Inspired Stories of Paul's Life

Carpe Diem
A Note from Paul’s Sister . . .

When I was approached about the idea of writing a book that would capture Paul’s spirit, I could not help but think how wonderful it would be for all of the patients at Somerset’s new oncology pavilion to not see just a name on a building but to also understand who that name represents. I remember how proud I was to introduce Paul to my new friends as life went along. I wanted to share him with everyone I knew. And I now find myself in that position again.

As you will read in the following pages, Paul touched many people in many different ways. You will read stories of his thoughtfulness, his ability to make people laugh, his very direct nature and most of all, his courage.

When Paul was diagnosed, my family could not have imagined where the journey would take us. Although Paul lost his battle with Hodgkin’s, which naturally devastated my family, his death has brought us so many disguised blessings; the formation of the foundation which has helped so many people, meeting and befriending other cancer patients who are all so special, and through the words of those around him a constant reminder of what an amazing individual Paul turned out to be. It is because of Paul’s need and desire for his family and other patients to be comfortable, that the foundation has grown to the level it has, that we are able to provide so much for others.

I am sometimes taken aback by the “hubabaloo” over my brother! I noticed as each of the stories came to me, not one mentioned the time he stuck his tongue out at me when we were younger, or the time that we did not talk
for a week because we did not agree over who knows what.

I love and cherish those memories because they are Paul and mine. To be locked away forever as only brothers and sisters share; growing up together, feelings about life from a unique perspective . . . having been the only children raised by Ren and Roe . . . only us two. It is only Paul who understood the nuances, the history and with one wink from each other’s eye, no words would have to be spoken, we understood.

Please know that Paul was a human being like everyone else. He had his bad days. But what made him different was his need to keep those to a minimum. To really try and have a great time even though he was in a battle for his life. And this is my request to you, the reader. Try not to fall into the “sick” trap. Try to remember that there are people around you that you impact; many times you may not understand to what degree. But if Paul is any indication, you may be impacting people in ways you never dreamed possible.

My hope is that you enjoy the following pages. Some are funny, some sad and all are heart-felt. Know that my brother’s name is not on the side of the building because of a donation, but because my brother’s philosophy, “Carpe Diem” is one that should be shared to all that enter here. He was a remarkable man.

- Renee Nardoni Flores
spend all your time waiting
for that second chance
for a break that would make it okay
there’s always one reason
to feel not good enough
and it’s hard at the end of the day
I need some distraction
oh beautiful release
memory seeps from my veins
let me be empty
and weightless and maybe
I’ll find some peace tonight

Angel
Sarah McLachlan
1997
car·pe·di·ēm ˈkär-pe-ˈdē-ēm, -ˈdē-, -əm\n
INTERJECTION:
Used as an admonition to seize the pleasures of the moment without concern for the future.
When Paul was diagnosed with cancer (Hodgkin’s Disease), we were devastated. But the interesting thing with Paul was that he spent more time worrying about us then himself, especially his mother. Paul and his Mom were very close. In fact, he proudly proclaimed that he was a “mama’s boy!”

Paul was home for 5 years with his illness. In that time, he always thought positively and about today. While many people would look at their illness as the end of a life, Paul saw it as just a minor nuisance along the way. He never lamented “why me?” In Paul’s five years, he changed careers, an executive chef in Hawaii and aboard the Wind Star cruise ship prior to his illness, he then sold advertising for the Somerset Patriots; sold cars over the internet; played golf with his Mom and Dad; met his soon-to-be wife Ellen; went to Hawaii on a vacation with Ellen (just heavenly, ask her!); went to the White House to a black tie dinner and saw President Clinton and Hillary; sat in the dugout at Yankee Stadium with Joe Torre; became best friends with his oncologist (a Philly fan who couldn’t stand the Yankees); made new friends and became friends with our friends; sat on the beach in the moonlight in the Florida Keys with the woman he loved; went snowboarding at Whistler in British Columbia; got married to a wonderful woman; and bought a house. He lived a lifetime in 5 years.

And, to me, those were the best 5 years of our life. Paul had been away for such a long time and the 5 years with Paul made us appreciate him as a person more than ever. We got to spend more time with Paul (Ren was able to
work from home then). The best of Paul came out during the worst of times.

Even when Paul eventually came home with us in hospice, he showed his strength and determination. He saw everyone that he wanted to see and said everything that he wanted to say. He cooked some very special meals with his mother (one dish is still in the freezer – we just can’t bear to part with it!).

We had planned to go on a cruise through the Greek islands and to Turkey later that year. When Paul was the Executive Chef on the Wind Star (a lovely, sailing ship), he always said that the Greek islands (and especially Santorini) and Turkey were his favorite places ever. He very much encouraged us to go there too because of his experience. So, for his wife Ellen’s birthday, Paul bought Ellen a ticket to go on the same cruise as us. Paul knew he wouldn’t be there but so much wanted to share the experience with her. As always, he was thinking about others and knew how important it was to do the things that you may never get to do. As it turned out, Paul passed away the next day. We’re pretty sure he just needed to get past Ellen’s birthday.

After Paul died, the outpouring of cards, letters and calls from his friends and the people that he had touched was overwhelming. We never understood the scope of his impact and probably never will totally.

In the end, Paul taught us a lot...that living for today is what we need to strive for . . . because there may be no tomorrows . . . and there is nothing worse than regrets...no, “should have”, “could have”, “would have” . . . only that you lived your life as if it were your last day on earth.
We just experienced a “Paul moment” recently when we were deciding whether to take a cruise next summer. We were thinking about spending the money and whether we should go or not. But then there was Paul in our head saying “Mom . . . Dad, carpe diem!” And you know what? As always, he was right. We went!

We grew up in a world thinking that parents are supposed to teach their kids...however, in many ways, Paul became the best of teachers to all of us that knew him. Life is short; life is sweet; life is now!

*Carpe Diem!*
For those of you who never met Paul Nardoni, I would like to tell you a little about the man who left an imprint on all of us who knew him.

I first met Paul the evening he was born – he was a beautiful baby, and grew into the typical boy – mischievous, fun loving and at times a real handful. Luckily, Paul had parents who guided him to become a caring and responsible adult.

Paul adored his wife, his parents, his sister and his many friends. He loved cooking (he was a chef) and travel especially, Hawaii and the Greek islands.

When Paul became ill he faced his sickness with courage and a belief that he and his beloved wife Ellen would handle everything that came their way. Paul had a true zest for life – you just had to look at his sparkling eyes and smile to feel encouraged. He managed to make those around his sick bed feel that nothing was beyond him.

I often think of the times we spent at the shore, cooking, laughing, playing cards and just being carefree. Though we knew the end was inevitable, it was Paul who gave us the stamina and courage to face the future.

When Paul left, he took a piece of my heart with him.

- Mom Mom
George and I didn’t meet Paul until he was diagnosed and living again in New Jersey, with his parents. We, like his parents, had just moved into a paradise called “Stanton Ridge”. We met Paul, of course, through Roseann and Ren. Knowing his medical history through them I was in awe of this young man’s lighthearted attitude. Had it not been for the fact that he was gradually becoming thin and appeared pale most of the time, we wouldn’t have believed he had such a serious illness. But, because of his constant smile and happy-go-lucky spirit you saw beyond his physical appearance and forgot the burden he was carrying. He never let on his personal anguish that I’m sure he faced.

We never said no to an invitation for dinner at the Nardoni’s – but first we would ask, “Is Paul cooking?” Ribs were the best when he was in the kitchen and that’s where you could find him every day. He wouldn’t leave the kitchen when you arrived – just gave a big “Paul smile” which I interpreted as meaning, “Wait till you taste this!”

- George and Gail Niccolai
Paul was a storyteller. He tells the story of his illness with a great deal of humor, despite the subject matter. He never experienced the "why me?" syndrome. He believed that there are 'gifts' the cancer had given him, mostly gifts related to the things he valued in his life. He believed that there is something important, a purpose he has for his life that he had not yet discovered.

At the end of 1999, Paul decided he wanted to marry Ellen. 'Being married to her is one of life's experiences that I want to have as much as I can'. He was concerned at the wedding that he would be overly emotional during the ceremony as he had been in the weeks leading up to it but found himself relaxed and calm. 'This was something I really wanted to do, so going through it was easy.'

