

Tribute to Paul Nappi

October 5, 1964-July 2, 2018

Written and delivered by Allie Nappi July 7, 2018

Good Morning and thank you all for joining us today and supporting my family during this difficult time.

Not all heroes wear capes, some of them wear fanny packs. My dad had a cape, but he still needed his fanny pack to hold all of his belongings, especially during trips to Disney World, Busch Gardens, or walks on the boardwalk. He was silly, and yet, he was a hero.

My dad grew up in Cherry Hill, NJ, but spent many summers in Wildwood Crest. Although he wasn't a fan of getting his toes in the sand, he loved to be by the water and he loved swimming in my Mom-Mom's pool. He was often caught playing video games, watching movies, reading comic books, or playing with his G.I. Joe dolls - or, I'm sorry, "fully pose-able action figures" as he used to correct me. He was the youngest of four, and my Mom-Mom used to call him her angel. He used to call her every day and spent every moment at her bedside when she was sick. At every dinner growing up, he sat right next to her. My Pop used to call him "Buddy." He introduced my dad to his love for movies. They shared a love for Cheers, Law and Order, and Seinfeld. He never relented to tell me how brilliant my dad was, and they had a special and intellectual bond like no other.

He was lucky to have had such a close relationship with his sisters and brother - just as my sister and I have a close relationship with our cousins, aunts, and uncles. Aunt Maria was the oldest, she was the boss, and he told me that when he was very young, she was the only one he didn't want to pick on. Later on, he used to talk about how she was his biggest mentor. He wanted to follow in her footsteps and become a lawyer. She sat down and helped him with all of his college applications, and she was the one that pushed him to go to Georgetown's School of Foreign Services. She always saw so much potential in him. He had a special relationship with my Aunt Chrissy - the second oldest. The two of them were very similar to my MomMom and both had a more introspective side. He told me that he used to love talking to her because they had a very similar way of thinking. My Uncle Dom was his older brother, his protector, the brunt to all of his jokes, the guy that picked up after his mess, and the best friend he ever had.

My dad was a goofball. I always hear about the time that my Mom-Mom asked my dad to take out the trash, and he dragged it down the driveway, spilled the trash everywhere, and made a huge mess. He was never asked to take the trash out again after that, for obvious reasons, and Uncle Dom would tease him that he couldn't even take the trash out right! My dad would say, "Yeah Dom who's the smart one now? Enjoy taking the trash out, I'll let you know how this

movie is!” The three siblings coined a term called “freaky Friday” because my dad would get himself into these strange predicaments and it was always on a Friday - one being the time he stuck his hand up a gum ball machine to try and grab a gum-ball, and my Mom Mom had to call the fire department. Another time, he was caught jumping into an empty hotel swimming pool to get Uncle Dom’s hat that he threw in there - keep in mind this is the g-rated version of the story. He was always making everyone laugh every opportunity he could. As the “frightening four” siblings grew up, their bond remained close as ever. With the birth of my cousin Stephen, my dad quickly started building his legacy as the favorite uncle. Although my dad never had a son of his own (sometimes he would buy us boy toys for Christmas anyway), he looked to his nephews and taught them everything they needed to know about movies and video games. He quickly became the favorite uncle. His humor was contagious, and he was at his best when he was with his family.

Now the one thing that I want to talk about that my dad loved more than his video games and more than any comic book - my mom. They met through an old Italian fix up in Brigantine - my mom’s Grandmother, Josie, had heard about this handsome, smart son of Dr. Nappi’s named Paul. Despite their inclination to want to ignore their parents and grandparents, my mom and my dad met two weeks before my dad started law school and fell in love immediately - I learned recently that she said it first! They completed each other. Where he was quiet, she was an advocate. He was a writer, and she was a speaker. Everything he did was for my mom, and there was a beautiful selflessness to their love. They used to tease each other, they understood each other. They truly encouraged each other to be the best that they could possibly be. The past four years, my mom has spent every second by his side. She worked remotely so she could take care of my dad. She gave up her free time, and never let out a complaint and never left him. In recent months, I used to love watching my dad’s face light up when she walked in the room. It was evident that she made him feel safe and protected, and she was the person that he confided in most. They taught me the most pure example of unconditional love. I thought about my mom’s strength through all of this, and I realized that God put her in his life because he knew that no other person could care for my dad better. She was the love of his life, everything was for her.

