

*Peter Corrigan's words for Hoover*

*Read by my wife, Dale at Hoover's Celebration Saturday, February 2, 2008*

UNBELIEVABLE! UNBELIEVABLE! These were the last two words Hoover ever spoke to me. It was the Monday after, the Giants improbable victory (that I predicted) over the Packers at frozen Lambeau Field. Of course he was talking about the Giants, but in reality, in retrospect, he was talking about his own life.

Hoover is my BFF (best friend forever as the kids say). That is the way I signed our Christmas card to him this year. He got a real kick out of that one. He is my Brother, my Hero. I know these words resonate with many of the people here today. I know I am not alone with these feelings.

He loved many things. He loved Westport, Compo Beach and Longshore. He loved the ladies, he loved music-turning many onto FUV-90.7 FM, he loved cars-particularly Fords and anything with Mag Wheels. In fact, for all three of his vans, he had to buy different wheels-you know, to make it look cool. He loved all sports, even auto racing. Is that a sport? He loved all the New York Sports Teams. He is the last white guy in Connecticut to still follow the Knicks. Loved the Rangers, the New York Giants and the New York Yankees. But most of all, he loved his friends.

His house on Manitou was the hangout, his room, the epicenter for the last 33 years. I would often go there - a few times a week. If I hadn't see him or talked to him in a couple days, he would call me up and leave me a voicemail saying "What, are you mad at me? Did I do something wrong? I don't think I did anything wrong. Call me." Then hang up. Pretty funny. Over the years, I have watched countless sporting events at Hoover's. My mother asks me, rhetorically, "Where did you watch the game?" I don't answer. "Who did Hoover root for?" She already knows the answers to both questions. You never knew who would walk through the door: the usual suspects, the cast of characters and I say this with complete and utter fondness. His friends are my friends. My friends are his friends. He has been a huge part of my life. My one fear is that with his physical absence, the gang will drift apart. It is up to all of us not to let that happen. He was the fabric, the glue that kept us all together. Where can you find so many friends still hanging out after all these years? I think you would be very hard pressed to find a greater bunch of friends.

People search and search to find their vocation, their purpose in life. I think it came quite easily to Hoover. His purpose is to be a great friend, to so many. Kevin Clark and I were talking about how he was able to stay so strong, no health issues, stay pretty much trouble free, for so long, compared to other quadriplegics. He beat all the odds. Kevin said, "Maybe it has something to do with 100 of your closet friends being around you, constantly." Ding, ding, ding. That's it! He has the best friends. A whole bunch of people here today, hung out with him before his accident. And NOBODY ditched him after the accident. Apparently in other similar situations, it happens quite often. People feel they can't handle it and disappear. Not Hoover's friends-no way. He touched so

many. My seven year olds' Brownie troop has a saying, "A circle is round, it never ends, that is how long I will be your friend." Another one is, "Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver, the other is gold." Jeez, it looks like Fort Knox with all the gold in here. Those Brownies are pretty smart cookies. Friendship is a huge, an invaluable part of all our lives. Treasure it. Let's face it. Without good friends, life would stink!

Milo and Nancy are two of the greatest parents that I have ever known. To give of one's self so completely, is truly, awe inspiring. A picture of them at OUR wedding reception is the last picture in OUR wedding album. That gives you an idea of how Dale and I fell about Milo and Nancy. There is nothing like the love of a mother. I want to personally thank Nancy. I have been blessed with wonderful mothers in my own life. Ma Corrigan #1, my mother-in-law-super, Tom Grime's mother, Kevin Clark's mother-wonderful. Nancy Wilder has mothered me as one of her own for more than three decades. I know that will continue. Nancy-thank you, thank you, thank you.

The events that transpired last week came on very suddenly. I have gone through a full spectrum of emotions. I know some people are mad. Many more, sad. I have cried every single day since Hoover first went into the hospital. That's fifteen days and counting. I even cried, the other day, when I heard an Allman Brother's song on my car radio. Oh brother. I now look at this whole situation, as it has unfolded, as happening exactly the way it was supposed to. From the start to the finish, exactly the way it was supposed to. I cannot deny that there is a void, a dent, make that a gaping hole in my heart. They say that everything happens for a reason. I believe it. AND I believe, that it is up to us, to find that positive reason. Sometimes in the midst of it all, it is impossible to find that positive thing. But if you continue to look, look hard, you will find it. We all go through tough times in life, but I feel it is imperative to make all things positive, to find the silver lining in every cloud.

I have never heard him complain, seen him depressed, sad or get mad. If anybody has a right to those feelings, it would be him. Wait back that up. I have seen him mad. If a referee didn't give the team he was rooting for the call, he would get mad. Followed immediately by some colorful, salty language, accompanied by a slap on his lapboard.

When Dale and I were at the hospital, it was very obvious I was having an extremely hard time. Sandy said some wonderful words to us. "We all love Hoover. We love his heart, his soul. It is not his body. That doesn't matter. He is still here." Wow! Wow!