The major thing he focused on is his desire to be more than ordinary. He desired to excel at all he did and one of his greatest fears is that he would be just average. Carpe Diem.

- Margaret Lazaar
My feelings about the Man . . .

Reflecting upon the life of Paul R. Nardoni and the memories and experiences I shared with Paul, his family and his friends, I cannot feel anything but honored and privileged to have known this man.

As you read the passages in this book I hope you are coming to understand Paul's legacy. For his seize the moment philosophy continues to resonate with the enthusiasm and zest in which he approached life. I’ve come to know that I can always count on these memories and experiences with Paul as a barometer to gauge my life to see if I’m heading in the right direction.

His loss was our gain. He was active participant in life who was not afraid to come in second, yet he always shared his victories with others. His honesty could be brutal and his charm contagious. I admire Paul for his courage and strength. Paul was not a quitter. He was a man who found ways to maximize his potential in any situation choosing to find ways to improve his life and the life of others around him, including you the reader(s) of this book.

Some Memories I have of Paul . . .

I came to know Paul in 1986 when he was selected to be the roommate of my lifelong friend Scott Williams. AKA “Weasel” Paul and Scott were roommates all four years at Susquehanna University. One Thanksgiving break Paul drove up to our town, Ho-Ho-Kus, New Jersey, to pay a visit. Now Paul loved a lot of things, he loved food and music but he cherished his sleep and preferred to sleep in a bed. Back then we did not have Aero-Beds and Scott did not have a bed or a cot for Paul to use at his home. So I
made arrangements with my parent so he could crash at
my place. In the middle of the night Paul had to take a
leak. Well, we lived in a small house and had recently
removed our carpet. Needless to say the house had a little
echo to it without the carpet. And when he began pissing
out the night’s beer consumption it awoke my Mom. Still
foggy and groggy she thought she was dreaming of
waterfalls, but instead it was the 6-foot stature of Paul
creating a story that I share with my Mother to this day.
Only Paul could create a memory by going to the
bathroom.

One summer while he was recovering from chemotherapy
Scott, Paul, and I went on a road trip to Al Churchill’s
water-skiing club in Delaware. We had visited to the Ski
club is the late eighties so we looked forward to this trip.
It meant relaxation, bushels of crabs and of course water-
skiing. That weekend was fun. What struck all of us at the
house that particular weekend was Paul desire to water-
ski. His energy was up and down due to the treatment and
his initial attempts were not successful. We did not want
to push him hard and we gave him encouragement for
trying. He was not satisfied with trying to water-ski, for he
had water-skied before and was good at the sport. So to
our astonishment he said “I’m going to give it one last try
and then someone else can go” The group of us said “Ok
Paul if you feel your up to it”. With that as we
maneuvered the boat to create the tension needed on the
rope to raise a person out of the water, Paul proceeded to
remove one of his ski’s to attempt slalom run. Without a
hitch he was water skiing on one ski. Later he told us that
the two skis were too heavy and bulky for him. An
amazing moment of determination, will and courage.
Over the years I shared some fond memories with Paul.
Most memories were light-hearted and some challenging.
We went to concerts together like ZZ Top and Aerosmith,
played golf, and socialized till the night turned to day. His passion for life lives within these pages. There is a saying that “the apple does not fall far from the tree”. I would feel remise if I did not mention the sources of Paul’s successes. His parents Roseann, and Ren, his sister Renee and his wife Ellen greatly contributed to make Paul the gentleman that he was and is. If not for their hard work and determination, along with the help of scores of others who helped so that we can appreciate this book, his memory and inspiration.

Thank you Paul for being a good friend and great human being.

- Christian Jeselson
I could write a whole book about how great Paul was. I knew Paul my whole life. We grew up next door to each other. Paul was always a wonderful friend. He could make you laugh even when you where feeling down. That was one of Paul’s greatest qualities. Even when things where at there worst when he was sick he was always making someone laugh or showing them the brighter side of something. I remember when he was losing his hair I would cut it real short and it didn’t get him down. We would just joke about it! We would think about a new style he could get when it would grow back. The funny thing was Paul’s hair was already thin and there weren’t to many styles for him, but it was still fun. Even though Paul’s hair would come and go he never lost his spirit. There isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t think of him. I can’t wait for my son Kevin Paul to grow up to hear stories of what a great person Paul was and to never give up on a dream, always strive to be better and don’t forget to laugh.

- Nancy Merrigan-Schaming
I actually became friends with Paul’s parents at the outset. The chemical connection with them evolved around the game of golf, but quickly grew to other commonalities, including our coming of age in the 1960-70’s and having a son the same age. Paul was portrayed by Ren and Roseanne as their debonair, culinary-guru offspring, at that time employed in a far-away exotic location.

Paul’s illness brought him back to the Garden State and, when I first met him, I was struck at how much he reminded me of our own son—same age, same build, same big smile, same curious yet promising golf swing, same easy going way of making you feel connected.

Knowing of his suffering during the few years that I knew him was an experience that brought me to a place where I was questioning my faith in just about everything- in a benevolent supreme being who might reckon our destiny, in the resourceful medical/scientific community who might be magicians, in the learned architects of statistical odds who might be mistaken, or in lady luck herself who might be on walk-about. Yep, a full-blown crisis of meaning.

My thin skin allowed dark visions and sadness to overwhelm me and I thought how brave Paul’s loved ones must be to endure this. But then I realized that they garnered their strength from him. Paul would not focus on blame and anger, but concentrated instead on living each day in its time, surrounding himself with people and things that really mattered. That is the lesson for life that he taught me. Our time on earth is so very fleeting. Take the time for one more wink, smile, hand squeeze, embrace, gentle word, kind deed. These can turn anguish and grief into comfort and faith.
I am still melancholy when I pass by “Paul’s Tree” planted at Stanton Ridge Country Club hole number 10. I miss him and think maybe he is helping me with my approach shot. But I no longer look up from the fairway to the heavens and ask “Why?” I look up and say “Hi Paul, and don’t tell anyone I’m using a wood from this distance”.

- Valerie Johnson September 2004
My memories of Paul . . .

What I most remember about Paul is the many times that we spoke on the phone or in person when he was in Atlantic City visiting his Uncle “Paul”. I remember when he was taking his “future” wife Ellen to Atlantic City for the first time. He called me and asked me for one of our best suites. Of course, I would always give him whatever he wanted.

He would visit his Uncle “Paul” quite frequently, which in turn gave Paul and I a lot of time to chat. We talked about everything from the enjoyable times he had in Hawaii to his illness. It was an honor to know someone like Paul and the courageous outlook he had regarding his illness.

I enjoyed all of our conversations and will always remember Paul, his bubbly personality and his big smile.

-Dena Bakley
Trump Taj Mahal
Atlantic City, NJ
When I remember Paul, I am always drawn back to my favorite passage in literature, a reflection on life and the end of life from John Steinbeck.

“The end of life is now not so terribly far away— you can see it the way you see the finish line when you have come into the stretch—and your mind says, ‘Have I worked enough? Have I eaten enough? Have I loved enough?’ All of these, of course, are the foundation of man’s greatest curse, and perhaps his greatest glory. ‘What has my life meant so far, and what can it mean in the time left to me?’ And now we’re coming to the wicked, poisoned dart: “What have I contributed in the Great Ledger? What am I worth?” And this isn’t vanity or ambition. Men seem to be born with a debt they can never pay no matter how hard they try. It piles up ahead of them. Man owes something to man. If he ignores the debt it poisons him, and if he tries to make payments, the debt only increases, and the quality of his gift is the measure of the man.”

It is the last line that reverberates with the memories I have of Paul. His gift to us was the sense that we should live each day so that the answers to the above questions are at our fingertips, and that life should be lived such that it leaves no doubt that our answers are the right ones. Paul paid his “debt” to mankind every day, he paid as he went, and the quality of his gift was enormous. The quality of his gift was surely his true measure.

- Kevin Fox
Every girl in the church and on the beach wanted to be me . . .

The summer before Paul and I were married, my sister Jannie and I rented the house on Long Beach Island – it was a same house that my family had rented for over twenty years. It was the second week in September when the ocean was warm and welcoming, not ankle numbing like the Jersey Ocean can be. As luck would have it, Paul and his family loved the beach as much as my family did. His family rented a house on Long Beach Island for the following week.

