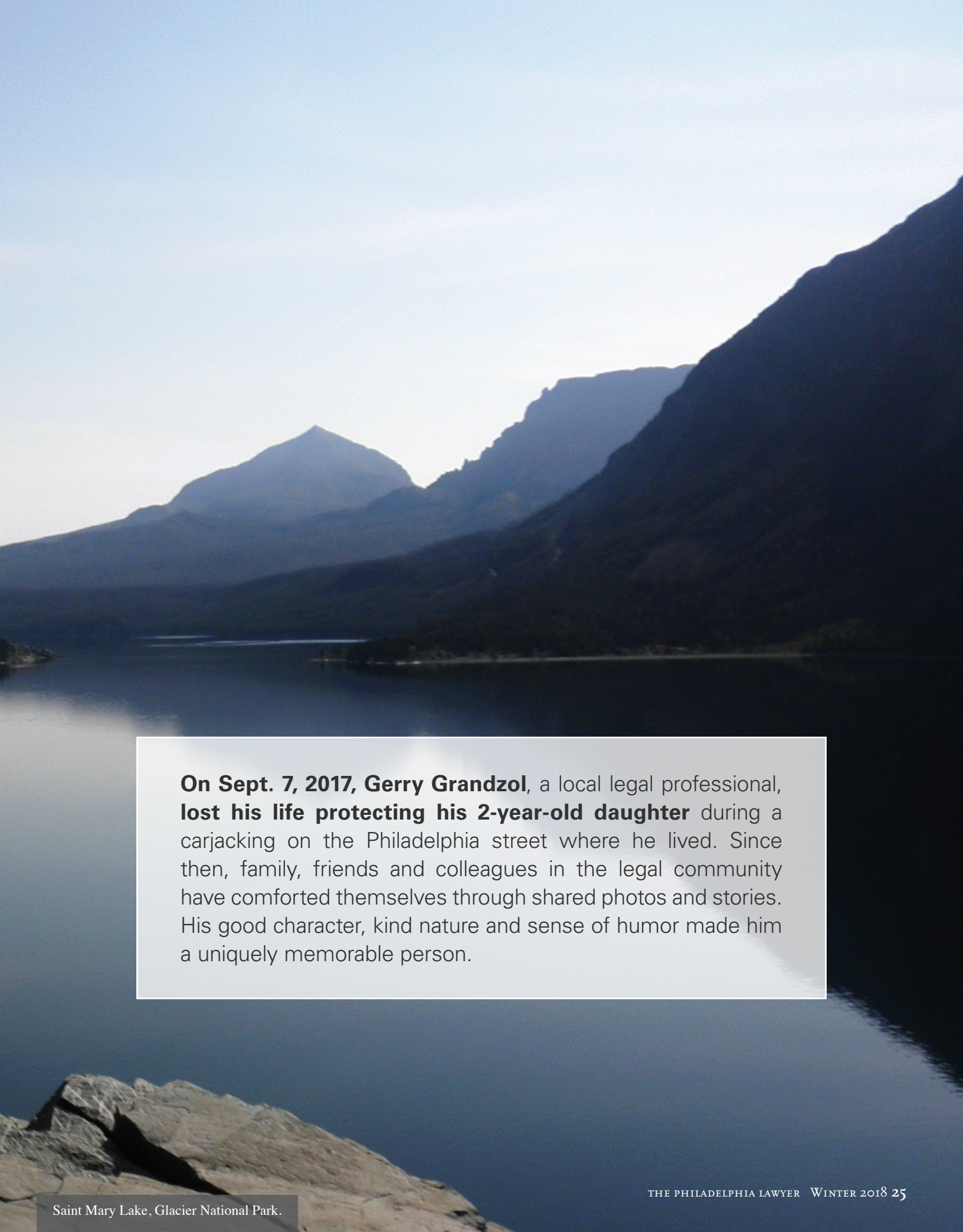
