

Eulogy for Kevin Parnell

Good afternoon. My name is Roxanne Banks Malia. I'm truly honored that Becky invited me to speak about Kevin today. I first encountered the Parnell family a lifetime ago when I attended Arapahoe High School, and I feel fortunate to say that I spent most of my formative years, and beyond, with Kevin and Becky as my teachers, coaches, parents of my favorite children to babysit, Emily & Leslie. They were my mentors, and ultimately dear friends.

But as I've been reflecting on Kevin, it's become clear to me that he was much more, much bigger than these roles. He seemed to live beyond these labels.

I have fond memories of babysitting for the Parnells—helping the girls clean the chinchilla cage, swimming at the Knolls pool, watching Disney movies. I also remember staying late with Kevin and Becky after they returned home from their nights out, and just talking--me sitting on the sofa, Kevin in the opposite chair. We didn't talk about school events or gossip; to me, these were deep conversations about big questions of life and human nature. It didn't occur to me until I had children that this was unusual: parents staying up late, indulging the ponderings of their teenage babysitter. As I think about it today, though, I don't think they were indulging me. I think this is who they *were*. This is who Kevin was. He wasn't trying to "cultivate the intellect of a student" or "teach critical thinking skills." He wasn't being just a teacher. He was treating me like an adult, like my questions and opinions mattered.

As my track coach, Kevin made his most profound impact on me, not while giving me tips on how to improve my mess of a triple jump, but rather in conversation while he raked smooth the evidence of my flailings in the sand pit. In one such conversation at the end of my senior year, just after a classmate and friend had taken his own life, Kevin offered insight into his own confusion from losing someone to suicide, sharing with me what he learned from such heartbreaking loss. Don't get me wrong—he wasn't asking me how I was *feeling*, that was certainly not his style. He was

simply showing me how he made sense of the nonsensical and doing so in a way that went beyond the role of a track coach. He, again, treated me as an equal, like I was a fellow human on the journey, trying to make sense of our condition. And though my triple jump never really improved, my outlook and confidence about navigating the world certainly did.

And speaking of making sense of the human condition, Kevin also found humor in challenging situations, like sitting with parents like my mom at a track meet. My mom was certainly NOT sporty—she would never sweat on purpose—but she enjoyed track meets and would sit by Kevin, one time even offering advice to him (& Coach Sisler) that they should, “really talk to those girls about sports bras; they are bouncin’ around all over the place out there. They’re going to end up with back problems.” When I went to Kevin later to exonerate myself from the embarrassment, he just laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and made a witty comment, something to the effect of, “Well, we always appreciate your mom’s insights...Glad she’s so engaged with the team’s success...”

At 81, my mother still asks about Kevin and Becky, calling me after seeing Kevin at the grocery store, saying what a nice man he was, how nice looking he was, how fortunate we were to have had a teacher like him. Last fall, when helping her move out of her home of over 45 years, I found a box of my things I’d misplaced over the years. In it, was an old three-ring binder that Kevin had given me when he and Becky had me over, just to catch up, after the girls had outgrown the need for a babysitter. At the time, I was preparing to go on a five-week canoeing expedition in the Arctic, and Kevin loaned me this binder full of instructions for tying flies. With it was his copy of Norman MacLean’s *A River Runs Through It*, and his collapsible fly rod and reel he loaned me, so I could easily travel by trail or river and still fish. When I texted Becky to tell Kevin what I had discovered, she replied that Kevin said that Banks, my son, will have to give it a go now.

Rather than feeling guilty that I never returned these things to Kevin, I think of what the writer Heidi Julavits says about how you know the difference between a friend and an acquaintance.

She says only acquaintances return books; friends don't. I guess all of this is to say, that somewhere along the way, though Kevin was a teacher, coach, second parent, and mentor, he had also become my friend.