So on Friday night we went to my house, spent the night and the next day closed the house. We decided to go to the beach for a little while before venturing to his family’s house a few miles away. There were about 10 surf fisherman and a few of them had families with them. We set our chairs next to each other and went for a walk. The day could not have been more beautiful. And we both felt so lucky..we were closing one beach house only to go to another. The ocean was breathtaking..not completely calm, waves breaking a few feet off the shoreline..the sun was so warm, we contemplated going for a swim but decided to sit for a while.

My life with Paul was so perfect . . . my life before Paul was wonderful – two daughters so lovely, so sweet – a family who loved me – sisters that I know other people would die to have – a full professional life – I felt that I could not ask for more. But when I met Paul my life seemed somehow to be black and white and it suddenly turned into color. My two daughters were actually more beautiful and special to me – my family more special – it is as if Paul’s friendship and love drenched my life in living color.
And so it was on that day... the ocean smelled so sweet, the sun felt so much warmer, the sand so soft I couldn’t believe it. We sat in our chairs and watched the surf fisherman. All of a sudden we heard the cry of a sea gull. When we both looked, we could see the gull fighting against the wind and surf to stay afloat. The bird would float on the ocean and try to take flight. It would go a few feet up and then just plummet back to the sea. We witnessed this bird try several times with no luck. It was Paul who realized what happened. As one of the fishermen had cast his line, the bird swooped down to catch the bait that was on the line and had become entangled in the fisherman’s line.

The line had bait and a weight. He had swallowed the line, enough to be weighed down and not able to fly away. The others on the beach saw what was going on but no one could do anything. Even the fisherman whose line the bird had swallowed stood motionless on the shore.

Paul stood up and walked over to the fisherman. I watched him as he approached him, they spoke and the fisherman took something from his tackle box. He handed it to Paul and Paul placed it in the pocket of his shorts. They both approached the water and jumped in. They swam to the bird’s location, which was a fair distance off shore. Paul was such a strong

Paul looking very healthy in Maui on a trip with Ellen, then his girlfriend (August 1999)
swimmer and he loved the ocean. They reached the bird . . . the fisherman held the line and Paul cut it with a knife. The weight fell into the ocean and the bird flew free. I heard the people cheering and did not realize that a crowd had gathered. They applauded as Paul and the fisherman came to shore. Paul walked back to his chair and sat beside me. He smiled at me and said, “Somebody had to do something.” We sat there every-one who witnessed what happened walked up to Paul and thanked him for what he had done. I looked at him and said, “Every girl on this beach wants to be me!”

Our wedding day was so special. I married the love of my life, a man who with a wink and a smile, won my heart and started my life on a path that I could have never imagined and one that I am truly grateful for. I am still on that path filled with anticipation and joy. Paul’s love and friendship filled my heart to the brim and continues to do to this day. The church was filled with candlelight, our family and friends. Paul had set the tone for all of us that day – he was excited and full of joy.

After the ceremony when the minister “pronounced” us man and wife, Paul and I turned away from the altar toward the crowd and the next thing I knew there was thunderous applause and laughter. Paul had taken a camera out of his pocket and took a picture of everyone! Everyone reacted with sheer delight! I recall seeing my sister Janice right after the ceremony, we hugged and laughed. I told her how happy I was – I was so lucky. Paul was so dreamy . . . She said to me “Ellen, every woman in that church wants to be you.”

Paul’s life was filled with moments like these, whether it was in the kitchen of his home, at the office or in the hospital . . . he participated every day and looked for
ways to reach out. His openness and willingness to do this amazed me. He was so special – you would think that he was given a special gift – but if you asked Paul he would tell you – he had the same blessings, feelings, opportunities that we all have – the difference was he recognized them, cherished them, used them. His hugs were a little tighter – his handshake a little stronger – his words a little more heart-felt. The power of love, the power of words, the power of a life lived fully every day. He seized every opportunity to fulfill himself and his loved ones.

**Friday Nights**

I have been working for as long as I can remember. In a strange way proud to say I am a workaholic. I would work crazy hours and sometimes work seven days a week. When my relationship with Paul grew from friendship to dating, I luckily had a chance to see him every day. I can remember he would say to me – take some time off this weekend. He wanted me to relax and do nothing. Those words were not in my vocabulary.

On this particular Friday, Paul called me at work at least three times asking what time I expected to be home. I told him I would try to be there no later than six. He knew from my past performance, that six o’clock wasn’t even close. He called me again on my cell, “When will you be home?” I told him I was on my way. As I pulled into the driveway on this winter night, I noticed the door open. I parked the car and as I walked toward the door, there he was – his smile so bright – his arms wide open. He greeted me with a hug and kiss and he said, “now our time together can begin – you are all mine.” Having someone greet you at the door after a crazy day at work
was such a gift. He did that time and again, reminding me to stop and relax.

To this day – my knees go weak when I think of how wonderful it felt to be in his arms. I learned that there is time for work but there is time to cherish and enjoy the people in your life and the wonderful things that happen when you take time to enjoy them.

*Just a few more notes*

“Friends are people who know the words to the song in your heart, and sing them back to you when you have forgotten them”

Paul, in an instant knew the song in my heart and in his own way still sings it to me when I have forgotten the words. Paul was so proud of each of us – his mom, dad, sister, cousins, and friends. When I think of the conversations we had I realize how important it was to him that we knew who we were and our own impact on the world.

The inscription written by Paul in an anniversary card that he gave me in celebration of our first wedding anniversary.

“Ellen:

Has it been a year already? I can’t believe it! This has been the best year of my life, it has gone by way
too fast. If this is what I have to look forward to for the rest of my life, I hope I live 150 years. Ellen, it has been pure smiles, absolute sunshine and pure bliss for me. It is so hard to put into words the feelings I have for you, but I know it was meant to be, I know our lives are like ying and yang, you are an eternal part of me. So with this being the best year of my life all I want is many more to come. I want to hold your hand, hug you until I am blue, just live with you. My life is now full, the rest is whipped cream – and honey – keep it coming.

Love, Paul”

Need I say more? He was so enthusiastic about life – this was written 2 months before he died.

- Ellen Nardoni
I remember meeting my nephew Paul for the first time when I was marrying into the Ryan family. Paul was this cute, blond little kid full of energy and eager to talk to anyone that would listen.

Paul was excited when his first cousins came along, he and Renee would no longer be the only kids on their mother’s side of the family. I remember him holding Billy as a baby and asking me how long it would be until he could play with him. The years between them seemed like many but the age gap was lessened with every year.

As Paul got older he would surprise us with visits to our house, which we all enjoyed. He would be in Brigantine visiting family and looking for some good surf. The family he could always find, it was the waves that could be lacking at times, but he never seemed to mind, he was always happy. He would always invite us to go out surfing with him and sometimes we would just go and watch.

When Paul passed away, I had a trip to North Carolina scheduled with my girls to go surfing. We were told not to cancel, that Paul would not want us to miss that opportunity. We went, and the day of the funeral we were at the beach, it was a beautiful, sunny, warm day. The waves were good, the girls borrowed boards and were surfing and I was on the beach watching.

I had forgotten that the funeral was that day but I was quickly reminded. I was looking out towards the water, the sun in my eyes, blinding me, when a tall, thin, lanky silhouette, carrying a board, pass in front of me said “Hey, what’s up?” passed me and looked back and smiled, and for a moment, I saw Paul and I heard his voice.
I was overcome with guilt for a moment realizing that the funeral must be going on but also I knew he was there to say “Hey, I’m alright”.

This is how I want to remember Paul . . . the sun on his shoulders, smile on his face, surfboard in hand, riding the big surf.

- Linda D’Alessandro

Paul loved the water, especially the ocean. Seen here coming back from riding some waves at Brigantine beach.
I was Paul’s roommate all four years of College at Susquehanna University. Our friendship grew strong during that time and I had the pleasure of being his best man at his wedding. Over the years I knew Paul, I grew as a person. He contributed to that and I am forever grateful to him.

Paul was someone who knew how to do three things really well; LIVE, LOVE and LAUGH. There are so many of my experiences with him and I that come to mind, but I’ll I share a few that bring him close to me in his spirit each and every day.