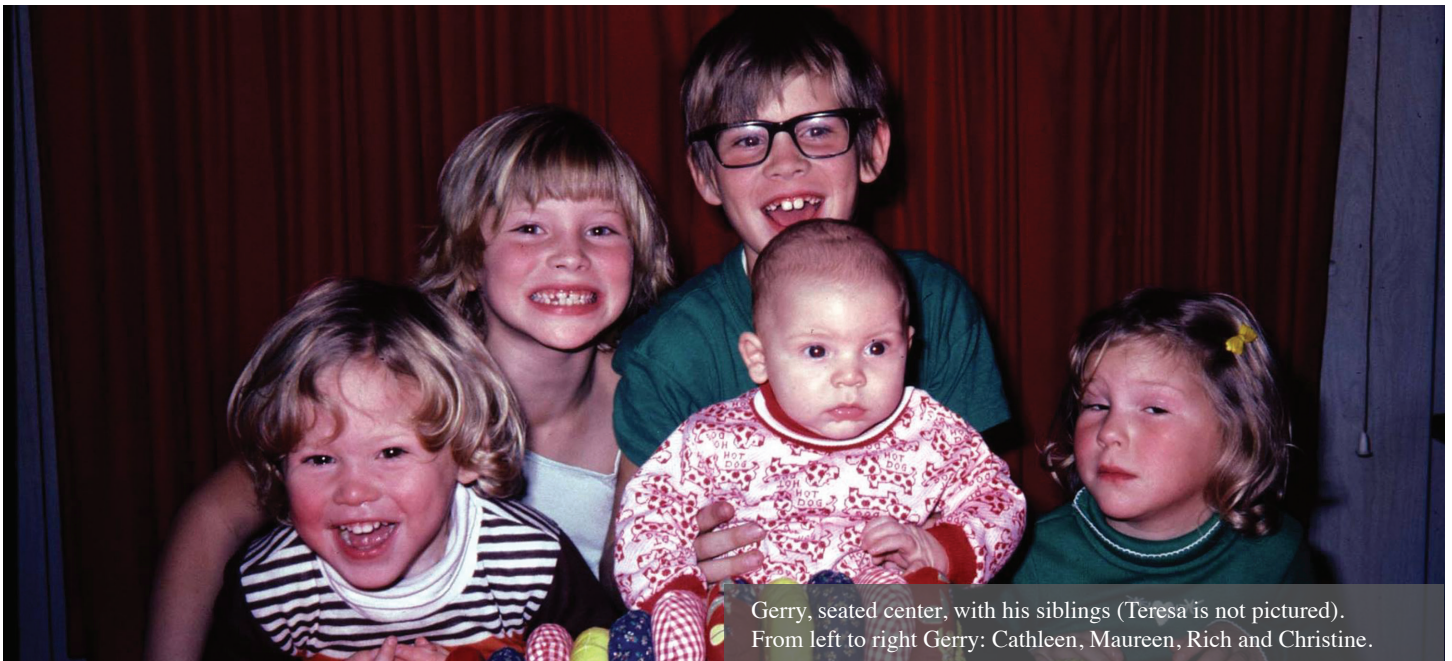

