

Mary Kaye Waldron Award Dinner

In my work as a Chaplain at Boston College, I have the privilege of coming to know some exceptional students here. When I was asked to speak this evening, I was deeply honored to remember one of the most outstanding friends of my life, Mary Kaye Waldron. Those of you present tonight who knew her will understand the challenging task I have before me. It is impossible to speak of Mary Kaye without sounding over sentimental, but the reality is that she was a rare and precious soul whom many of us felt privileged to call friend.

It was my great pleasure to meet Mary Kaye during her second year at BC, just before she was diagnosed with a relapse of bone cancer, something she had spent most of her high school years battling. The image I will always carry of her is her bright smile and amazing spirit, and so from the beginning, that is how I knew her. I know that what I most cherish from knowing her is that she taught me great lessons in living. She did not teach me how to die with grace, although she did that; rather she taught me some lessons about how to live life to the fullest, and for that I shall always be grateful.

When I spoke with the organizers of this dinner about the award that had been named for Mary Kaye, they said that they wanted to honor a member of the faculty or administration who has gone above and beyond what is expected to be a member of this community. The award could not be more aptly named. From the beginning months of Mary Kaye's time here, she immersed herself into this community and came to call it home. The decision for her to come here was no small thing, because she was on crutches and the obstacles were sizable. While to many of us on the outside, it may have seemed that she must have had many limitations, to Mary Kaye, the world had no limits or none that she could not surmount.

During the many times that Mary Kaye would leave BC for chemotherapy or other treatments at Children's Hospital, she always wanted to come back to BC, to her friends, to her classes, and to all of her activities here. She spoke in my class during the fall of 1994. In her talk, she said, "Through it all, I remained at BC. I had to in order to stay sane. Leaving BC would have devastated me, and because of the amazingly altruistic parents I have, they understood this. The support came from all angles. I decided to concentrate on all of the wonderful things that I had in life, instead of the things I didn't have. The more I was surrounded by loving people, the more the rage died down. I realized that there were a lot of things that never would have happened to me if I had never been sick, a lot of people I never would have met."

As many of you know, Mary Kaye involved herself in so many of the activities that make this university a wonderful place. She served as manager for the men's basketball team, which was something that she deeply loved. She was a member of Jenks Leadership and the Salt and Light Company. But I know what she loved most about BC was the people...from her roommates to her classmates, from the coaches and players on the basketball team to all of her friends in Salt and Light, from her professors to special friends in the administration, Mary Kaye embraced all of the people she met with a huge heart.

What I often noticed was that Mary Kaye invited people into authentic relationships. Perhaps because of her illness and her struggles, she had such an openness and people were able to speak with her in genuine ways. There was a depth to her friendships that was unique. She inspired people to carry that depth into their relationships with their friends and family as well. She could be serious, but more often than not, she was very funny and loved to have a good time. She understood the importance of living a balanced life. Her faith was deeply important to her, and she was comfortable sharing that with others.

Initially I said that Mary Kaye taught me how to live. This was most powerfully communicated to me in December of 1994, just four months before her death. I was visiting her in her hospital room at Children's

Hospital, and she had recently been told that there was nothing more that could be done for her. There was an invasive procedure that could be done, simply to extend her life for God only knew how long. She was talking with me about whether to undergo this painful surgical procedure. One thing I recall was that we talked about life after death, and she said, "Paula, I really do believe in God and heaven and I think it will be a wonderful place of love, but how can it be more wonderful than here, because all of the people I love are here?" Because of those wonderful people, she indeed chose to undergo the procedure because it might allow her to live long enough to say good-bye to her friends from BC who wouldn't be returning to campus for at least several more weeks at the end of winter break. She so wanted to see all of the people whom she loved and who loved her.

Miracles do happen, and Mary Kaye not only lived to see her friends in January but returned to school, and in the last three months of her life attended classes and did homework, went on the Senior Retreat and senior pub crawl and went to the basketball tournament in New York. She defied the odds. She so appreciated all of the small day-to-day aspects of being at college, and in so doing, she taught me and so many of her friends to appreciate what we too often take for granted.

It was April 15 of last year that she left us...left us with perhaps a deeper understanding of what it means to have loved...to have loved her and to have been loved by her. Among the gifts she left to many of us were the new friends we met in our common connection to having known her. Her parents, Jim and Bonnie, her sister Tara and brother-in-law Dan, were such a part of Mary Kaye's life, and so they have become friends with her friends. They continue to honor Mary Kaye by extending themselves in friendship to so many, and they continue to honor her by loving Boston College with the same love she had for this school and the people who are a part of it.

It is now my honor to introduce Mary Kaye's father, Jim Waldron.