

March 17, 1992

WOW! Monica would have liked this!

Let me start this afternoon by thanking you all for being here. You know, the love and support that each of you have shown to my Mom, and my Dad, and my sisters and brother, and myself over the past three days has made this thing bearable; or otherwise I'm not sure it would have been. You are each very, very special people and we thank you for sharing this time with us.

We need to set the ground rules early here: there're two things that you won't see today. You will not see me break down up here. I went over to the funeral home this morning and I had a talk with Monica, and I got rid of some baggage I needed to get rid of before trying this and we made a deal. And, the deal is that I won't blubber at her funeral and she'll find out who's been haunting my putter for all these years. And the other thing you won't hear and see is: you won't hear me using a whole lot of real specific examples about the things I remember of Monica, and you won't see me spending a lot of time looking at the front row here. And it's not because those memories and those people aren't very, very important to me, it's just that if I do either of those things, I won't do a very good job of keeping promise number one.

You know, I'm not a theologian and I don't know nearly enough about the scriptures and about formal religion, but I do know about being a big brother. And the greatest thing about being a big brother is that they issue little sisters with the job. And in my case, I got the best five models they had in the store. Each of them is very, very special in her own very different way. And although no big brother ever really loves one sister more than the others, I think he does discover, over time, that he understands one a little

better than the rest. And, that's the way it was with Monica and me. I love each of my sisters intensely--more than anyone in the history of big brotherdom, I can assure you! But I KNOW Monica. And that is why I'm talking to you today instead of one of the others. Because you see, I know what Monica likes and what she doesn't like. I know what she thinks is funny, and I know what she thinks is sad. And I know how she'd like you to feel when you walk out of this church today.

When I was standing out front watching people coming in here--now that may have been one of the most intense experiences of my life! I wasn't quite ready for that. I wasn't really going to talk about this, but it's worth it, I think. There is an incredible mix of people here. There are people here who have known Monica since she was a baby--people, who although they don't share our family name, they are as much a part of the Welsh family as I am, and you know who you are. I won't look at you either. There are other people here who know Monica only through other members of the family, and they're here to offer love and support for that family member they call friend. And then there is the great majority of us here who knew Monica in all her wild-eyed glory--on her good hair days and her bad ones! But, I think whether you knew Monica for 30 minutes or for 30 years, you would agree with me that what Monica was, was LIFE. She was uncertainty, and laughter, and faith, and anxiety, and ambition, and fear, and energy, and truth, and dreams, and love all wrapped up in a single red-headed package. She embarrassed quickly and she loved very, very easily and she made friends forever.

Those of you who knew her well and shared her life, you need to know that you made her feel like the most special person in the world--even when she was having to struggle to deal with some of life's frustrations. There are some here in this church today who feel somehow responsible for what's happened. And if I'm talking to you, I beg you to close your eyes, take a

deep breath, and let that burden go! There is no blame to be placed here. There is just joy and thanks to be shared for the friendship that she offered and you accepted and returned. And Monica could share some serious friendship! Most of you know that.

One of her special gifts was the way she dealt with children, and to me that was always very, very important. She had this way of somehow being their equal and their idol at the same time. It didn't matter whose kids they were, she loved them all equally, whether they were part of her family or they belonged to a friend. You know, I've never met Emily VanCourt or her parents, but if they're here today, I really would like to, because I have heard for a long time about Monica's friend Emily. About how they studied Spanish together--they were going to learn a new language. And about how well they got along and about how pretty Emily was. But, you know, until last night I never knew Emily was 14 years old. It didn't matter to Monica, she was a friend. But the reason she got away with that is because Monica never lost the innocence of her own childhood. She is still a wide-eyed, trusting child at heart--an extreme breath of fresh air in this sophisticated, mature world we live in now.

Another one of her special gifts was her absolute disregard for social barriers. She had no time for them! You know, last night at the memorial service there was a reading and the punch line was that "whatsoever you do for the least of my brothers, that you do unto me." And that hit me pretty hard, and I know it hit Maureen pretty hard, too. Because Monica never did recognize who was the least or the most of her brothers, she just recognized who the BEST were. . .and they're sitting in this church. She counted among her friends, and the members of this congregation today, politicians, bank owners, military general officers, priests, airline pilots and professional athletes. But, you know, she was just as close to the Cartrons out at the Hills (the guys who took care of the golf carts for them); and the bartenders; the

guys who mowed the neighbor's lawn, her little brother's high school teammates (which blew me away when they showed up in uniform from a baseball game last night to say good-bye to her at the memorial service); to the guys who park cars at restaurants and the guys who sing in Duck Soup down at Anchovies. To Monica, a friend is a friend, period. There are no discriminators or qualifying adjectives--never were and never will be for her. And there is a great moral there. And, if she could leave just one thing for all of us to remember, I suspect that would be it.

But, if there was one trait that, to me, defined Monica, it was her sense of humor. I don't really need to tell most of you that Monica lived for the one-liner. I think she laid awake at night thinking of one she could use for the rest of the week! If you never received a letter from her, you should feel cheated. Because her letters were like stand-up comic routines in draft. She started every phone call to Betty and me with her latest joke. . .just to test it out and see if it would work on the folks at work. She was blessed with a unique insight into people and situations that somehow let her filter out everything but the things worth laughing at. More importantly, when she laughed, it was always with you, she never laughed at you. What a tremendous gift. . . and example!

This may sound a little sick. I wasn't going to say this, but I will. O.K., this WILL sound a little sick! Last night at the memorial service, as Monica lay in the open casket at the front of the chapel at the Harrell Funeral Home, throughout that entire service I kept waiting for her to suddenly sit straight up and throw out some one-liner that would bring down the house. But, she didn't. . .and that is as it should be. Because no matter how painful all of this is for the rest of us, this is ABSOLUTELY the best thing for Monica. We'll never know why it happened, or why we were deprived from sharing her a little bit longer in this life, but I do know that she has gone to a better place. That is a fundamental fact of my own non Bible-thumping Christian faith.

The same faith that Monica shared.

I have to admit, I have an advantage over many of you. . .an advantage that is shared by a few in this room. You see, I am by choice, by training and by heritage, a fighter pilot. Not only do I live relatively close to death and see it more than I care to, the only thing really remarkable about all that is the fact that I have sat alone high above the sunlit clouds of early morning and evening and I have seen the places angels live. And I know I'll see Monica there. . .and when I do, I'll tell her you said "Hi," and I'll tell her you send your love. She'll like that. She'll like that A LOT!

You know, years ago I read a very special poem that some of you may recognize. Unfortunately, I don't recall the author or the title, but there is one verse that has never left me and it fits this occasion very, very well.

She shall not grow old,
as we who are left grow old.
Age shall not weary her,
nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun,
and in the morning. . .
We will remember.

Good night, Mo.

Please rest gently.

We love you. . .and we'll see ya soon.