Celebrating the Life of Gerard Grandzol

By Laura Powers





On Sept. 7, 2017, Gerry Grandzol, a local legal professional, **lost his life protecting his 2-year-old daughter** during a carjacking on the Philadelphia street where he lived. Since then, family, friends and colleagues in the legal community have comforted themselves through shared photos and stories. His good character, kind nature and sense of humor made him a uniquely memorable person.



Gerry, seated center, with his siblings (Teresa is not pictured).
From left to right Gerry: Cathleen, Maureen, Rich and Christine.

One thing that is absolutely true, that everyone would agree on, no matter how you knew Gerry Grandzol – as a friend, a brother, a neighbor, a colleague – is that Gerry is memorable.

He is described as a “human supernova” by one friend. His hobbies included woodworking, guitar, photography, hiking, camping, gardening, grilling and cooking and he was good at all of them. He biked to his job at Special Counsel every day, no matter what the weather, and could fix a flat on the way with no trouble. He was a lifelong devoted ice hockey player.

His neighbors will tell you that he was always outside. If he saw kids riding down his street, even strangers, he would call them over to clean their bikes and their chains. He would teach them about bicycle maintenance for as long as they would listen.

Gerry and his wife, Kristin, have a sheepdog named Oscar. Gerry walked him everywhere around their Spring Garden neighborhood, north of Center City. On his walks, Gerry made an effort to introduce himself to new business owners in the area. He supported and patronized Philadelphia’s small businesses and would encourage his friends and coworkers to do the same.

But although his hobbies and interests were numerous and admirable, there was more to Gerry.

For seven years, Gerry was a board member of the Franciscville Neighborhood Development Corporation, an organization that is invested in improving the quality of life in the North Philadelphia community of Franciscville. Mac Curtain lived with Gerry, first in Manayunk and later in Franciscville when they moved there together. The boys had met in third grade and played hockey together throughout their lives. “Gerry took to the neighborhood immediately. Within months everyone knew who he was. He got really involved really fast in neighborhood association meetings. He encouraged me and other friends to come to the meetings and vote, to have a voice in the community,” Mac told me.

Eventually Gerry moved to Spring Garden. Another friend, Patrick Casey, moved there as well, settling down on the same block as Gerry and Kristin. Patrick had known Gerry since they were 5 years old and growing up in Doylestown. They maintained a friendship through high school and college, then Patrick headed to Georgetown Law. He returned to Philadelphia, clerked for Judge James Gardner Collins and worked at Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC for ten years. He has been with Connor, Weber & Oberlies since 2016 practicing insurance defense and civil litigation.

“He liked the developing nature of our neighborhood,” said Patrick. “Gerry would attend every meeting and made sure to meet every family on the street. If you felt proud for introducing yourself to a new neighbor as they moved in, you would find that Gerry had met them weeks earlier.”

Patrick described to me the vacant lots and abandoned properties in and around the neighborhood that Gerry would note and document. He couldn’t stand to see the neglect and degradation that these spaces conveyed to the community. He would track down and reach out to property owners to determine their intentions or to alert them to trash on their land or vandalism in their vacant buildings.

Another neighbor, Julia Griffith, told me, “Gerry knew everything happening in the neighborhood. He knew about all the abandoned lots. He attended every Spring Garden Civic Association meeting. He was active in the community garden and encouraged others to get involved. He would remind us to vote and when we told him we didn’t know the candidates, he would tell us in detail about each of them. He took pride in this neighborhood. He loved every single bit of Philadelphia.” In 2002, Julia and her husband, Brad, moved to Philadelphia. Brad joined a hockey league and met Gerry. Subsequently, they all became neighbors.

As a public relations professional working in Philadelphia, Jeff Jubelirer has a first-hand knowledge and expertise in public policy advocacy and civic issues management. In 2010, Jeff opened his own public relations consultancy on



Gerry's hockey friends honoring his number, 24.

“He knew what it took to keep the friendships going. He remembered everyone’s birthday and would get everyone together to celebrate whether it was a big blowout party or just grabbing a beer.”

the same floor as Special Counsel at 16th and Market streets. When I recently spoke with Jeff, he told me that “Gerry had a nose for being interested in community events, community affairs and politics. He attracted people to him which is a very appetizing recipe for political leadership. Gerry was magnetic. You wanted to be around him. He was enthusiastic about life.” Both men worked in the legal industry and shared stories in the hallway and a few commiserations. “With Gerry’s knack for politics, it wouldn’t have surprised me at all if he had gone on to do more civic work outside of his profession.”

I regret that I am not able to share the voices of all of the many people that Gerry met through his community activism. His outreach was vast, heartfelt and passionate.

But hobbies, lasting friendships and neighborhood work aside, what made Gerry most memorable to those who knew and loved him was that he was uniquely ... **Gerry**. His attitude. His disposition. His humor. The fact that he always had a smile. The way he laughed. He remembered details about people and kept track of them. He always worked to connect people in his life and he strived to keep them connected to each other through the years.

