

# Rise and Be Great

By **MIKE POWELL** on **JUNE 7, 2016**

Bang! Bang! Bang! “Time to get up! Time to rise and be great! Time to make the world team!” It was 6:30am on the second day of tryouts for the 2006 United States Men’s Lacrosse Team when I was awoken by the loud and unmistakable sounds of lacrosse legend Peter Kohn walking the hallways of the dorm we were staying in. This was the traditional wake up call for Peter — he would start on the bottom floor of the dorm and work his way upward until he hit every player’s door three times and recited the phrase, “Time to get up! Time to rise and be great! Time to make the world team!” I laid there in bed silent and sore as his voice echoed through the building, each time louder than the last as he got closer to my door. These tryouts were the most intense and grueling 4 days of lacrosse I have ever been a part of. An invitation only tryout that consisted of the top 100 lacrosse players in the world and the format was simple — 4 days and 12 full length games against the nation’s best. That meant a top level high intensity game for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It was both mentally and physically exhausting so when Peter hit my door with his hand and his phrase, I opened it and said, “thank you Peter, that’s exactly what I needed”. He turned, grinned and responded with his typical uber respectful response, “No, thank you Michael, you’re going to be great today.”

I have to be honest with all of you, I wasn’t planning on writing a post about Peter Kohn today. However, last night I finished reading a couple chapters from “The Four Season Harvest” by Elliot Coleman and decided to turn on the television for a bit. I’m not a TV or movie guy but admittedly it does help me fall asleep sometimes and I do enjoy a good documentary every now and again. So I was thumbing through Hulu and stumbled upon a documentary by filmmaker David Gaynes titled “Keeper of the Kohn”. I had heard rumblings about this documentary throughout my travels within the lacrosse world but had never had the chance to watch it until last night — it completely floored me. It was an intimate and raw journey into the life and times of the Hall of Fame lacrosse legend and it did what every great film does — it forced me to look inside myself and take a 30,000 foot view of my life from above.

I have an insatiable appetite for life and learning. There’s so much out there and so much room for improvement within all of us as individuals that can help us all as a collective. I believe it’s our mission on earth to explore and learn as much as we can while we’re here. There’s a book I return to quite often that has in many ways been my beacon in the night. It’s titled “Flow” by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. The overarching theme discussed in his writings is how we as people are happiest when our mind is active and learning something new. Through my life experiences I find this to be the truth. I’m a seeker, explorer and dreamer so when I watched “Keeper of the

Kohn” my mind was satisfied and content. The film is filled with lessons a few of which I will share in this post.

I was lucky enough to spend a good amount of time with Peter on several occasions and have been the subject of several of his photographs taken with his disposable cameras at All American banquets, North-South games, Final Four weekends and when I played for the World Team in 2002 and 2006. Unfortunately, I never really broke down the conversational barrier and got to know Peter the person as well as I should have. Peter died on August 5, 2009. I truly regret not taking the time to speak with him on a deeper level because he was a fantastic human and a great role model for all of us.

*Society would label Peter as handicapped or autistic but I don't view people in that manner. Peter was certainly different and unique, but so am I and so are you. I judge men based on their hearts and their actions so to me Peter was not challenged and in fact just opposite, he was in my eyes a philosophical genius and a hero because of what he stood for and what he believed to be important in life.*



The first thing that struck me about him on our first encounter was the large feather that was attached to his ball cap. I've always loved birds and am fascinated with feathers. I collect them and always pick one up if I pass it on a walk. Finding a feather is like finding a fragment of flight that reminds me of all of the wonder that is out there in the world. I used to live across the street from a wild bird sanctuary so I was used to seeing all sorts of beautiful birds and as a result had access a wide array of feathers so I started keeping them in mason jars. I've even pulled my car

off to the side of the road to pick up a nice turkey or hawk feather on backcountry roads. So in terms of style and fashion I always thought Peter looked so cool with that giant feather in his hat and we had several conversations about that. I even wore a feather in a headband under my helmet for the games in Lake Placid in honor of Peter after he passed.

Next thing I admired about him was his eternal optimism and true love for people. When you listen to the way he spoke with people it was so respectful and full of joy and love. He wanted people to be their very best and was willing to do whatever it took to help them get there. His pregame speeches they feature in the film gave me chills and it was easy to see how important his spirit was and I'm sure still is to the Middlebury lacrosse team in Vermont. Don't judge, just listen. Although he always rooted for Middlebury he cared about people more than lacrosse or wins. There's a particular conversation between Peter and a Middlebury athlete that captured a bit of what made Peter so awesome. It went like this...

Player: How do you think the Bates girls team was?

Peter: The Bates girls' team? They showed a lot of heart.

Player: Yeah but they weren't very good.

Peter: Well I don't say bad things about anybody.

Player: Maybe our team was just too good.

Peter: Well don't be big headed about it. We have some pretty good teams but...

Player: They haven't lost in forty something games

Peter: That's true they haven't forty five I think it is now

Player: I think it's fair to say that they are very good

Peter: Yes, they are but I do feel for the others I have feeling for the other teams.

So please see "[Keeper of the Kohn](#)" if you haven't already and learn more about an absolute lacrosse legend and someone I am very honored to have known. I can truthfully say that out of all of the championships and awards that my brothers and I have won there's one particular accolade that stands out as the most special to me by far. In 2002 my Mom was the recipient of the Peter Kohn award that is given to someone in the lacrosse community that goes above and beyond to help others around them. She deserved it and I know that she was moved and honored to receive such an amazing award.

I would like to thank Peter Kohn for living a life full of love, respect and integrity and inspiring hundreds of young men and women including myself. I still pick up feathers whenever I see them on my journey through life, the only difference now is that I view the feathers as fallen fragments of wisdom from the highest soaring bird in the sky reminding me — “It’s time to get up. It’s time to rise and be great.”