When I look back and see what Paul did with his life, I am still amazed. His original major in College was Political Science . . . what a joke! He had no idea what he was getting into with some of those classes, really boring professors and classmates. Soon, he changed to Communications -- a better match. Art classes and theater design were those easy classes, where Paul could party first, and then do his homework - drawing a picture. It really pissed me off. Really, I would bust my ass on papers, projects, case studies and Paul would draw pictures while he was drunk . . . and get an “A”. Needless to say, Paul got the most out of his College experience. He had fun and succeeded (I think he graduated with a 2.3 – SUCCESS!!!)

Let’s get to some laughing – my favorite part. It was freshman year, early in the year and we got back to our dormitory room very late on a Saturday night after about eh . . . 100 beers or so. Paul decides the munchies would be satisfied with Orville Redenbacher’s Cheddar Cheese microwave popcorn. Once it is ready, Paul and I sit in chairs on opposite ends of the room. He then tells me we will throw each kernel at each other and try to catch it
with our mouth. Ok, 2 drunk idiots trying to catch popcorn on the fly in our mouths – needless to say just about every kernel ended up on the floor. As if there was not enough laughing during this episode, something very special happened that night that I want to share. I was woken out of a cold sleep in the middle of the night “Dude, check this out” I then see a flame from a lighter and Paul was laying on his back with his legs in the air giggling. Then, a huge blue flame shot from his ass to the lighter. He lit his fart! We laughed harder than we had ever laughed that night. I still think about it today and start to laugh out loud sometimes. From that night on, Paul and I had a lighter check every night before bed. Yes, bringing a lighter to bed every night ensured a light show and a good laugh. About a year before Paul died, he gave me a book: “The Gas We Pass”. This is an animated children’s book. The inside cover reads:

“Scott – Saw this and immediately thought of you. Enjoy. Love, Paul”

This book is proudly displayed in my bathroom today.

- Scott Williams
In the early seventies my brother Ren and sister-in-law Ro were kind enough to let me live with them for a while. I guess Renee was about six or seven and Paul was five. What a time to be with those kids! They were so much fun!! Renee and her friend Sarah Gershenberg were patiently precocious enough to teach me in no uncertain terms the definition of the “F” word. And, I will always remember Paul on his Hot Wheels, zooming around the neighborhood, being such a cool, full-of-life kid. One of Paul’s classmates was a girl called Kazumi Matsua, and I would be enraptured whenever Paul, in his melodic, five year old voice would try to pronounce her name because he said it so cutely. (I would encourage any discussion of Kazumi just to hear him!)

Another memory I have is a little more scatological: I borrowed Ren and Ro’s car, and was rummaging through the glove box (probably for a match to light a cig or something like it!) and found a note from Paul’s teacher. I don’t know why this has stuck with me, but it seemed so “Paul”. The note said, and I paraphrase: “Dear Mrs. Nardoni: Today Paul produced a large, loose stool . . . .” For some reason I believe Paul was proud of that...

And what a man he grew to be! During the last years of his life I was so impressed by Paul’s caring, unselfish, nature, in spite of the hardship he was going through. To wit, I was in the midst of a personal struggle, and my wonderful nephew took the time to write me the following note:

“Steve, I just want to tell you how proud I am of you. Your strength and determination will help you get through this. Put all of your demons aside, enjoy the sunshine and live life to its fullest. Love, Paul”
I am so grateful for that small note from him, which to this day continues to comfort and inspire me. Paul has given all of us so many gifts: this is one I will always treasure.

- Uncle Steve
As often happens in families, time and distance prevent the closeness a family should exhibit. Such was the case with the Nardoni and Collins families. Although Marge is Paul’s godmother, we didn’t get to see much of Paul as he was growing up. That proved to be our loss.

I remember the first time I saw Paul. We were sitting in the Nardoni house when an enormous pair of sneakers peeked through the door. Eventually, the rest of Paul followed but those feet... Wow! What an indication of the man who would grow to fill them. Tall and gangly, with a wide smile, quick wit and a cheerful “hello”, Paul imposed his presence much like a ray of sunshine awakens the senses on a warm spring day. Who knew what a memorable impression this was to become.

With the exception of the few times I saw Paul after he became ill, I really didn’t get to see him very much. Even then, he always tried to put others at ease and remove the attention from himself. At Ellen and Paul’s wedding, where most would be worried about themselves as the subjects of a photographer, Paul entered the church taking pictures of the congregation. Only Paul would have the foresight to do that.

Every time I think of Paul, I remember those big shoes. Big shoes filled by a big person, a person who left a legacy in which he is still involved. Through the PRN Foundation, Paul is still filling those enormous shoes, those shoes with the logo “Carpe Diem”!

-Marge and Mickey Collins
Paul’s Story . . .

As neighbors and friends of the Nardoni family, our friendship with Paul started with a car – an old, classic 2-seater Mercedes convertible. When we brought that little white car home, Paul made sure that he came over to check out our new toy. We got his approval on that car – right down to the color – they were all his choices! He was so enthusiastic about that car! But that seemed to be Paul’s nature, and one we came to truly appreciate in the time we knew him.

Paul’s fun-loving nature was a joy to be part of in our neighborhood. When Paul and Ellen were married, the church was packed in anticipation of sharing this special time with them. The guests were all expectantly turned toward the rear of the church. As the bride and groom appeared in the doorway, Paul pulled out a camera, and with a mischievous grin took pictures of us all. There was much laughter and joy during that ceremony.

I think of Paul’s culinary skills often when cooking, and wonder what his advice might be on a given recipe. Of all my memories of Paul, I think the most endearing and inspiring was his ability to face his illness with such courage and dignity. His relationships with family and friends remained strong and loving throughout. Paul lived life to its fullest, and his gift of life will always be treasured.

- Lucia Worman
Ithaka

As you set out for Ithaka
hope your road is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
angry Poseidon - don’t be afraid of them:
you’ll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
wild Poseidon - you won’t encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope your road is a long one.
May there be many summer mornings when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you enter harbors you’re seeing for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind-
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to learn and go on learning from their scholars.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you’re destined for.
But don’t hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you’re old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you’ve gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.
Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you wouldn’t have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won’t have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you’ll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

Notes: First version probably written January 1894. Final version written October 1910 and published November 1911.
When I think of Paul, I think of a young boy coming over in the morning and saying, “Hey Mrs. M” what’s for breakfast? You see Paul lived next door and grew up with my children. They took the school bus together to Whitehouse School. Even though Paul had breakfast at home, he was still a little hungry. He was always a bit disheveled because Paul was not a morning person. The boys would eat in a hurry and out the door they would go. When school was over (around 3pm) Paul and my son Greg would burst in the door saying “We’re hungry – what’s to eat?” Then they went right for the cookies and milk – Oreo cookies that is – it was their favorite. This went on day after day, and Paul was like one of the family.

As the years went by, he always came over to say “Hi Mrs. M” and go over to the kitchen cabinet and help himself to a handful of Oreos. Always having time to talk and visit. We would talk about so many things – his job, girls, his travels, especially Maui. I shared something else with Paul – “cancer.” I was diagnosed a few years before Paul and then my husband was diagnosed a year after Paul’s diagnosis. Now Paul was supporting us – and we shared a special bond.

He was strong and focused and very brave. He never gave up and we would say to each other “Enjoy the day and don’t waste it” – and he didn’t. Although Paul’s life was cut short his enthusiasm for life lives on in my heart, always remembering our days together sharing Oreos.

- Maureen Merrigan aka “Mrs. M”
Paul and I became friends after he was diagnosed with cancer. Initially, we both found we had so much in common...we were both tall, had lots of hair, we were both chefs, we both owned car dealerships (ha!) and we both had cancer. I was in remission and Paul was not.

Cancer was the catalyst for our relationship. We spoke openly about the side effects he might experience from treatment. The effects on his family and friends, the difference in the way he might be viewed, after they realized he had cancer. I told him not be upset when he saw fear in their eyes, fear for their concern for him and for their personal fear of cancer.

We met several times and then I did not hear from him. I was glad. He was getting on with his life doing what a man in his late twenties should do. He was on his way to a textbook recovery. We would catch up with each other sometime in the future and celebrate our milestones - his 5-year remission and my 10-year remission.

This was not to be. I was surprised to see Paul when he stopped by sometime later. He told me his cancer had returned after the transplant. We both knew this was a significant setback. We talked and I could see Paul was scared and confused. I asked Paul what was he going to do? He answered, “I am going to live my life.”