Gerry had a large group of friends and some of them have all been buddies since they were little kids. “Gerry was the driving force behind it,” said Mac. “He knew what it took to keep the friendships going. He remembered everyone’s birthday and would get everyone together to celebrate whether it was a big blowout party or just grabbing a beer.” He was the connection that kept the group in touch. “Gerry taught me the value of real friendship.”

To know a close friend and keep in touch with them for more than 30 years – to remain so close that you are in each other’s weddings – would be unique for any one of us. But this wasn’t unique for Gerry. He had many well-established long-lasting friendships.

“Gerry had a relentless amount of energy,” Patrick told me. “He was blunt. He was straightforward. But he had a great capacity to keep track of people and get them together.” This

may be why he was so good at the recruitment and placement of attorneys in his role at Special Counsel.

By the time Lisa Goldstein joined Special Counsel as executive director in 2009, Gerry had worked his way to the position of senior placement director, having started as a temporary paralegal in 2003. In 2017, he accepted Lisa’s executive director position when she was promoted to Parker + Lynch, the legal search division of Special Counsel. There were four people on the team when she and Gerry started working together and she could see that Gerry had valuable talent and a knack for recruiting. Throughout his career at Special Counsel, he was consistently recognized and awarded as a top performer.

“Gerry’s heart was good and he had a great perspective on life,” Lisa said. She supported Gerry as he became more and more confident in his work at Special Counsel. “He excelled at his job because he was really fantastic at relationships.”

Gerry insisted on maintaining his cubicle to stay close to his team rather than moving into an office. Today, his jackets, extra shoes and personal knickknacks remain as he left them in his cube. His whole team decided to keep his memory in plain sight so they can think about him every day. Nothing has been moved or put away.

As I talked with his childhood friends, his family, his colleagues... I came to a realization about telling someone else’s story. Although I know his sisters from sharing a common group of friends, I had never met Gerry. This distance allowed me just a bit of perspective that otherwise I might not have had. My realization was that I didn’t need to search for big dramatic stories that would convey all the meaning of Gerry’s life for us in one scene. Our lives are intertwined because of a hundred, a thousand, a million small interactions. In searching for events that described the heroic, kind, funny, smart ass, genuine, sporty handyman that Gerry was, I was finding the small packages of kindness and caring that embed themselves inside of us and create our memories of a friend. It was these interactions that everyone was telling me about;



"It was rare to look at Gerry and not see him smiling. He was happy. He loved his life." Maureen Newberry, sister.



Gerry with his daughter, Violet (left), and a neighborhood friend.

