

A Reflection of the Life of John Babbitt

Speech Given by Ted Corvino '94 at the Memorial Assembly

I want to start by thanking the Babbitt family, the school administrators, and especially the students who organized today's tribute to John Taylor Babbitt, especially Logan Bartlett and Kim Kimber, for giving me the opportunity to speak today about my memories of John. Several of the Junior girls have told me that they're counting on me to "keep it light" in my speech; I hope that they meant "funny" and not "brief". The students who organized and arranged this assembly did so with the intent of not wallowing in the grief of John's death, but rather to celebrate the life of their classmate, teammate, and friend. With that in mind, I hope that the Babbitts can forgive me for self-medicating with a "light" dose of humor.

Nick Devers asked me at about 11 o'clock last night if it was ok if he could slap me across the face in the event that I became too emotional on stage today. I, of course, told him no, that it would just remind of the last three dates I went on and make me even more depressed.

When I think of John Babbitt, I can't help but be reminded of an Education Psychology course that I took in college. In this particular course the subject of "classroom management" frequently worked its way into discussions, as it did in several other education courses for that matter. If you walk near my classroom on most days, you might think that I must have slept through those classroom management discussions. I like to think that all that yelling and screaming is the "sound of learning". As you might anticipate, there are a number of theories

as to creating and fostering a proper classroom atmosphere that get shared during classes directed at future teachers. One particular theory that seemed, at least to me, to have been universally accepted by a number of professors of education is that it is appropriate for a teacher to be friendly with his or her students, but is it never appropriate for a teacher to be friends with a student. As teachers we often

difference, he and I had many things in common. For one, we both had to work real hard in school, and it didn't always come easy for either of us. Then, there's food. We both liked to eat and spent many Sundays together shoving Cluck U chicken bites into our faces as we anxiously waited for Peter Cipriano, seated across the table, to come up for air during one of his endless diatribes or simply pass

out from jaw exhaustion, so that John or I could get a word in. Also, I always identified with John's desire to project the image of a tough-guy. Like me, he tried relentlessly to convince people he was "hard," as he liked to say. Neither John nor I have had much success in that department. John couldn't ever be hard with that baby-face that all the girls thought was so cute, and I could never be hard as long as I continued to live at home with my mother, which my first period seniors like to point out as often as possible. John loved sports, in particular, base-

ball. The Yankees were his team, which immediately made us the best of friends. Had he been a Red Sox fan, I assure you this speech would be a lot shorter. We both played baseball for the same teams, Pingry in the spring and Flor-Mad Post 43 American Legion in the summer. We both played for the same iconic coaches, Manny Tramontana at Pingry and the notorious Shupe family of the Legion Post. For both John and me, the only things tantamount to actually playing baseball was trading baseball stories involving either Coach Trem or the Shupes. I'd need a week to tell them all, but believe me, there are some great ones... most are probably unsuitable for mixed company anyway.



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John with his brother, Andrew (III)

find ourselves at the crossroads of theory and practice... and in the case of befriendng students, I have more often than not ignored the route of theory entirely. In spite of universally accepted pedagogical thought about teachers being friendly but never friends with students, the fact of the matter is that I am proud as hell to have called John Babbitt "my friend" and will continue to be proud of that fact as long as I live. I am only sorry that I didn't get a chance to tell him just how much I cared for him two Sundays ago.

John Babbitt was easy to befriend. We spent most Sundays together and in spite of our age

John and I both loved to go to Pingry events to cheer the others on. My favorite Babbitt cheers came during this year's Girls Soccer State Championship Finals down on the frozen tundra at the College of New Jersey. After Rob Tilson's crowd-inspiring trombone riffs were immediately banned by NJSIAA officials at the gate, John reassured me that he would save the day and inspire the soccer team by getting the crowd going with some cheers. All he could come up with was, "move together as a unit, girls" and "respect your opponent" as well as my personal favorite, "stay hydrated, ladies." To this day I am convinced that the girls tied that game, 0-0, certainly not because of a lack of athletic prowess but because John's cheers were so awful. He did succeed in making the entire student section double over with laughter though. In all seriousness, what stands out most to me in terms of the things we had in

common is that we both loved and appreciated nothing more than spending warm spring and summer days running in and out of a baseball dugout, knowing that our grandpas were always in the stands at every game, smiling from ear to ear watching their boys.

