



Mr. Damian McElrath

December 26, 1928 - April 25, 2021

Damian Edmund McElrath, December 26, 1928 - April 25, 2021. Preceded in death by his parents, Anna and Edmund McElrath, siblings, Danny, Mary Collins and Audrey Gusmerotti. Raised in Brooklyn, New York, he spent the first part of his life as a Franciscan Priest, earned a doctorate in Ecclesiastical History and was respected for his long career as teacher, writer and administrator (President of St. Bonaventure University, 1972- 1976.) He came to Minnesota in 1976 and took the Clinical Pastoral Education course for clergy at Hazelden to learn about the disease of alcoholism and to serve the spiritual needs of the chemically dependent. He decided to switch careers, left the priesthood and the Franciscans and remained at Hazelden for the next 35 years serving in a variety positions, one of which was Executive Vice President of Hazelden's Recovery Services. But his love was patient care and the last decade of his career at Hazelden was spent as the chaplain on Hazelden's Extended Care Unit where he was able to care for the spiritual needs of the patients as contained in the 12 Step Program and the Fellowship of AA. He wrote extensively both as a Franciscan and while at Hazelden where he wrote about its history in Hazelden - A Spiritual Odyssey. After he retired he volunteered at the Retreat in Wayzata. He and his wife Sandy shared a mutual love and support over the 40 years of their marriage. He is survived by his wife, Sandy, his stepson Steven Grandstrand and wife Amy, his stepdaughter Amy Hansen and husband Erik, and six grandchildren, Nicklaus and Megan Grandstrand, Ben, Emily, Anna and Sara Hansen, and

many nieces and nephews. They should know that their "Papa" will be with them always. He loved to paraphrase Cardinal Newman whom he admired: To live is to change and to live well is to have changed often. A memorial visitation will be held May 8th from 2 - 4:30 pm at Washburn McReavy Glen Haven Chapel - 5125 West Broadway, Crystal, MN. Masks will be required. In lieu of flowers, please send a memorial to the charity of your choice.

Cemetery Details

Neptune Society

7550 Wayzata Blvd.
Golden Valley, MN 55426

Previous Events

Memorial Gathering

MAY 8. 2:00 PM - 4:30 PM (CT)

Glen Haven Chapel
5125 West Broadway
Crystal, MN 55429
(763) 533-8643
info@washburn-mcreavy.com

Tribute Wall

“ In Memoriam

Colleagues make life worth living in spaces and places unseen. One such person came into my life shortly after I began working at Hazelden Foundation in the Spiritual Care Department. This man, and his formidable ‘side kick’, Kevin, became my working ‘habits.’ We spoke the same language and came from similar backgrounds and back stories. We liked to say we came from parallel universes. His was 3 decades in the priesthood, and me, 4 decades working in the Church as a ministerial professional. We were both in a second act, he a Catholic college president, me a Diocesan Director and theology professor. Both rabid believers in Social Justice. Our language was Franciscan and Benedictine. Religious and Diocesan experience. Our shared Catholicism. Our sense of justice and compassion came from those roots. Sometimes it was difficult for others, not coming from, or believing the same way, to understand our motives. We never wavered. Our focus was written in two huge Books-Scripture and Alcoholics Anonymous, better known as the Big Book. We both loved the 12 Step way of Life. It was a match made in heaven. He became my mentor, defender, and friend. I, his. We also became carpool buddies, which brought many moments of hilarity and uniqueness. It later became a retreat on wheels.

He was erudite, a scholar, academic, intellectual, at a level most people only dream about, his depth and breadth of knowledge was extraordinary and yet, the humblest person I have ever met. And although we had more than one conversation about ego, while his was well-established, with clarity, it was never arrogant. Never. I called him Saint Francis with a backpack. During the time we were colleagues, it became apparent to me that God had given me a gift, not to replace, more to appreciate, even more, a close friend, I had first lost mentally, to Parkinson's, and eventually to death. He was like an extension of that deep and precious gift. The two were so similar. I often told him I knew his presence in my life was a gift straight from God. He would just smile.

When he saw an injustice, he spoke. It was the only time I saw his anger. And it was an injustice toward me. He was livid. He did not stay silent. Such friendship is rare. I was not the only person who was gifted with this man, hundreds were. It was just that I came in his second act, and he was accomplished in addressing pastoral situations that spoke of injustice. He changed my life. I want to believe I made a difference in his as well.

An author of innumerable books and articles, he was the one who found my publisher, editor and encouraged me to write with complete honesty and abandonment. He was the Angel on my shoulder as I wrote each page. He was there at my book signing and continued to encourage me as I shared the memoir at book reads, signings, retreats and presentations. His support was invaluable.

We talked about our love for our families. The love he had for his wife was unparalleled. He, a rare breed of men, who take another's children and love them as their own. And I know, I was raised, after the death of my own biological father, by a man just like him. He loved Sandy and her children, deeply. The grandchildren? Over the moon. He was gitty talking about them and attending their activities and their family outings at Rutgers et al. A once celibate priest became a husband and father, as only an incredibly good man can.

When our time ended, it was excruciating, because I knew this gift was so rare and wonderful. Yet, not for one minute did I take it for granted. He encouraged me to stay, when I wanted to leave. He told me to keep doing what I was doing, when others were maligning my work, he said how important my work was in saving lives. He told me to ignore them. I did. When I questioned whether I was a good enough writer, an author, he told me it was excellent and to not only keep writing, do so with total honesty. I did. He gently kept me going at some



“ *Loving Lilies and Roses Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mr. Damian McElrath.*



April 29, 2021 at 10:55 PM



“ *As one of his nephews, the resounding theme from my memories of Damian is timing. At family gatherings, Damian masterfully interjected with dry, good humor and warmth. A subtle jokester. He never needed to be over the top or attention grabbing. His charismatic demeanor had its own gravity. And when the moment was right, he would deliver. Chuckling to himself in a fashion wholly appropriate and endearing, inviting others to appreciate his wit. While there are other accolades to be cherished in his memory, may this subtler one speak to his varied contributions to the lives fortunate enough to be in his presence.*

Ryan Hanko - April 28, 2021 at 08:28 PM