

HFS Gym Dedication to RC Smith, September 17, 2022

- My name is Nancy Ritzel. I'm a parishioner of St. Paul's Church, a mom of 4 St. Paul/Holy Family School graduates and a retired Holy Family pre-k teacher. I'm also a board member of the RC Smith Foundation.
- But I'm here today just as a friend of Robert Smith. It's because of my family's friendship with him that Rick Runyon and Bill Acee asked me to share a bit about this very special man.
- Bob has been gone for 15 years, and, if he were alive, next year would mark his 100th birthday.
- Time will erase the memory of all of our lives, eventually. That's a pretty sobering fact of life.
- In Robert's case, through the RC Smith Foundation, his name and generous gift will live on for a long time to come.
- But here, at least for today, I'd like him to mean a little more, on a personal level, to those of you who didn't know him.
- Bob lived in Norwich, in the same, simple house on Elm Street his entire life. He graduated from the original St. Paul's School on North Broad Street and from Norwich High School.
- He worked as an accountant for Victory Markets.
- Bob may have hung his hat each night at his Elm Street address, but I believe his soul and *heart* resided right here at the top of Pleasant Street.
- I look at his name over the gym doors and think...if ever there was a fitting spot to mark his footsteps in this world, it is here on this St. Paul's Church/Holy Family School campus.
- And I would personally like to thank Tom Sorsci and the centennial committee so very much for honoring him here, in this way.
- When my husband and I moved to Norwich in 1976, we knew no one. We registered at St. Paul's Church because we wanted our future children to attend St. Paul's School, later renamed Holy Family.
- Bob Smith was one of our very first Norwich friends. Looking back, I have to smile and think that it's no surprise that we first met him in church.
- We, in fact, had a regular, weekly rendezvous at the back of the church. For several years, in the days before the "Crying Room" and the spacious vestibule, I was one of those frazzled moms self-exiled to the back of the church with a crying baby or squirmy, talkative toddler.
- Bob was the sensitive usher with the kind smile, keeping us company, talking softly to the fussy baby and making sure we still felt part of what was going on at Mass.

- Very simply, our friendship started there, and over the years we just naturally "adopted" each other as family.
- Most, if not all of our get-togethers with Bob centered around a meal. Now, Bob never married and had no siblings, so, there were no children, nieces or nephews in his world. He would treat our wild, young family of 6 to dinner at one of his favorite Norwich restaurants. What an exciting outing for us as we didn't go out very often in those days.
- And we would feed and entertain him in our home which, at that stage of our daughters' young lives must have seemed like total bedlam to this quiet bachelor.
- He wasn't used to pets or 4 giggling girls. And over the years we had a house teeming with toys and projects and a small zoo's-worth of dogs, birds, fish, guinea pigs and the occasional baby ducks from the egg-hatching project at school.
- When I think back, he never appeared anxious to bolt out of our house at the end of dinner, considering what must have seemed like an alien universe to the quiet he was accustomed to.
- Actually, it was quite the contrary. He would sit back with a quiet smile on his face, and he always came back for more whenever he was invited.
- Food-wise, Bob was very easy to please, as long as it didn't contain cheese. And his favorite dessert was lemon ice cream, *not* lemon sorbet...virtually impossible to find.
- Bob seldom talked about himself. Instead, he spoke with affection and humor about his mom and dad, and one particular uncle who was a musician in the Norwich City Band; he was quite proud of him. He also spoke of his friends at St. Paul's Church, with as much interest as if they were his family.
- He had a certain old-school elegance about him. He wasn't tall....at all, but he had the most perfect posture I've ever seen. And whenever Bob was especially impressed with something, he had such a lovely way of expressing that awe. He would lean back, take a deep breath and say, **"Wellllllll, isn't that GRAND!"**
- Bob lived simply. I can't help but think he could have traveled the world in his retirement. But he really loved Norwich, and he was more than content to vacation for a few days, once a year in Alexandria Bay with his childhood friend, and fellow usher, John Tiquin.

- Now, I realize full well, that all I've given you is a random smattering of little memories of my friend. I had intended to recall his stories and the reasons we found him so charming.
- But sadly, time truly does erase memories. And my memory often lets me down anymore.
- After racking my brain and spinning my wheels, I had to put it out of my mind for about a week, hoping to reboot and remember. And actually, something very enlightening did happen. Bear with me just a minute more.
- When I was running out of ideas, I attacked it from a different angle and asked myself, "What was it about this gentle man, that after spending an evening with him, he always made us feel so comfortable and so special!?! " Bob was like that "favorite" relative...the one you always looked forward to being with again, soon. John, the girls and I...we were all drawn to him.
- There's a verse in the Book of Sirach Ch. 3. **My son, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts.** Humility...yep, that was *it!* It all made sense!
- Since the inception of the RC Smith Foundation, so *much* of Chenango County has been the recipient of this "**giver of gifts**". But the dear man who became our friend was the one who just *recently* reminded me of the virtue of humility.
- I did some digging to find the marks of a humble person:
 - a person who listens, asks questions and wants to know more about *others*.
 - The humble person is not the person who thinks less of himself; it's the person who thinks of himself less.
 - and *my favorite*... The humble person has the ability to pay attention because he is free to think of the person in front of him.
- 'Sound like someone we know!?! Perhaps I didn't forget any dazzling stories Bob might have told us after all. Because chances are, he didn't tell any stories like that, at least *not* about *himself!* He was too wrapped up in the people in front of him, soaking up all the chaos, laughing with us, laughing *at* us. Little wonder we loved being with him.
- If Robert Smith were physically here with us today, in his humility, I think this gymnasium dedication would literally take his breath away. He would probably be both uncomfortable and unable to speak.
- But you know what? I can picture him slowly looking around, and seeing all of you here. And I'm certain he would say....."Welllll, isn't that GRAND!"
- Long live Holy Family School. And Thank You, Robert!!!