this, Mike?"

He said two things:

- "Surround yourself with a great team."
- "My dependence on God and prayer."

Let's talk about the team.... Shelley, Steve, Ceil, Tony, Bobby, Vanessa, other family members, friends, co-workers--all of you here.... You have been Mike's team.

You stayed by his side, pitched in, supported, watched the kids, provided meals, gave hugs, and prayed. You faithfully served on Mike's team and made these last 7 months of Mike's life possible. On behalf of Shelley and the kids, thank you.

As Mike would say, "But here's the thing..." The season isn't over for this team... in a way it's just beginning. There's a need for a lot more support, meals, hugs, and prayers in the coming weeks, months, and years ahead.

Shelley, Tony, Bobby, and Vanessa--this room is filled with people who love you and commit to continue being a great team for you.

Mike's second lesson was his dependence on God and prayer. When many would be dominated by, "Why God?" Mike was on his knees saying, "Dear God..." Both Mike and Shelley were greatly encouraged knowing many of you in this room today were praying for them regularly.

Mike would break out in tears when he heard about people praying for him, including family, friends, and even doctors and nurses. This wasn't some false religious front--it was utter dependence on God.

Team, the time for praying has likewise just begun. Shelley, the kids, and all who are closest to them are desperately in need of the peace and wisdom that only comes from God and through prayer.

The truth is this is a clear wake up call for us all... that there's no guarantee of tomorrow for any of us, and we can learn from Mike that we all are completely dependent on God.

Yes, we celebrate a life this morning.... The life of a gentleman, a loving husband and an involved father, a gardener, a cook, a sports fan, a music lover, a hard worker, and a fighter. Shelley, your husband.... Tony, Bobby, and Vanessa, your father... will be sorely missed by us all.

The seeds of what you need from here have been planted and watered, by a husband and father who loved you dearly. In many cases those seeds have begun to bloom.

In the midst of this pain, we stand with you. We love you, and are ready to start the next chapter of your lives along side you. God bless you.

Andy Kaufman