

## Jim Grube Memorial Service Remarks

It is wonderful to return to Middlebury. Many years have passed since Maggie and our two boys, Howie and Tucker, lived here. Very fond memories, indeed. It is great to be back.

I want to recognize two people before I begin my remarks.

Olga Schmidt, Jerry Schmidt's widow, could not attend Peter's funeral this summer and has traveled from Ocean City, Maryland to be with us today. As you know, Jerry was Peter's closest friend and was responsible for bringing Peter into the game of lacrosse. Olga, welcome to Middlebury.

I would like to thank David Gaynes. His documentary, Keeper of the Kohn, is a treasure. No one dies until they are forgotten and David's work will help us keep Pete's spirit alive.

I have been asked many times "What is the story with Pete"? I would like to try to answer that question.

Peter first came to Middlebury in the spring of 1980. Riding the Amtrak "Montrealer" he was eager to visit Vermont, to see Middlebury College and to work the Middlebury-Williams lacrosse game. I had made the invitation and Peter did not forget. Peter was the 'guest' field manager for the Middlebury-Williams game that year. Pete made it clear that at halftime he would go over to the Williams side to work with his dear friend Coach Renze Lamb and the Williams team. I do remember that there was some discussion about whether he should be with Williams first, or Middlebury. Pete was my guest, but he knew Renze longer; a classic Kohn conflict.

It is hard to describe the joy of the Middlebury players that day. The players loved Peter and Peter loved the players. The die was cast.

By his own account, Pete's childhood and earlier years as an adult were difficult. Pete speaks of those years and the love and care he received from his mother and the compassion of his teachers. Peter could not do this without choking up, a tear would always be shed. These were the days when little or nothing was known of "special needs". Growing up, as Pete did, was a challenge, for sure. Cruel comments, the slights, being laughed at. But somewhere in his youth he learned what "Giving it Your All" meant. I suspect this was his mother's gift.

When I first met Pete he was a club lacrosse field manager in Baltimore. Never disloyal to his club team, but Pete was looking for more in his life. Imbedded in his spirit was his mother's solemn wish that he earn a 'real' job and gain respect as an adult.

Most of us here this afternoon are keenly aware that the side of Pete that many saw in the singing of Dinah and Park School is only part of knowing and appreciating Pete. The time that teams spend together – the sideline, locker room, bus rides, post-game celebrations ....these moments in the life of a team are the grist of our fondest memories and stories of the amazing Myronius Peter Gutman Kohn. But Pete was searching for more. The image of Pete walking this campus, blue canvas travel bag stuffed with newspapers, instamatic cameras, train magazines and reams of chewing gum to give his players – this memory endures. Perhaps a gangly, awkward gate, but Pete always walked with grace.

Middlebury changed Pete's life. What we all realize today, what we are celebrating here, is the gift Pete gave us. So, a part of the answer "What is the story with Pete" is Pete's remarkable kindness his unflinching habit of graciously thanking all those that touched his life. Were he before us today, he would begin by saying thank you. And he would be happy. Not big-headed, mind you, but proud, humble and gracious. He would be attentive to thanking us for all that Middlebury College has meant in his life. Of course he would want to thank Erin and me and that would lead to Dave Campbell and that would lead to Missy because he did not want to favor the men's lacrosse team over the women's. And then he would be sure to thank Mickey, which would lead, ultimately to all the coaches, trainers, equipment managers.

After thanking everyone at the Field House he would certainly thank President Liebowitz, which undoubtedly would lead to an extended tribute to President McCardell and, of course his wife Bonnie and, I suspect on the topic of wives and college presidents, Maggie O'Brien would be thanked.

You see where I am going with this. Peter Kohn was a gracious, caring person. Everyone in his life was worthy of respect, gratitude and affection. Pete's Middlebury universe included a vast expanse of friends starting with the President of the College, trustees, faculty and included Stan (the zamponie operator in the 80's) Bev DeGray and her staff at the Crest Room back in the 80's, Bud the Barber, the legions of taxi drivers who chauffeured him over the years. The list goes on and on.

Pete's logic would not allow him to prioritize this endless list of friends, but within this vast universe his dearest friends were the players. After all, Pete by trade was a field manager and his mission, his calling, was caring for the players.

It may have taken Pete a while to learn a player's name, but 10 years later at Vail when he met you again, he would recall your middle name, ask how your mother was doing and would add a friendly jibe that the Red Sox did not do all that well this year.

In our world of indirect language, sometimes off-putting and sarcastic comments, Peter's straight up kindness and complete inability to speak ill of someone is a beacon for all of us. His gift of kindness and grace came so naturally to Pete but is so hard practice.

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It is only fitting, Pete, that your memorial service, this formal good bye, is homecoming weekend and this chapel is filled with your friends who came here to celebrate your life and all the you have meant to Middlebury College. Your wish is fulfilled, your mother, Hilda Gutman Kohn, would be proud, indeed. Mead chapel is brimming with tender emotion that reflects the respect that you deserve and cherish. This is a proud moment for us all.

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Your words when honored with selection into the Lacrosse Hall of Fame say it best:

I guess one has to keep his emotions together, and realize what the real meaning of life is. There are so many people I have to thank because I was very very difficult for many years but because people put up with me I finally found myself at a very late age. But I did find myself. I thank all of you for allowing me to be myself, Peter Kohn, which was the most important thing I needed was to be loved and cared for as myself and accepted that way. Thank you all so much.

Peter this is your homecoming. Welcome back to Middlebury College, welcome home.