Although our initial meeting was about cancer, our budding relationship and friendship was not. Paul and I spoke about many things during our early visits together. We spoke about our families and we spoke of our aspirations. We talked politics, business...we really talked about everything and anything. I realized Paul was becoming a pal, soon to be a friend. I loved his sense of
humor, it could be biting or playful – he only laughed when he meant it.

Paul developed a special bond with my dad, Milton. My father’s health was failing rapidly. I remember Paul always being helpful to him at the dealership and always engaging him in conversation. The spoke sports a lot. Paul had sensitivity for my dad that my father appreciated very much. I remember one evening in Newburgh, NY the first season the Somerset Patriots played. Paul was bringing my dad into the ballpark slowly with all of the loving attention a son would provide. I was an extra guest that evening. Paul and Milton chatted throughout the game, listening to Sparky Lyle stories later at the team hotel and finally continuing their conversation in the car for the ride home. I was in the back seat thinking, “Will they ever stop talking?” I then fell asleep. I woke up as they pulled into my parents’ driveway and they were still talking. The next day at the dealership, my father pulled me aside and said “That Paul Nardoni is really something. He’s the genuine article.”
What was surprising to me and to my wife, Suzanne was the immediate impact that Paul had on people. He had an instant identification with the individual, never blurred by the circumstances of the meeting or the surroundings.

We spent many special days with Paul. Not special because of the venues, but special because we were in his company.

We so admired the way he lived his life. He valued everyday he had and just as important, he valued the days with his family and friends.

Paul worked so hard and so long for his cure. He accepted all the treatments with a dogged determination. He never gave up. It is the natural instinct in all of us to survive. Paul’s instinct was not about survival. Paul wanted to flourish. He wanted to live so that he would have the continued physical presence to share with us his love. He knew that we needed him. He knew how much we loved him. Sometimes the insecurities of life cause us to question our place with those we love. This was never the case with Paul. He had the confidence and peace of unconditional love. In return he provided us with a sense of well being.

Our hearts were breaking watching him succumb; he was working overtime trying to repair them for us. Courage has been defined time and again, sometimes by individuals and sometimes by circumstance. Unfortunately courage has often been defined by the caricature of Hollywood – the proforma warrior, the formulaic leader, the hero athlete – Paul defined courage to all of us, not as he died but as he lived. Paul had the courage to prepare us for the time that his physical presence would no longer be with us. The thoughtfulness
of this courage will not play at a theater near you, or on a television set or in a video store. It will play in our hearts and minds. We will carry his courage with us every day.

The “Lesson of Paul” has no clichés; it contains no artificial special effects or story lines. As my Dad once described Paul, we describe “The Lesson of Paul” as “The Genuine Article”.

- Steve and Suzanne Kalafer
The most amazing thing about Paul was his determination to live normally and to extend himself to others regardless of his own battle with Hodgkin’s Disease. Paul’s social calendar was jammed, so when Don and I wanted to invite him and his wife Ellen to dinner, we had a wait ahead of us. Many phone calls were exchanged and activities got reorganized until finally a date was set that fit all of our schedules. But the day before we were to dine the phone rang and it was Paul:

“Hey, Vic – I’m really sorry but I’m going to have to cancel dinner tomorrow night. A very good friend of mine was just diagnosed with brain cancer and she’s scared to death. I need to spend some time with her to see if I can help – she’s in pretty tough shape.”

Naturally my husband and I (impressed by his loyalty to his friend) understood completely and promised to re-schedule our engagement.

Meanwhile, Paul was telling his father about his friend’s diagnosis and mentioned to him that he had cancelled his plans with the Tourvilles. Ren was taken aback and said: “So that’s it?? You just blew off Don and Vicki after all the hassle getting a convenient time for the four of you to get together?”

“Yeah, Dad, I did. Ya see, it’s all about priorities . . . ya know? It’s all about what’s really important in life . . . ”

-Vicki Tourville
He was tall of limb. He had huge doe eyes and had a smile that would light up the darkest day. He was my nephew, Paul Nardoni. Ever since he was a little boy, he would call me “Neets” (short for Anita).

The Nardoni clan is a very close knit family and we number many. When Paul was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s Disease we were devastated. From the beginning, Paul was the shining light who made us all feel better. While he knew how sick he was he never faltered in his everyday life. He did everything: worked, traveled, enjoyed sports, and . . . he got married to a wonderful woman, Ellen. Paul never lost his sense of humor and somehow that always made us feel better.

Paul was an executive chef and had cooked in some of the most prestigious hotel/restaurants in the world. However, Paul’s favorite restaurant was his Mom-Mom’s home cooked Italian meals (my mother, Jane Nardoni). He loved good food. He talked about it every waking hour. The Nardoni’s had a habit of eating breakfast and somehow talking about what we would be having for lunch and dinner!

Paul embraced life with a vigor I have rarely seen. He did it all with such gusto and in doing so, without his realizing it, made our time with him so special.

His favorite photograph was one he had taken in Maui while vacationing with Ellen. He said if heaven existed this is what heaven would look like. I picture him in that special space. I miss him.

- Anita Nardoni
Juanita’s #9

Scary, but that is the first thing that comes to mind when I think of Paul. We met in 1991 in Del Mar, Ca when Paul was on his externship from one of the finest culinary schools in the country. I introduced him to Juanita’s taco shop one night after work and the tradition began. Fine food by day, 2 chicken tacos with rice, beans and guac by night; quickly chased by 2 liters of diet coke, m&m’s and oh yes, the jumbo bottle of multi-colored TUMS. He was living in a garage, on the cold cement floor, with the bugs, a couple of sleeping bags and endless tie-dyed shirts (that he wore with madras shorts). Flying a long-board and frozen chipotle chicken to New Jersey from San Diego. Did I mention that he was also sporting a mullet that would make any Hollywood stylist sit up and take notice? And he would “sing” . . . how could you not fall in love with him?

Years later Paul would pick me up at the airport – his hair practically military length, he wore tasseled loafers and a sport coat, breakfast in hand . . . I walked right by him.

Paul was always surprising me, each visit, each conversation held something new. To be honest, I could have done with out a few of them . . . His sense of humor and his love were limitless . . . I don’t know how they fought for space in that tall skinny body of his. There was no room for anything else, except courage.

Paul was a fighter. Passionate, about everything in his life. Nothing was half-assed. Even being sick. He fought and he loved and he touched everyone he met. I know that living his life extended his life. If you’re reading this, know that there is someone who came before you, to help you and the doctors to make the path easier. He is
watching over you and sending you strength. He still has so much of it to share. He would tell you to give this battle everything you have, don’t do it alone, and if you are lucky enough to have a family like his, a love like his wife Ellen, and hope, you’ve got it all.

My guardian angel has a face. I’d give anything to have Paul back, but I take the lessons, love and laughter with me wherever I go. . .

- Brett Krugman

Brett & Paul at a friend’s wedding in California
I have so many wonderful memories of my nephew Paul. If I had to choose one, It would be when my mother died, January 22, 1999.

At this time everyone had full time jobs. After all was said and done, they had to go home, back to their obligations. I was not working and had the time to do the job of vacating my mother’s apartment. At first I was working on nervous energy. As the clothing, furniture, and her personal items were taken from the home, I became overwhelmed with grief.

Paul, who at the time was not well, called me and said “Aunt Deb” This is too hard for you. I will come down and take care of Mom-Mom’s apartment. He and his soon to be wife Ellen drove the two hours to Mom’s and finished the kitchen and all the other odds and ends that were left.

He was the kindest most giving person. I feel blessed to have known him and loved him in my lifetime. As with everyone else who knew Paul, I miss him everyday!

- Debbie Ryan
To this day when I think of Paul, I shake my head and smile. What a character he was, a tall drink of water with a devilish grin and a twinkle in his eyes. He just had a way of making you smile whenever you saw him. He was always quick to make a joke, give a compliment or even dish irreverent observations about hospital life. Though I was in a caretaker role as the Director of the Art Program at Penn, somehow I felt taken care of when I was in his presence.

There was never a time when I entered his hospital room that he didn’t say to me the equivalent of “take a load off”. You felt as if you were being “received” when you came into his room. He would graciously offer you a seat, oftentimes offer you something to eat, ask you how your day was going, and what was new in your life. I never once heard him feel sorry for himself, rather he seemed to possess a righteous indignation at this disease that was hounding him. He seemed to treat it as a formidable adversary that he was doing battle with.

