



*New York State Supreme Court
Appellate Division, Fourth Department
50 Delaware Avenue
Buffalo, New York 14202*

*Salvatore R. Martoche
Associate Justice*

December 13, 2010

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Personal and Unofficial

Joseph A. Tomasulo, Chair
Bishop Fallon High School/
Holy Angels Collegiate Institute
Hall of Fame Committee
c/o The Durham Companies
6300 Transit Road
Depew, New York 14043

Re: Phillip LaGreca '58 and Thomas Christopher '58

Dear Committee Members:

I ask you to give serious and favorable consideration to include Phil LaGreca and Tom Christopher in the next Hall of Fame class. I am enclosing a copy of an article written by Phil about their recent travails that appeared in the Per Niente Magazine. I think it says it all. Their exploits epitomize the very best in Oblate values. One friend and classmate helping another through a bad time, being there for him and encouraging him to muster the faith and courage to regain his health and walk again.

Here are two people who have been friends since the fourth grade and when one of them encountered real difficulty and severe physical limitations, the other did so very much to help him. Their story is inspirational and I believe that Tom's miraculous recovery from the spinal stroke he suffered will enable him to walk into the dinner that night under his own power. It will be a moment for all of us to savor and give thanks.

Sincerely,


Hon. Salvatore R. Martoche

*A Tribute to the Enduring Friendship of Tom Christopher and Phil LaGreca**By: Philip Dennis LaGreca*

In 1948, I was eight years old and starting my first year at Holy Cross Parochial School on the West Side of Buffalo, New York. It was a bit traumatic leaving the comfortable surroundings of PS 36 where I had spent five years. I started there in kindergarten, failed and had to spend a year in "pre-primer," an abyss somewhere between kindergarten and the first grade. Yes, I failed kindergarten. So what!

Holy Cross parish opened an elementary school at Niagara and Maryland Streets in 1950. It started with kindergarten through fourth grade. Tom and I were among the first fourth graders. Each year thereafter the school would add a grade until it reached eighth grade. The first graduating class in 1954 was made up mostly of those of us who started in 1950.

As the years passed and because we were together for so long, we all bonded in the class of 1954. We had the same teacher, Sister Mary Redempta, a Felician nun for each of our five years. The Felicians were mostly Polish-American nuns who taught many poor Italian-Americans. Wow! What an interesting adventure for the poor sisters and us. If I recall correctly, we were thirty girls and twenty boys. That's right, fifty in a single classroom.

I remember the first time I saw Tom Christopher. What I really saw was his Hopalong Cassidy - Aladdin lunch box. I sat next to him with my greasy brown paper lunch bag. He opened his spiffy lunch box, took out his thermos and proceeded to pour cold milk into his cup. Then, lo and behold, he unwrapped a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on "American bread." Oh, my God, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich! I opened my greasy bag to pull out my sandwich: veal cutlet with peppers and eggs on Italian bread and a carton of warm milk. Oh, how I wanted that peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

I was raised by my elderly grandmother, Anna Maria

Albano, she was loving, but very old school. Tom's parents were much younger and in the vernacular of the day, much hipper. I was included in many of these family adventures: picnics at Sheridan Park with a real Coleman stove. Oh, my God! I was in Heaven! It was great growing up. We lived on the West Side of Buffalo, mostly first and second generation Italian-Americans. Poor, proud and hardworking. Well, one day, maybe when Tom was in eighth grade, the Christophers bought a home in Kenmore, NY and left the West Side. It seemed that it was as far away as anyone could possibly move. What a house! 123 E. Hazeltine Avenue. It was a one-story home with a room in the attic. Tom had his very own bedroom. I remember jumping up and down on the bed just happy as heck with his new house. Wow, Kenmore, New York! It could have been Newport, Rhode Island, or La Jolla, California. Actually, it was a first ring suburb of Buffalo, maybe 10 miles from the West Side.

In 1954 it was off to Bishop Fallon High School. Wow! What a collection of young men; almost all working class hyphenated Americans: Polish, German, Irish and MOSTLY Italian, and all in the same economic strata: POOR! I was proud that on my own I was able to pay the tremendous annual sum of \$60.00 for my high school tuition. Our teachers were the Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate, i.e. - O.M.I.'s. or the Irish Mafia in priestly garb! They were tough. But they had to be to control us. In today's world they'd have some explaining to do. But that's a story for another day!

It's in today's world that my story begins.

Tom and I are in a plane 37,000 Feet above Denver, Colorado. We our way from La Quinta, California to Toronto, Ontario, a whole lifetime behind us. The unknown before us. I never thought I'd be taking this trip with my good friend, Tom Christopher. He had had two back surgeries, one in early 2009 and one a few months later. During the second surgery he suffered something the doctors called a spinal stroke and his spinal column was cut off for a while leaving him paralyzed.

Tom and I left La Quinta in the California desert at

5:00 a.m. A three hour drive to the Los Angeles Airport. We hired a medivac van; Tom stretched out comfortably on a gurney and me stuffed in a jump seat with no ability to move or stretch. Wonderful trip.

We arrived at the airport around 8:00 am. for a 10:10 flight. Being first class we zipped through the ticket line. With the help of a nice Filipino man named Victor, we quickly made it through security and up to the gate. As we waited, it was time to empty Tom's catheter bag! Not my real strength, but I persevered! Finally, we boarded the plane. We sat in the first row and made ourselves comfortable. Then Tom announced he had to go to the bathroom. Another adventure was about to begin.

Two hours after take off, still up at 37,000 feet, it's a little bumpy and Tom is in a lot of pain. We tried to no avail to take him to the bathroom, but the three of us: two flight attendants and I could not get him to the plane's tiny bathroom. So here he is having an accident and me helping him reconnect his catheter. OK, those of you who

really know me are thinking, NO WAY! Yes, WAY! Sixty-two years of friendship. What's a guy to do?! Some time later Tom woke up to tell me he was freezing. I had pointed each and every vent I could in his direction. I told him if it was a choice of him freezing or me barfing, he would lose. We gave him a couple more blankets and some Tylenol.

When we landed, one of Tom's children met us at the airport in Toronto with a Medivac van and off we went to Tom's new and hopefully short term home. A beautiful place with wonderful staff and his children close at hand. As I said goodbye, I told them all I was passing the baton to them!

After spending the last six months in two hospitals and a rehab facility, Tom has made tremendous progress in regaining the use of his legs and just last week, with support, he was able to walk several steps. He is still confined to a wheel chair and he needs assistance for most purposes. But his will to recover and his great work ethic are an inspiration.

I hope the next time I see my good friend he will be walking again. I really miss him in California already. It all started with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and an Aladdin-Hopalong Cassidy lunch kit!

I remember one friend, Salvatore, a classmate who commented that we were both crazy as kids and that's why we got along so well. He said, "Phil, you were dumb enough to want to trade your wonderful sandwich of veal cutlet with peppers and eggs for Tom's lousy peanut butter and jelly on American bread - and Tom was dumber for not insisting on the trade!" Thanks Sal.

God Bless Tom, friends forever !!!!!



Phil LaGreca and Tom Christopher, March 2010