Even though I never conveyed in words to John that I had thought of him as my friend, I think he assumed we had a little more than just the standard student/teacher or player/coach relationship. "How do I know this?" you ask. Well, we did spend quite a bit of time hanging out, but for some unexplainable reason, John immensely enjoyed having access to my cell phone number and, as if he knew we were friends, he frequently called me in wee hours of the night. Now, don't get me wrong. Like any normal human being would react when the phone rings at two in the morning, I would get worried. I would check the caller ID and see his name, and my fear would turn to anger. I would then answer the phone, hear John's voice, and in a flash my anger would disappear. I don't know what it was about him, but I couldn't stay angry with him for very long at all.

He tested that phenomenon though. John introduced me to a little technological service known as IP Relay. Middle Schoolers: Ear Muffs! IP Relay, for those of you who don't know, is a fantastic service... if used properly. I believe the service was most often used by, and intended to assist, those who are hearing-impaired. If one has a significant hearing impairment, one might, quite naturally, have difficulty carrying on a conversation via the telephone. Well, the IP Relay service allows the hearing-impaired person to log onto a website and types a message that he/she would like relayed in spoken word to a person via a third party. The professional on the host side of the website takes the typed words and reads them verbatim over the phone to the intended recipient, or in my case, victim, and then type the responses back to the hearing impaired person's computer screen. Well, on several occasions John would craft elegantly written messages consisting entirely of random dirty words that would make even Howard Stern blush. The IP Relay technician would then be forced to read John's messages to me over the phone. Had this been your standard prank phone call, it would be easy to simply hang up, but it usually took me at least several minutes to figure out why this polite-sounding young woman on the other end of the phone was carefully announcing each syllable of the various slang terms for male and female anatomical parts. It was wrong on so many levels... but

still kind of funny.

I realize that although John had many, many friends here at

mischief, then you definitely have some John Babbitt in you. Apparently, if you have ever



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school, there are many of you in the audience today who may not have known him real well. That's understandable. What you might not know is that there is a little of John Babbitt in everyone here today. If you have ever said something that your friends thought was really funny, but you really didn't intend for it to be that funny, then you have a little Babbitt in you. If you wholeheartedly love to simply be in the presence of a group of your friends or being surrounded

disrobed and run laps around a late-night delivery woman, you have more John Babbitt in you than anyone cares to envision.

It is very hard to argue that John's passing was anything but tragic, but there are undeniable, positive lessons that we can learn from this experience. The first is to recognize that for many, Pingry is much more than just a school. It is much more than just an institution that allows students and teachers to pursue means of bettering

themselves on levels independent from one another. The Pingry experience is not about padding a college portfolio or professional resumé. The Pingry experience is about community, about family. Unfortunately, it frequently takes a tragic event or the loss of one of our own for us to realize just how much we rely on one another in this family. A second lesson is to recognize and come to grips with the fact that our time on Earth is finite, so we must learn to cherish the small things, appreciate the seemingly insignificant moments, and make the best of the time we have, leaving as few regrets behind as possible. A third lesson to learn is to have a strong faith. Not everyone will share John's strong Catholic values, but hopefully we can share a common faith in the genuine goodness that exists in all people and not be satisfied by just recognizing goodness in others, but to actively strive to demonstrate our own goodness.

There is a special place in my heart that will always remain for John Babbitt. I regret not telling him that I loved him. But I promised to not make that same mistake twice. There is a place in my heart for all of my friends in this auditorium today, and I love you too.



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by the team, you know a little of what it's like to be John Babbitt. If you ever stopped in the middle of a sentence, sensing a camera lens was pointing in your general direction so that you can plan your facial expression for the photo, then that's all Babbitt. If you ever valiantly plugged away at studying for a quiz only to get a C+... and then thanked the teacher, you have got a bit of John in you. If you ever smiled out of the side of your mouth while creating a little innocent



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