One of my favorite memories of being with Paul is how he would always tell me stories of his travels and of the food he loved to eat and cook. His eyes would light up as he recounted in intricate detail the beauty of a landscape, replete with all the colors and textures and smells. Or he would recount a list of exquisite ingredients in the dishes he made that were oh so delicious. His appreciation of the finer things in life was contagious. You’d leave the room hungry and wanting to get on the next plane! He savored his memories and life experiences fully and was generous to a fault in sharing them, so you too could be an
armchair traveler with him. These conversations were momentary sanctuaries for both of us. For just a little while, when Paul was telling these stories, we weren’t in a hospital room anymore, and this persistently obstinate disease seemed forced to a back seat and we both drank in these moments of pure beauty and imagination.

Paul had such a big heart, I never left his room without him looking me square in the eye, taking my hand and warmly telling me how much he appreciated my visit. He always seemed to minimize (quite humorously at times) whatever he was going through on any given day. His concern, even in the midst of being so sick, was for his family. Paul often expressed to me how much he loved everyone, how wonderful they all were. What a generous and appreciative spirit, quite an accomplishment in the face of such hardship. I really believe this was because he lived in the moment. Even his memories from the past were brought to the present, as a present for those around him and for himself. Remembering Paul reminds me to live in the here and now, that a little humor can go a very long way, and that it truly is in giving that we receive. What a blessing!

- Gianna Volpe
I first met Paul in May of 1998. It was the day of the first game the Somerset Patriots ever played. I remember him walking into our house, wearing a shirt and tie. He was upbeat and talkative, and very excited about what the night had in store. I never would have guessed that he had cancer. It wasn’t until later when my dad said, “Paul and I have something in common, we both have had cancer” that I knew. We had a wonderful time that night in Atlantic City. It was the first game for a team that Paul had been involved in from the very beginning. The weather was perfect and there was a salty breeze coming from the nearby ocean. I will forever associate moments like that with Paul -- happy… optimistic… peaceful… warm.

In the summer of 1998, we went to a dinner at the White House together. It truly was the most beautiful evening that Washington DC had ever known. It was warm and there wasn’t a cloud in the sky. We sat under a magnificent tent on the South Lawn, a stone’s throw from the First Family and we dined. We took pictures and laughed a lot. We talked about how beautiful everything was. To our right was a perfect view of Thomas Jefferson standing in his monument – to our left was the back of the White House.

Afterwards we all went to our favorite bar and I sat next to Paul. We talked about everything in the world. My parents went to their hotel and Paul came back to my apartment and we talked for another couple of hours. Finally, we both fell asleep. We became very close that night.
How very lucky I am to have had so much fun with Paul and to have shared so much with him. We packed a lifetime of friendship into three short years.

- Josh Kalafer
Native American Prayer

I give you this one thought to keep –
I am with you still – I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning’s hush,
I am the swift, uplifting rush
of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not think of me as gone –
I am with you still – in each new dawn.

Paul loved his niece Sarah (here almost 2) as if she were his own. He could not resist playing with her even though he was going through heavy chemo at the time of this photo.
like others, Gail, Phillip, Kyle and I were always thrilled by Paul’s enthusiasm, humor, and sense of fun. We always enjoyed the following:

- His sense of true awe at the Queen’s (our grandmother’s nickname) longevity
- His hatred of having his feet touched
- His inclusion of Jane’s home recipes in his outstanding cuisine repertoire
- His appreciation of family and friends.

And the one story that has always and will continuously resonate with us centers on a Great Adventure trip taken when Paul was little. With the same degree of enthusiasm and excitement that he would always display, Paul announced gleefully and excitedly as the Nardoni vehicle trekked through the safari that everyone should look at “the bagoons!”

To this day, not one of us can see baboons, apes, or safaris without remembering Paul! We think Paul would enjoy the fact that his malapropism has and will continue to live on!

While the loss of Paul through his terrible illness will never be diminished, the oncology pavilion in his honor is testament that good can sometimes spring from bad. Consequently, and keeping with the classical Latin theme of Carpe Diem, the following seems most appropriate:

“Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit.”
*The Aeneid*, Book 1, Line 203

- Bob Nardoni
There are many people that we meet in our lives, but only a very few who make lasting impressions in our minds and hearts. Paul Nardoni is one of those people. Paul’s friendship is a special gift shared by all of us. Isn’t it remarkable that he has touched so many lives?

Being in this church, you just have to smile. As you look down the center aisle it makes me remember a very special day, Paul making his entrance as the groom, the entire congregation turning to watch him enter and he whips out a disposable camera and starts taking pictures of us as we take pictures of him. With such a positive outlook on life, his words were always so encouraging. He made us laugh even in his darkest moments. His thoughts not about him - self but about the people he loved.

Paul fought for his life with courage, grace and humor. Knowing him has made all of us better people. He made you believe that there were no obstacles that you could not overcome. That there is a purpose for everything and though life can sometimes be so hard and unfair it is for a reason that we are meant to suffer. In his silence, he said so much. Never willing to lose hope, believing every day that there was a purpose to living.

Paul has challenged all of us to live our lives fully, with dignity and respect. To honor and cherish the things most important to us, our family and the gift of each new day. He will live forever in our hearts.

There are many things that we will miss about Paul - His wit, sense of humor, his torn shirts, his resolve, love of life, occasional cynicism. His eternal optimism, his famous ribs, POLAR CUB, an occasional wedge holed out for a birdie from two fairways over. His courage and
fortitude. His friendship and love of family. And at least a hundred other great qualities.

But it is also these things that will forever keep him in our hearts and allow us to cherish the precious time that we shared. Paul we will miss you. And we will never forget you.

-Beth and Frank Sztuk
Paul Nardoni was an extraordinary person – I wish you could have known him. He was truly a great friend to me. He was funny, good-looking, sincere, smart, opinionated, sarcastic, brave, optimistic, fearless, courageous and big-hearted. We also shared a common interest in the music we liked. I loved him.

I met Paul while he was in high school - his Mom Roseann and I worked together, and I quickly grew very close to the entire Nardoni clan. When I would spend time with the Nardoni’s, Paul and his friends would always entertain me. He always had lots of them around, and I found them all cute and funny. He seemed to be the ringleader - his warmth attracted all sorts, and people naturally gravitated to him.

Eventually we all moved on from New Jersey. Paul became a chef, and went on to adventures in Hawaii, and then on cruise ships. I moved to Alaska. The distance did not stop our friendship, however, as we could always communicate via telephone. And, we sometimes planned vacations that would take us to the same area – usually around where his sister Renee was living at the time. Paul visited me in Alaska twice – once with Renee, and once after she had moved here. He was seriously considering a move from Hawaii to Alaska, but could not handle the idea of so little fresh produce to cook with! We met in New Jersey for Renee and Ernie’s wedding, and again in Las Vegas at their house for some R&R after his stem cell transplant.

During that trip to Las Vegas, Paul and I got to spend a few days together. We went to Hoover Dam so we could say we had been sightseeing. We also spent some time in the local casinos. We had lots of fun playing cards together, and most of the dealers we met assumed because
of the large age difference between us that I was his Mom! I couldn’t have been more proud, because if I had a son I would have loved one just like Paul.

Then we met again in New Jersey, this time for his wedding to Ellen. He had had some other serious relationships, but everyone who knew him could tell that Ellen was the love of his life. This was truly a wonderful event, and I feel privileged to have witnessed the wedding.

Paul was always very upbeat and optimistic, which I think made it easier on those of us around him. I am extremely proud to have been a part of his life. He certainly has left a hole in mine.

- Maryellen Moreno
Paul Nardoni and Foodie Friends . . .

Here’s the deal: I will always think of food when I think about Paul. It’s a passion we shared. Planning the menu, buying the ingredients, cooking the food, and eating the finished product. What a basic expression of self, we agreed.

Whenever we spent time together, food was nearly always a centerpiece. Margaritas and baby-back ribs, champagne and osetra caviar. Informal gatherings after golf, festive evenings at the holidays. (Though I inconveniently managed to miss both Nardoni wedding fests, I lapped up every culinary detail after the fact.)

The first time Paul visited our home, he checked out my cookbook collection. He never knew that it was at that moment that I felt an instant bond between us was formed. And he never knew how much it pleased me that he noticed I had a well-worn Larousse Gastronomique on the shelf.