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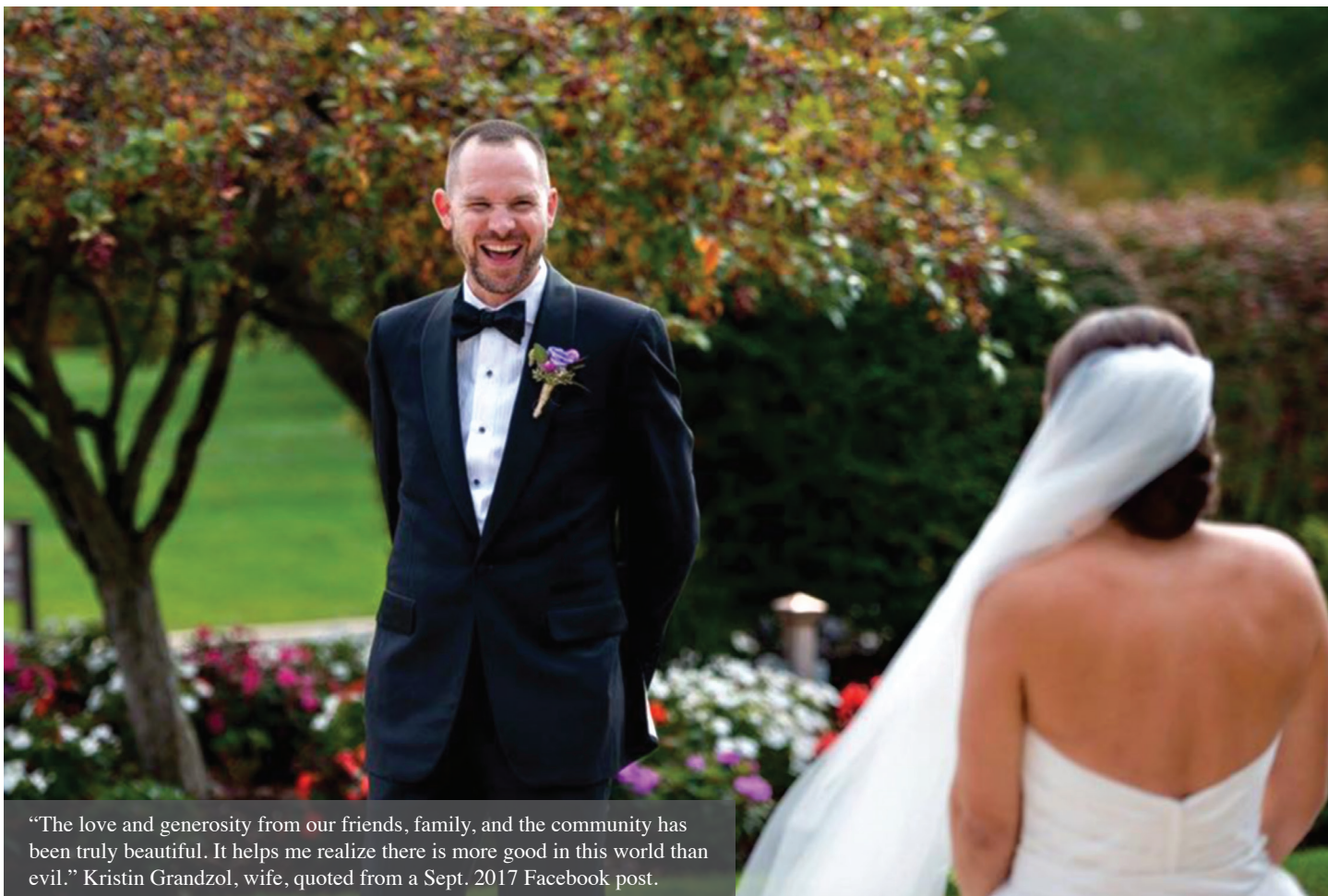
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What else is the human experience if it is not the experience of impacting the life of someone else so much that they always remember you smiling and laughing?

I just had to listen. When I did, I heard how Gerry found his true calling as a husband and father. How Gerry was the one to bring water balloons and toys for the kids when the neighbors would grill out in the park on Sundays. How Gerry attended a golf and tennis benefit having never played tennis before, and just played terribly, but had a great time doing it. And in doing so, made it more memorable for everyone around him. And more hilarious. How Gerry was "absolutely, no question" the one individual that you would call in a middle-of-the-night emergency because he was your most reliable and capable friend. How Gerry was so goofy, so quirky, and so consistently the life of the party.

Although these stories were all very personal to the storyteller; every one of the stories involved some version of "Gerry was always smiling," or "Gerry had a great laugh." Isn't this how we would all choose to be remembered? What else is the human experience if it is not the experience of impacting the life of someone else so much that they always

remember you smiling and laughing? I can't think of a better honor to designate an extraordinary life.

To paraphrase Thoreau, it is the obligation of the living to fulfill the promise of the life of a friend who has been lost. We can fulfill the promise of Gerry's life through the manner in which we interact with others and with our communities. By remembering the impact that Gerry made, every day in many ways, we can better understand our obligation and his gift.

Gerard Grandzol's life was celebrated on Sept. 13, 2017, in a service at the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul on Logan Square – a church that can comfortably accommodate more than 2,000 worshippers. "I knew that the Basilica would be packed," Mac told me as we ended our conversation. "It was standing room only. That was evidence of how he touched people. That was Gerry. That was all real and genuine." ■

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