

A Eulogy for Paul McGrath  
by Rick High

October 10, 2020

Good Morning.

My name is Rick High. I am honored to have been asked by Gail to say a few words about Paul this morning.

Let me begin by offering my heartfelt condolences to Gail and to Paul's family—his sisters Ann and Pat, and to his nieces and nephews, in whose lives he played such a special and important role.

My relationship with Paul extended over the last 38 of his 87 years. We met when I came to work for John and Leo Corcoran; Paul was 49 and I was 29. Over the decades, we worked together, travelled together, and watched sporting events together. We hiked and bicycled and canoed. We dug ditches and put-up fences and took down fences and we chain sawed trees and chopped wood. Over uncountable lunches together, we discussed business and politics and religion and sports and the latest scientific discoveries. The conversations were enlivened (just so you have the full picture) by even more uncountable glasses of beer. He was my colleague, my mentor, my friend, and the godfather of our daughter.

I wasn't at Corcoran long before I learned my first lesson about Paul's unique way of travelling through life. Paul came in on a Monday morning, arriving a little late (which, honestly, wasn't that unusual), and after grabbing a cup of coffee walked into my office and sat down.

"Before coming here, you lived in Connecticut, right?"

"Yeah", I replied, wondering where this conversation was heading.

"What are the big newspapers in CT?" he asked.

"Paul...what are you talking about? Why are you asking?"

"I just want to know what the largest papers are...what papers would people read all over the state."

"Well, in the New Haven area, it's the *New Haven Register*, in the Hartford area, it's the *Hartford Courant*. There's sure to be one in Bridgeport, but I don't know it."

"OK, thanks" and he got up to leave.

"Paul, wait a minute, why do you need to know this? What's up?"

And out it came: “Well, I was up in New Hampshire over the weekend and on the way back I picked up a hitchhiker. He was a really nice kid. He was on his way to visit his girlfriend in Connecticut.”

“So what’s with the newspapers?”

“Well, he left his leather jacket in the backseat of my car and it’s a really nice jacket and I want to get it back to him. So I want to run an ad in the paper.”

“What’s his name?”

“I don’t remember—maybe Mike”

What’s his girlfriend’s name?

I don’t know.

“So, let me get this straight. You plan to buy “Found” ads in the major newspapers in CT with the hope that the girlfriend of a guy who might be named Mike reads the newspaper, happens to scrutinize the Found ad’s, registers that this is Mike’s jacket that’s been found, and then calls you to make arrangements to get the jacket back?”

“Yeah, that’s right” and he walks out my office to refill his coffee mug, leaving me smiling at the improbability of it all.

Well, since you knew Paul, you already know the end of this story. Of course, the girlfriend saw the ad. Of course, she called. Of course, Mike got his jacket back.

This could have never happened to me. First of all, my mother taught me never to pick up hitchhikers, a lesson Paul was either never taught, or routinely ignored. Second, even if I had, I never would have run such an ad, because if I had run the ad, I can guarantee you Mike’s girlfriend would have never seen it. All I would have gotten out of it were invoices from the newspapers.

That was the magic of Paul: his good deeds, and there were many, routinely paid off in good fortune. I came to the conclusion that Paul’s life, and the way he lived it, was proof of the existence of Karma.

One way to recall Paul’s life is “resume” style. He grew up in New Hampshire, living and helping out in his family’s General Store in Alton Bay. He attended the University of New Hampshire and did a stint in the Army. He worked for the Federal Housing Administration, then for John M.

Corcoran & Co., then for MassHousing, and then put up his own shingle as McGrath Associates, real estate appraisers.

He was athletic: Boxing as a young man (Tiger McGrath (you shoulda seen his left jab!)); played lineman (lineman!) on the University of NH's varsity football team and was an avid skier.

He was charitably minded, joining Leo Corcoran's non-profit Caritas Communities where he served on its Board for 15 years and helped finance its first rooming houses for the working poor.

He met and married Gail, the love of his life, and was in a long and loving relationship with her. ("I married late, but I married well," he told me). In the Big Brother Program he was a steady and generous big brother for his adopted little brother long after his little brother was a grown man. He was a kind and giving uncle to his nieces and nephews.

But Paul's life is not fully understood until one takes into account the ongoing stream of acts of kindness not just to his family and his friends, but compellingly, I think, to total strangers—people, who like Mike, he had never met and would never meet again.

My ordinarily reliable colleague Paul once caught me off-guard in a big way when he didn't even show up for what he knew to be an important business meeting. He had left our office in Milton for a noon meeting in Boston and hadn't returned. His presence at the meeting was essential, and he knew that, but he was a no show I'm sure I glared at him when he walked into my office hours later.

His excuse: he saw a woman struggling to drive car with a manual transmission through downtown Boston traffic. She had borrowed the car in Worcester to drive to Boston to pick up some medicine and had no experience driving a car with a clutch. With her consent, Paul hopped in the driver's seat, drove her car across downtown to the highway ramp, hopped out, then hiked back to where he had quickly abandoned his own car in order to help her. Of course his car wasn't towed. Of course he didn't get a ticket.

Extraordinary really. A man with his priorities straight. And ever so much Paul.

It was my great fortune to have known this remarkable man.

We will miss you, my friend.