I always looked forward to sharing my cooking with Paul. I remember one meal when I tried to pull off a sort of Caribbean affair. I agree that the jerk chicken was good and that the key-lime pie was terrific. What was not so good, and certainly nothing close to terrific, was the glutinous rice-and-beans concoction. I’m still not sure what went wrong. Paul never missed a beat: “This is often how they fix rice and beans on the Islands.” Our bond intensified.

Even more, I looked forward to sampling his wares. When one food treat or another was ready to be served, all the foodie friends were like little baby birds, working our mouths in unison in anticipation. Then came the
flavor treat, and quickly – incredibly quickly – it was gone. We oohed and aahed, and, at that moment, we all felt a bond with Paul.

But make no mistake. Paulie’s priorities were always in impeccable order. While food was a key, he never left any doubt that it was family and friends that ultimately mattered. The food was only a creative outlet that connected Paul to us and us to Paul. Generous of heart, generous of spirit, Paul nourished us all.

- Virginia B. Edwards and Neil F. Budde, April 21, 2001
Growing up next door to Paul was always an adventure: I was the tag-along little sister since he and my brother were buddies. I always wanted to hang out with them and be part of the “gang.” Well, that is what I had in mind – but in their eyes I was the little tag-along. One of the funny adventures was “mischief night.” Paul and my brother Greg persuaded me into hanging toilet paper from trees, soaping car windows, and ringing doorbells. So, I gathered up enough courage to go and ring the neighbor’s door bell – Paul and Greg assured me that they were right behind me and said not to worry (keep in mind I was half their size) nothing is going to happen, they said. Well, as soon and I rang the doorbell they were out of sight and I was running like the dickens – with the neighbor not far behind. Luckily, I hid behind a tree and I never got caught. Paul was laughing so hard he almost blew my cover. He said, “Listen Kath if you want to be part of the gang you should try to keep up!” Well at this point I was terrified and the thought of going home sounded like a pretty good idea. So, Paul cut his night short and took me home.

Paul always thought that I was older and bigger than I really was – mind you he stood 6’ tall and I was all of 4’ tall. He always told me – you are as big as you imagine yourself to be – Don’t let anyone ever tell you different – You can do anything in this world if you want it bad enough. As we grew older, Paul was a good listener, friend and someone I admired. He is truly missed.

- Kathleen Merrigan
Paul and I became friends in 1977 when we were nine years old. We went to school together, played baseball together and grew up together doing the things kids do. The basis of our relationship was a mutual respect for general absurdity. Paul left Readington Middle School to attend Gill St. Bernard’s in 1981 while I finished at Readington and went on to Hunterdon Central High School. As often happens at that age Paul and I didn’t see each other often because of the different school situation but we did get together on occasion. After two years of High School, much like Paul I decided it was time for a change and joined Paul at Gill St. Bernard’s. Our friendship immediately picked up where it left off again and we were back to fooling around full time.

Paul and I led pretty privileged existence, not because we were always flush with cash, but because of the associations we had at school. We took full advantage of all the opportunities available to us. With all the fantastic sights and experiences I was exposed to, it was sometimes difficult to impress me.

One winter day Paul and I and a dozen of our friends went skiing after school. We piled into Jeeps, Volkswagens and even a Camaro and caravanned the sixty miles up to Camelback Mountain in the Poconos. If you don’t know the mountain Camelback is a very modest 800 vertical feet. It was a cold gray day with quite a steady breeze. The snow was thin in the spots where it wasn’t ice. We had only been there about two hours when darkness fell and though there were lights for night skiing the visibility was poor. I remember thinking to myself “this sucks”.
Paul and I rode the lift together but because of the temperature and wind we stayed bundled up and didn’t say much.

About half way up Paul broke the silence and yelled louder than he needed to for me to hear him “this is great”! If you knew Paul you are probably thinking there must have been at least one expletive in that shout but I don’t remember it. What I do remember was being stunned! I was cold, couldn’t see, and was not finding the conditions up to the Vermont standards to which I had become accustomed.

Paul was not a stoic character by any measure; if he were not having fun everyone would know about it. But this day Paul recognized something I didn’t. We were in the prime of our lives, out doing what we loved to do, surround by good friends. I was so accustomed to that situation and that feeling that it had never crossed my mind that it wouldn’t go on forever. Paul’s positive shout helped turn that day around for me and I finally recognized that I was having a good time, not because of the conditions but despite them.

The next year I bought a student’s season pass at Camelback and I’m sure it was at least in part an attempt to relive those good times of the year prior as often as possible. I still get out on the mountain quite a bit and I have seen more than my share of days where the weather would have turned back the majority, but I refuse to be deterred. Not a day on the slopes goes by where I don’t yell out “this is great”! The best part of this simple gesture is that it is absolutely contagious. I don’t think any one of my friends could tell you why, but a sarcastic “this sucks” is reserved only for blue sky powder days, and no one can come within a hundred yards of us on a wicked weather
day without hearing “this is great” accompanied by a number of hoots and hollers.

Now I am married and have a son of my own. I hope one day to be able to teach him the life lesson that Paul taught me on that cold day in 1985. Appreciate the good things in life, especially when you have to look hard to find them.

- Mike Harwell

Paul snowboarding at Whistler Mountain in Vancouver even as he was undergoing chemotherapy. “This is great!”
The first time that I really started to get to know Paul was a few years ago on our annual pilgrimage to the Keys. Perhaps the fondest memory that I have of him was one day when we were out on the Waverunners. The conditions were perfect, the sun was bright, the sky was blue, and there were a few fluffy little clouds – just enough to look pretty without being threatening in any way. There was no chop on the water and the ocean looked like a pane of glass – you could see the ocean floor 15 feet below you. When the ocean is like this, the Waverunners glide through the water without the slightest bounce that characterizes most rides. It is a moment so fluid, so effortless that it feels like some idealized version of flying without all the turbulence and the bumpy landings. If memory serves, Kori was on the back of my Waverunner, arms around my waist. Paul was on a separate Waverunner riding solo, a plume of water shooting up from behind his watercraft.

Looking back, it reminds me of the scene in Easy Rider, when Jack Nicholson is riding on the back of Peter Fonda’s motorcycle flapping his arms, and Dennis Hopper is riding next to them, swerving back and forth just for the fun of it. The important similarities aren’t really the vehicles, or the number of people on them, but just the fact that those people were enjoying the ride. We were enjoying the tide that day. At the time, I was enjoying it more because the conditions were perfect then because I was able to have some of Paul’s precious time. After all, this was the beginning of our relationship, and I was still denying the gravity of his disease.

In hindsight, Paul being there was another part of the perfection of that ride. I can’t specifically remember Paul saying he enjoyed the ride that day, but I am convinced
he did nonetheless. Not just because the conditions were perfect, but also because Paul seemed like that kind of person to me. To me, Paul seemed like the kind of person who enjoyed his ride on this planet. Regardless of where he was coming from, regardless of where he was inevitably going, and regardless of the fact that the conditions weren’t always perfect like they were that day, he enjoyed the ride.

The wedding of Paul and Ellen is another fond memory. Again the conditions seemed perfect. A picturesque chapel, great food, great people, copious amounts of laughter and the joyous union of two people so wonderful they could only deserve each other. All of these things worked together to achieve the amazing accomplishment of allowing me to temporarily forget the underlying tragedy and enjoy one of the best weddings I ever attended.

- Jonathan Kalafer
A note Paul received once diagnosed terminal by his friend, Beth Harrison Meyer...

Ok, so I’m sucker for anything remotely related to horses! I had dinner last night at PF Changs and thought of you. I think of you often and I wish those thoughts would bring some words of wisdom or understanding, but I’m at a loss. Yes, I’m actually at a loss for an opinion to express! All I can say, and I know it is no comfort, is that, having lost my father, I believe it’s better to have been connected to something special for a short time than something or someone less than wonderful for a longer time.

You are truly a wonderful person and I am honored that you’ve been a part of my life. You have touched so many people. I so wish I could change things, but as you well know I can’t (I hate admitting these things), and I almost think that God must be hungry and looking for someone like you. I’m sure my father is.

- Love, Beth
Most of my memories of my cousin Paul are from my childhood. I was about 18 when Paul passed away. I wish we could have connected more as adults, but the times we did had a profound impact on me. I had always looked at Paul like a big kid, not too young, and not too old. He was young enough to connect on my level when we spoke and old enough were his advice was profound and insightful.