From the moment that my dad held me in his arms, I knew I would be protected forever. I was always a daddy’s girl, and he made it so easy. My mom was the love of his life, and Bella and I were his whole world. He was our biggest cheerleader and we knew there was nothing he wouldn’t do to make us happy. Our success was his success, and he hurt when we hurt. Bella and I both used to seek his assistance when we had projects for school or papers to write. Despite whatever we were interrupting, he wouldn’t stop until it was perfect. I joke that he played a huge part in getting us into college - and the ironic part is - we both wrote our college essays about him. He gave us the world and he was our entire world. We both were lucky to have unique, and very special relationships with our dad. Bella and him used to love watching horror movies together - I used to think it was to make me squirm, but I soon learned it was a love they both shared. In the ones they liked the most, there was a mystery to solve, and Bella would ask my dad a million questions, and he would try to guess who the killer was by the end - I imagine he was right more often times than not. She was his Bella Boo, and he used to tease her relentlessly, but

he loved her endlessly. I was his Allie-Pump (short for pumpkin because of my large baby head). I was enamored by his scope of knowledge and his outlook on life. My favorite memories with my dad are easily the times where we would spend hours into the night talking. There was one weekend around the time that I was learning to drive, and we drove down to wildwood together, just the two of us. The two hours there and back gave me incredible insight into who my dad was. I asked him questions about why he chose his career, and I began to understand his values. It was then that I decided, no matter what I did, I wanted to emulate this man in every way imaginable. That desire to be like him has grown with every conversation since. My dad is the best friend I ever had. The other day when I told one of the chaplain's this about my father, he prayed with me and said to thank God for showing me a glimpse of perfection in the love that my father and I share. I thought that nothing rang more true - the love we share is the closest thing I've ever seen to perfection.

I don't need to tell you all how brilliant he was. He was the Salutatorian at Bishop Eustace Preparatory School, he graduated summa cum laude at Georgetown for undergrad, Boston college law school, and Villanova for his LLM. He was one of 3 people in the history of the Villanova LLM program to graduate with a 4.0. Not once had I heard him utter these accomplishments to me, others had to tell me. His intelligence was like nothing I've ever seen. Yes, he had an incredible scope of knowledge and a nearly photographic memory. However, his mind extended past just pure intelligence. It allowed him to have an incredibly deep and introspective understanding of the world. His favorite memories in college had little to do with his grades, and much to do with the friends he made and the community service he sought out. He was a member of Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity, and he discovered his love for helping others and giving back. He was a man of great depth and passion, and he spent his life trying to figure out the best way to use his skills to serve the world around him. He was the smartest man in the room but he would never let you know because he was the most humble man in the room. He wanted to teach, yet he yearned to learn. It was a most beautiful combination.

I know the thought that is crossing all of our minds, as it has gone through mine many times. Why? Why so young? Why must such a pure heart endure so much suffering? When my dad was diagnosed with chondrosarcoma in November 2014, he was told he would need to have his left foot amputated. After processing the initial shock, he reassured us that he would rather it be him than someone else because he liked to read, watch movies, and play video games. He could still do the things he loved. He said he would rather it be him than a young child, as he knew that sarcoma is the third most common form of cancer in children. On December 2, 2014 I received a text from my dad that I look at when I need a little reassurance. This was the day that he lost his leg. The text read "I woke up after surgery and I can't describe the peacefulness and calm I felt. I'm not sad - I'm excited for my new challenge!" He embraced the fight with an incredible amount of grace and strength that set an example to all who were in his presence. We said, "Why him?" And he said, "Why not?"

Many of you know the horror that we went through earlier in the year when my father had an awful inflammation in his lungs and was airlifted to Penn Presby for our very first visit. On March 8, we were told he would not make it through the night. He did. Not only that, but 22 days later, he was released from the hospital requiring no oxygen. While all of us were beyond grateful for this incredible blessing, my father would often wonder “Why? God let me live through something I wasn’t supposed to. What is the reason, what am I here to do?” He spent the next four months working to figure out this reason. Whether he was out and about in a wheelchair or watching lifetime movies in bed, he managed to change the world around him. I used to watch his face light up when I would push him in the hallway at Naaman's Creek and he would address every person that walked by, he’d ask how they were doing, he’d share his warm contagious smile. Every hospital stay, he made sure to remember the name of every doctor, nurse, respiratory therapist, nursing assistant, and member of the cleaning staff. During my dad’s last week at Penn Presby, his sweet nurse, Alicia, was moving around some of the gowns and Bella was sitting on the chair next to him. The next thing Bella heard from my dad was “Help! Help!” Bella jumped to his attention - “Dad what’s wrong?!” He said, “Alicia! Help!” Bella asks “Dad, Alicia is here, what do you need? Are you okay?” He replies “Help her!” This is the most true testament to who he was as he was always looking out for others. We’d discussed the possibility of showing less pictures of my Dad while he was sick because it reminded us of his suffering. After putting some thought into it, we concluded that in the almost 54 years my dad was here, he became more whole each day. His spirit was growing exponentially every day that we spent with him, and he was able to change the world with his example up until the very last day.

