

SUNIL WILLIAM DAVIDSON*

September 16, 1947 - March 10, 2002

On behalf of my mother, my brothers and sisters and all our extended family I would like to thank everyone for joining us today. It is hard to remind ourselves that this is not a time to grieve yet a time to celebrate a wonderful life. This is what Billy would have liked -and what Sunil would have firmly believed. Our family especially thanks all of Sunil's friends from his spiritual family and from UNICEF/UN who have been so supportive over the past week. You were his home for the past 32 years and we know that he felt highly of you. You will never know how comforting it has been to realize that you cared so much for him.

We are a large family of seven children -Billy was the third and I the middle, just one year younger. Better known as Irish twins. In many ways my brother had two distinct lives. As a child, Billy was a fun loving sweet kid. We grew up together and shared an upbringing that many brothers would have who were one year apart. We played baseball in the back yard making believe that we were Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris. We snuck into the neighbor's house when they went out for the afternoon to see what snacks they had in the refrigerator - only to be rudely interrupted when they returned early to find us polishing off a container of ice cream in the pantry. These were days of innocence -the 50's and 60's. Billy was always a heavy child, a lover not a fighter. He was not a great athlete when younger -especially not caring for organized sports. I remember in early High School Billy wanted to tryout for the football team. My parents bought him a new pair of football cleats. They were beautiful. He went to the first day of practice and quit. He said, " You people are crazy ". At times my parents were worried about the friends he made. Yet this was just a testing phase. He had his own path to travel.

After High School we both went to Fordham and bought our first car together -a big green Ford Fairlane. It may as well have been a Mercedes. We car pooled each day; were often late for class; and in the rare times we argued it was about who was using the car that night.

We both worked as waiters in a local restaurant -as did our older brother Kevin. Billy was always the favourite. They all loved Billy. This is where I met my future wife Eileen as well as my future Mother-in-law. They both worked with us. Eileen's mother would tell her " you have to meet this nice boy at work, he's just perfect ". Yet Billy would have no part of it. He had a different road to travel. He was happy being our best man over 32 years ago.

Billy graduated from Fordham in 1969 during a time when Vietnam was heavy on the minds of many of us. He travelled and began searching. This was the time of the first numbered lottery system for the military draft. Birthdays were assigned numbers where the low numbers were chosen and the higher numbers were free. My number was 72 and Billy was number 312. I have often thought back on this event and believe that there was divine intervention. I do not know what Billy would have done if he were drafted -a Marine he was not.

This time frame began Billy's transformation. My mother recalls when he I returned home from California one year with long hair, moustache and messy. He went to visit a local priest. The priest told my mother "don't worry about him. He is a very religious young man. He will be OK ". As sweet ! and kind as Billy was, Sunil would be several levels higher. We were

never really comfortable with Sunil's new name or new lifestyle. Probably because we did not see enough of him or understand his journey to seek perfection. Yet when questioned, Sunil was steadfast and confident. He knew his own mission.

Sunil was kind and peaceful. When you spoke with him he had an uncanny calming influence and a strong sense of serenity. Meditation was his lifeblood. Sunil was more complex and in contradiction of Billy. Billy was not an athlete and was undisciplined. Sunil began as a runner -he conquered the New York Marathon. On Thanksgiving Day, we would be watching TV and snacking and Sunil would be swimming the Housitonic River. We would be having a barbeque at the beach and Sunil would be swimming along the horizon. In 1988, after two attempts, he successfully swam the English Channel. In recent years he was into mountain climbing. These feats are not of an undisciplined non-athlete. In the end, he was a better athlete than us all.

Sunil travelled extensively. I believe he visited more countries than most of us have US cities. To Sunil it was all about personal perfection, love and peace. During the past week, a friend of Sunil's said that he did not leave many material things but what he left and had begun will last a long time.

I can't remember ever hearing Sunil say a bad word about anyone. I can't remember the last time that Sunil got angry -he was always lovable and peaceful. Sunil was always thought provoking. We never imagined that he would be the first sibling to make us think about death. We thought he would outlive us all.

As I think of him today looking down with his peaceful smiling face -as always -two things come to mind. First, I think he is ticked off that he never was able to climb Mt. Everest. Secondly, I hear him saying, " don't mourn for me. Celebrate my life. I was able to live the life I wanted ".

In closing a verse comes to mind:

A golden heart stopped beating
Hard working hands at rest
God broke our hearts to prove to us
He only takes the best.

I guess the old saying is true. The good die young.

- Gary Davidson

*Original version presented at Connecticut Funeral Service on 15 March 2002]