

## **Eulogy for Brian Cannizzaro**

Delivered by: [Billy McDermott](#)

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I met Brian ten years ago while he was a junior at St John's. I have a son Robert who is 25 and mentally retarded. He attended the Seton Foundation for Learning, a Catholic school founded fifteen years ago to educate children with such disabilities. It is one of only a handful in the nation. My son was the seventh student. I have been fundraising for Seton ever since, both as a Board Member and a parent. As an alumnus of St John's and a fellow brother in Sigma Chi, I wrote and asked for their assistance at an upcoming 24-hour Super Dance benefiting this great and worthy cause.

Brian called me and told me that we could count on him. Within minutes of arriving, the entire gang befriended Robert, had him dancing, laughing and having an all around good time. This was very unique because Robert is introverted and really does not communicate that well. It was really touching for my wife and me. A few hours later while chatting with others, I noticed Robert sitting in the bleachers, surrounded by girls, and Brian not far away. But something was different. Robert was now wearing a black number 24 football jersey that he had not come with. Brian was now wearing a white T-Shirt.

Approaching later with the intentions of leaving, my son so appropriately said: "Dad, can't you see I am hanging out with my friends? We're going to have pizza soon." Brian smiled and shrugged. I leaned over and saw the name CANNIZZARO embroidered on Robert's back. I knew my son was in good hands. Brian then mentioned: "We just made him an honorary fraternity brother." So we left him – with his buddy Brian. For that short time, Brian gave my son the chance to be the college student he could never be.

Somehow we lost touch with each other. But, actions sometimes speak louder than words. Robert wore that shirt every night for the next eight years until it was frayed and worn beyond repair. A plaque Brian had made the following morning hangs by Robert's beloved TV. Brian was Robert's hero. Msgr. Jeff Conway of OLSS remarked recently that our firefighters were all heroes before that fateful day. We just found out who they were. Robert knew one quite a long time ago.

The day following the tragedy, September 12, one of Seton's high school students was called to heaven. He died of natural causes. It helps me cope with the enormity of the tragedy when I daydream and wonder if Brian has indeed found him too. I can see him wearing a special something Brian felt he needed to just hang with the guys.

God Bless you Brian! And Robert asked me to "send his regards."

Download Seton Foundation for Learning Speech Honoring Brian [here](#)

E- Mail: [Billy McDermott](#)