A word that I hear more often than not when talking about my dad is selfless. Everything he did was for others around him. He had a fascinating sense of empathy. Anyone that walked into the room with my dad was greeted immediately with “How are you?” If the answer to that question was anything short of “I’m doing great” he wanted to change that. He listened and had a way of understanding how others felt in a manner that allowed many to connect with him. He was never judgmental and always willing to give the most honest and wholesome advice. He used this ability to connect as a force for good and a way to help others. It was evident that this was something that often made him incredibly happy. I always loved Christmas time because my dad would find pure joy in coming up with things to do for my mom. One in particular that I love to remember was Christmas 2016. He met me at the King of Prussia Mall one afternoon to do some last minute shopping. We had bought my mom a fancy “Vitamix,” and he insisted on carrying the heavy blender all over the mall and refused to let me help. I remember worrying that he would get tired walking so much on his prosthetic leg, but I was also beaming with pride and appreciation for this incredible moment. His heart was unquestionably its happiest when he could give to someone he loves, and there was no one he loved spoiling more than my mom. Another story that my Pop always loves telling me is about the time when my dad was a little boy and they were at the toy store, Kiddie City, together. There was a little boy crying that he wanted this one toy in particular, and my dad begged for my Pop to buy the toy for the other little boy too. We live in a world where many people are so focused on themselves and are often ignorant to those around them. My dad was an incredible example of what it looked like to be attentive and

understanding. Several weeks ago, I was listening to a podcast that was centered on the concept of empathy. At the end of the podcast, the psychologist that was being interviewed mentioned that movies are often the purest forms of empathy because in order to be entertained, we take on the character's experiences as our own. As soon as I heard that, I thought of my dad. I'd thought about who he was as a person, and I had the realization that maybe the reason that he had such an affinity toward his superhero movies wasn't only because he was a "big kid" like we used to joke. I realized in that moment, that, in his own way, my dad wanted to save the world.

My dad had a remarkable devotion to God, although you would never hear the word "devout" come out of his mouth. He spent every Sunday and holy day in Church. He prayed often, and, specifically, he used to pray the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy every day at 3:00 - which is what encouraged us to begin to pray with him every day these past few months. You'd often run into him going to confession whenever he could. The only reason I know this is because he would sometimes need a ride, but if he were able to drive himself, I would have never known. We used to tease him and ask "What could you possibly have to confess?" because he's so kind and had been through hell with his battle with cancer. It was admirable and humbling, and he never pushed his faith on us, but his example led us to want to follow. He taught us to pray for our enemies and to always forgive. If there was someone that was hurting me or Bella, we would often hear their name on his list of people to pray for. In those moments, he was hurting for us, but he had the strength to ask God to give them grace. There was one night that I overheard him saying his list of intentions and I heard him pray for Hillary Clinton!

Throughout his struggle with cancer, there were times where it felt impossible to understand God's plan in all of this. However, every day, he would try to make sense of it all. A few weeks ago, I had a conversation with him at Naaman's Creek, and he told me that he wasn't scared of what was to come anymore. He said that Jesus endured immeasurable suffering, and even He was scared, but He trusted God's will, and He gave himself for us. My dad told me that he understood his circumstances as his cross to bear, and he said he was ready to submit to God's will despite some of his fears. There was one morning at Penn Presby, and my dad and I were having a more existential conversation about what comes next. There was a hospital chaplain that happened to stop in to give my dad a blessing, and my dad invited him to join our conversation. He then explained to the two of us some of his fears about what he was facing with his disease. Specifically, he said, "I am afraid I haven't done enough. There is more I could have done on this earth and I'm afraid I'm not worthy of heaven." The chaplain responded to my dad, after meeting him just a few minutes before and said, "Paul, the people that ask questions like yours are not the ones that need to be worrying." I don't bring this up because I think my dad didn't do enough. I bring this up because I want you to look around, I want you to listen to the stories people tell about my dad, I want you to understand the example he set. His goodness and most purified soul impacted others in so many different ways, and yet, to him it was never enough for our Lord. That same chaplain visited my dad every day he could after that and mentioned to me how impressed he was with my dad's strength and depth in just that one conversation. He said there is no one he's met that is more fitting to wear the superman cape.

Bella and I were talking the other day about what we thought would be the first thing my dad said when he met our Lord. We both agreed that, knowing him, his first words were “I’m sorry,” and he was taken into the Lord’s arms and his suffering was no more. He will forever be our angel, and he will forever protect us all.

I’ve heard several people say these past few days that my dad lived a more fulfilling life in his short 54 years here than many people who live to be 100. I stand here now as, not only an advocate for my dad, but a daughter that spent 24 years wanting to be like him in every way imaginable.

Today, I ask you to remember who my dad was, and specifically, remember the way he wanted nothing more than to make his loved ones happy. I ask you to, instead of mourning, question what you can do to follow my dad’s example. When you have a friend that is suffering, think about what my dad would say to them. When you come across someone that needs money or food more than you do, think about my dad. When you find yourself upset with God and His plan for us, think about my dad. If each one of us can follow in the example that my father set in his 54 years here, then we too can save the world.

I know this was very long..I inherited my dad’s writing style.