Hoover had a real knack for being present, living in the moment. I had a harder time doing this until our daughter Dani (one of Hoover's Goddaughters) was born seven years ago. It doesn't matter if I am having a hard time with a real estate deal, or whatever, when I get home, she deserves to have me be present, to focus on her, not to have my mind someplace else. I am now making a conscious effort to feeling Hoover present, here, with me. This is a newer thing for me and will take some effort on my part to get used to. When thinking about Hoover, and if I am feeling a little sad, I steer my thoughts to what a great guy he is, what a gift he is to me, what a huge presence he is in my life

and I literally can feel my face change and a smile appear. I will continue to honor and celebrate Hoover in the present, rather than to think of him in the past.

Hoover loved to go for rides in his new van. He got a Toyota Mini-van, imagine that, not a Ford, in July 2005. And I loved driving him. We would go any chance we got, particularly on Fridays. Dale and I had a standing deal. On Fridays, Hoover and I would usually go for a cruise and then I would usually meet my great friends Sal and Martha Lucci, for dinner, at Dunvilles, around seven. I thanked my wife before Thanksgiving, for supporting me in doing this. It meant so much to Hoover and I. It was quite the project getting him out the door. He would say, "Get my green coat. Get the headrest. What do you want to drink? Get some Water, soda and beer."

"Hey Hoover. That's a lot of fluids for two guys."

"You never know whom you might meet," he would say. "Get the blue cooler, it's in my closet. Do I need sunglasses? There, over there. How much gum and candy do I have? Get the gum, fireballs, Swedish fish and sweet tarts. What CD do you want to bring? Allman Brothers? Don't forget the XM Radio or my wallet. Oh, grab a hat. No not that one, the other one." With all the crap we would take, I sometimes felt like we were going for an overnight trip, instead of a cruise for a couple hours.

Hoover's new van is so much easy to get in and out of. Press one bottom and the door opens, the van tilts down and the ramp unfolds. Like magic. Hoover had a peg installed on the bottom of this chair, that slides into a slot on the floor. No more latches, clamps, do-hickeys things. Presto. Ready. As Jackie Gleason used to say, "and away we go!"

Once we got rolling, the commands started coming, fast and furious. For anyone who has driven any of his vans, you know exactly what I am talking about. "Put the radio on. Turn the heat on low, put the vent on floor, aim that vent towards me: a little bit this way, no a little bit that way, OK. Crack my window: no too much, no too little, that's good. Open the rear vent windows. Change the radio station; try button 3,4, 8. Turn it louder. It that the Allman Brothers? No. Change it. What time is it? Put on the WFAN-Mike and the Mad Dog. Oh the Dog! He's an idiot! He knows nothing about sports! Change it back to the music. Try button 1. That's good. Volume. Put the headlights on. No not the headlights-the parking lights. Hit the windshield wipers for me one time. Turn the temperature knob. Did you open the rear vent windows? Could you do me and Nance a big favor? How much gas do I have? Lets get gas and we can also get the van washed." Yikes! Now mind you, this is all while I am driving!! After 30 years though, you get used to it.

The cruises always started out the same. Go through Longshore. Go by Timmy and Ann Marie Romano's house. Go see if Coop-John Cooper is at the pro shop. Go in back, to see if Johnny Kondub is hitting golf balls. By the way, did you see Johnny hitting golf balls two Sundays ago on westportnow.com. It was 26 degrees out. Go through Compo Beach. Make a couple of laps. Go downtown. And after that, go wherever. It is during these rides, we would both talk more deeply than we usually would. Hard to believe that after three decades together, two brothers could get even closer. We were away from the distractions of his room: The TV, stereo, his computer, the internet, the phone. Just him,

me and the open road. Well you know, and the constant changing of radio stations, opening and closing of windows, changing this that and the other thing.

About six months ago, Hoover started saying some stuff that kinda startled me. Like: “this is my last van. We should do this more often, because I don’t how many Fridays I have left. Nobody lives forever.” He didn’t say it with a heavy heart, but rather matter of factly. Me being me, I just went with it.

“Well, after you go, what are you going to do with all your crap? I would ask.

“Do you want my van?” he said.

“Sure I’ll take your van. What about all your other junk?”

“You want it?”

“What all your old dusty Allman Brothers CDs? Nah, you can keep those.”

And that was it. Over. Done. As fast as it came up, it was gone again. Then we would just keep driving. I would never bring it up, it was always him. It didn’t seem to be a big deal. We always left it on a funny note. Another time I suggested that his legacy could be to put fountains in the three water hole hazards at Longshore Golf Course. He liked that idea. “Let me think about that one,” he said. Now, looking back, I wonder if Hoover was having premonitions, foretelling the future or just jerking my chain.

Boy, did we love those rides! I looked forward to them every week. I just read in Hoover’s old Bedford Junior High School’s Yearbook (the best junior high school in Westport, by the way) that he wanted to become a racecar driver. Hol-Dana Hollingsworth told Nancy that when Hoover drove Milo’s old blue LTD that he loved to patch out, lay rubber, do hole shots, you know spin the tires. I was a passenger in that car during some of those episodes. Well, old habits die hard. His wish was my command. Truth be told. Since I was his hands and feet, when he said floor it, I floored it. Let me tell ya, there ain’t nothin’ cooler then a couple of fifty years olds laying patches in a minivan.

Hoover would be mad if I didn’t say go Giants! Go Big Blue!

HOOVER, I love you. My Brother, my Hero. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

It has been an incredible ride. I leave you with those two words he left me,

UNBELIEVABLE! UNBELIEVABLE!