A frequent memory that comes to me when I think of Paul is of him standing on the beach. He is enormous, probably because I was about seven or eight at the time. Paul would make a day at the beach that much better. He always had his skim board with him. It’s this thin wooden ovular shaped board that he would throw into the water, run up to, jump on and glide down the water where the ocean meets the sand. He would ride that board like he was walking on water. I thought it was so cool. So of coarse my brother Billy and I would try it out, we would fall on our butts over and over again. But we didn’t care and Paul was very encouraging for us to keep on trying. It’s a really happy memory. My Mom loved Paul and it always made her really happy when he came down. We thought he was this really tall dark kid that came to play with us on the beach. I think I had a unique experience with Paul. I got to know my cousin Paul through a child’s eyes, and I’m not too old where I can’t go back to those memories. There is purity to those memories, innocence, a genuinely happy part of my life that we spent together and that is how Paul’s spirit will live on in my memories.

- Shannon Ryan
While my wife Patti and I were visiting with Paul in the very late stages of his illness, we so admired his willingness to share his emotions with us. We sat together in the study/bedroom of the Nardoni home that Sunday afternoon talking and laughing as if it were just another day. The sharing was cathartic for all three of us and enabled our conversation to be free of the worry of saying the wrong things. Whether Paul did this intentionally or this was just part of his personality, we will never know. However, what Patti and I did know, was that we were privileged to have had the opportunity to become friends of Paul, Ellen and the Nardoni family. Our time with Paul had been short, but exceptionally meaningful and very special.

On the Saturday prior to Paul’s death, I went to visit with Paul and to bring him a set of Elizabeth ‘football fashion wear’. He laughed when he opened the package and thanked me for thinking of him. While we were talking, Paul asked me to do him a favor. Of course I said I would be happy to help out in any way I could. Paul leaned over and whispered, “After I’m gone, I want you to tell my sister Renee that for the first time in her life, she’s #1”. Paul and I both laughed together and I promised him I would give Renee the message.

I kept that promise and while with family and friends at Stanton Ridge Country Club, celebrating Paul’s life, I quieted the group down and delivered Paul’s message to the entire crowd. Everyone got a real hoot out of the message and once again we were able to remember Paul’s spirited humor and ability to make people laugh.
PS: Ren told me that when they took Paul to the doctor’s office that same day, he insisted on wearing the ‘football fashion wear’.

- *From the heart of Jerry Moore*
Dear Ms. Nardoni:

I am writing to tell you that I was inspired by the obituary about your husband that appeared in the Star-Ledger. Although I had never met Paul, your husband and I have something very important in common. I too was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s disease as a young man, three years ago at the age of 36. I am actually surprised to find myself in remission today, because it appeared for a while that the high-dose chemotherapy and stem cell transplant I had undergone had failed to kill off the disease.

It was difficult for me to enjoy life when it appeared that I would have long to live. I, therefore, have a special appreciation for people like your husband who are able to demonstrate great spirit and enthusiasm for life in their final months. He sounds like a remarkable person, and I am sorry for your loss. I hope that you can derive some consolation from the thought that his life touched even strangers.

- Daniel Kueper, May 10, 2001
It’s a near impossible challenge to define someone’s spirit and philosophy in a few paragraphs, especially when that someone is Paul Nardoni. Paul had two mottos that defined him. One was Carpe Diem, the other is unprintable here. Both embraced the same tenets – seize the moment, live FOR the moment and live IN the moment.

Paul lived Carpe Diem. It was evident in the way he loved his family and friends, in the way he approached his illness and his treatment, and for me, in the three lessons Paul taught me. These underscored Carpe Diem more than any words he spoke.

The first lesson Paul taught me took place at a restaurant, or rather a series of restaurants. It didn’t take long for me to learn that if you went out to a restaurant with him, you could count on at least one dish being sent back to the chef because it “just wasn’t right”. Given his life as a chef, a less than perfect offering from any kitchen was not acceptable to Paul, or for anyone else dining with him. It happened every time we went out, and at the beginning, it was a source of apprehension. What would go back? How soon? Would the second effort meet with his approval? This behavior was a revelation to me, and I wondered why he never seemed satisfied. I looked forward to spending time with Paul, and after a while, began to anticipate with delight the interactions between him, the wait staff, the chef, the host/hostess.

In listening to these exchanges, it dawned on me that Paul felt life was too short to settle for anything that wasn’t exactly what he wanted. Whether it was a purchase from a store, or a meal at a restaurant, or service at a gas station or a car wash, if Paul felt that he wasn’t being met
with someone’s best effort, he told them. Paul gave the best of himself in all that he did - he didn’t think it was too much to ask that others did the same. He had very high standards, and he charmed people into meeting them. My first lesson, simply put, was Give your best and expect no less in return.

Paul lived in every moment, and the simplest of gestures spoke volumes about how much every day meant to him. Paul loved company, and if he was too tired to be up and about, it didn’t stop him from wanting to talk. Sitting at his bedside didn’t work for him. Lying in bed next to him did. It was not at all uncommon to stop by to see him and find him upstairs lying on his bed with one of his countless visitors lying next to him. He made you feel like your visit was the best part of his day; his bed was the most comfort- able place in the world. Laying there with him, talking, laughing or just being quiet – to this day, those are some of the funniest and most memorable moments in my life. After the first few visits, I started bringing my camera and taking photographs – I never knew who would be in Paul’s bed and it was the source of delight for both of us. At the time it seemed kind of silly, lying in bed with my brother-in-law. Now it is precious. The second lesson was “Show up and make the most of your time together.”

Paul’s best and most enduring lesson is an act of faith, an act of hope, an act of undaunting courage and above all, a complete act of love. He and Ellen got married. It was a story book setting - a white country church in the snowy twilight, candlelit ceremony, surrounded by family and friends. Together, Paul and Ellen chose life. They chose love, knowing the odds but taking the leap anyway.
My family rejoiced when Paul entered Ellen’s life, for only someone as special as he could love someone as special as Ellen. We would have loved him simply because she did, and wouldn’t have had to look any further than that. But Paul was never viewed through anyone else’s lens – just his own. He wanted to know all of the details of Ellen’s life, of the people and places and things that are so important to her. He wanted to know each of us, not just in the context of our relationship to or with Ellen, but who we are . . . what we think . . . how we feel. Paul formed a unique relationship with each of us. He wanted each of us to learn about him, what he thought, how he felt, what his dreams are.

It is impossible to put into words what Paul means to Ellen, but for those of us who love Ellen, who prayed that she would find someone whose capacity for love matched her own, we have witnessed a miracle. His capacity for joy, the music of his laughter, the sound of his voice, hearing him talk and laugh with Ellen filled us with delight. They didn’t think about how many days they might have together. They lived as though each day was their first and last one with each other.

Paul was in my life for a total of one thousand days. Not many in the span of a lifetime – about as long as it takes a person to earn a Master’s degree, or the average period of time a person stays at a job. A thousand days are so brief, but that time with Paul is so memorable. He is with me now, and he will be all the days of my life.

- Janice Miholics
Thanks You’s …

I am so grateful for all of the people that have contributed their very heart-felt stories to this project. I know that it was very challenging for some to dig down and tell stories about Paul and bring back memories. It is very intimidating to know that people will be reading your words and they will forever be in print! He obviously loved you all very much. Ellen, please note how many people wrote about the love between Paul and you - a story in and of itself.

The Nardoni/Ryan family is one to be proud of. Everyone has been so supportive of this book and every project we do for that matter!

Thanks to the Board of Directors for the Paul R. Nardoni Foundation for their continued support and participation. It so nice to work with people I consider family.

Thanks to Dave Flood and his staff at Somerset Hospital for saying “yes” to almost everything we asked to do with regards to building the oncology pavilion. Denise Hayes, from the Print Shoppe in Flemington, you saved my life!

To Mom and Dad, thank you for being the people you are. You raised an amazing son that so many people admired – you should be very proud of the legacy you created.
Facing a young death, Paul Nardoni stood face-to-face with life and said, “This is my life to live, how and the way I want”. His courage is to be admired and his ability to live life to the fullest is truly inspirational.

Through his family and closest friends, the reader will be inspired and compelled to reflect about what one would do in Paul’s “big” shoes should they face the fight of a lifetime.

How do you want to be remembered?

For more information:
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