

Eulogy

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Joy Hackett and without Kevin Miller my life might have gone in a very different direction. I want to thank all of you for coming today to remember Kevin and to celebrate his life. I'm deeply honoured that Sue asked me to be here this afternoon. Over the years, Kevin and Sue, and their kids, Caitlyn and Nick, have become like a second family to my husband and me, as well as to our daughter. In fact, Caitlyn used to babysit for us.

Many of us have a song we go back to time and again when we need something to motivate us. For Kevin Miller it was "Glory Days" by Bruce Springsteen.

Some folks of a certain age might remember the song. It's about people living in the past, because their past was so much better than their present. Near the end there's the line, "I hope when I get old I won't sit around thinkin' about it, but I probably will."

You may not realize this, but Kevin didn't have the most auspicious start to his adult life. He was born in 1961, which means he was a teenager during the 70s. His suburban high school had a bit of a reputation as a party school, and he didn't do much to counter that reputation.

In spite of all that, Kevin was a smart kid, and a good athlete. He was a wide receiver on the football team, played trombone in the school band, and he was just about as good at school as he needed to be. As he admitted later, he also had "way too much fun."

After high school, Kevin went away to Nova Scotia for university. Acadia. He told me once that he applied to Acadia because it had a good football team and because he wanted to make a fresh start away from some of his high school friends. He was also looking for a university that wasn't too big. He did well in his first year – better than his last year at high school, in fact. But as his workload increased, so did the time he spent in the student hangouts around Wolfville.

Kevin left Acadia midway through his second year and went down to Halifax to figure out what he wanted to do next. He thought maybe he'd picked the wrong discipline. He worked as a security guard for a while, and then at a gas station.

That all sounds like the life of someone who wasn't all that happy. Maybe someone whose glory days had already passed him by. I don't think Kevin ever believed that, though. But time was marching on, and Kevin was still working at the gas station.

He met a girl during this time. She was a student at Dalhousie and was planning to go on to get her masters and work as a biologist. They dated for about a year before she decided to do her graduate studies elsewhere. She apparently told him she didn't see the relationship progressing. In later years, Kevin told me he had come to realize that what she had meant was she didn't see HIM progressing.

Sue, for the record, if Kevin never told you this himself, I'm telling you now. Despite the way that relationship ended, Kevin never regretted the fact he lost her and found you. You were always number one and always would be.

By now Kevin was going on 24 and still trying to decide what to do with his life. He had some ideas, but he just wasn't sure... then that song came out on the radio. About the guy who was a big baseball pitcher back in high school. The one who could throw that speedball by you and make you look like a fool.

At first it was just a song.

Kevin had nothing against Bruce Springsteen, but he wasn't a big fan either.

But, you know, in those days, before the Internet, everyone in every town listened to one of about a half-dozen radio stations.

And that song was on a lot.

And the more he heard it, the more he thought about it.

Kevin didn't want to be that 30-year-old guy who sat at the bar talking about his glory days. As far as he was concerned, those days were still ahead of him. But if they were going to happen, he'd have to make them happen.

On the spur of the moment, Kevin applied to Laurentian University in Sudbury, and began to study psychology. Another new city and another fresh start.

Finally in his element, Kevin finished his degree and went on to grad school, becoming a registered psychotherapist.

He was really good with young adults, because he knew what kinds of traps they can fall into when trying to figure out their lives and careers. He found he really liked living in Sudbury too.

There are a lot of people out there who might never have found their niche if they hadn't come into Kevin's office.

I'm one of them.

I was referred to Kevin after complaining to my doctor that I couldn't sleep because I was having nightmares. This was early in Kevin's career, so we're a few years apart in age.

Kevin saw me for about six months. He was a really good listener. He would ask me questions that were intended to make me think and come up with my own solutions, which I did. I figured out that lot of my issues stemmed from the fact my mother had died in my teens and, being the

rebel I was, I never really had a chance to tell her how much she meant to me. After some deep introspection and hard work on myself, my nightmares ended, I started sleeping better, and my marks improved.

I'll never forget the day I walked into Kevin's office and Kevin asked me what I wanted to talk about. I said I wanted to talk about not coming back. He said, "That's awesome!" I walked out of his office about 20 minutes later, after going over the coping strategies he'd helped me develop, and I didn't see him again for about five years.

But my sessions with Kevin had inspired me to also go into a helping profession – social work. It was after I graduated that our paths crossed again. Kevin was running a successful practice and I wrote to ask him for some career advice. Email wasn't really a thing yet, so I wrote him a letter. He remembered me, and he said would be glad to meet me for a coffee and to chat. He knew people by now and he helped me to make some connections in my field, which helped me to get established.

We also became friends, as well as professional colleagues. Kevin had a lot of friends, but I was honoured to be one of those invited to attend his wedding.

Sue: You and Kevin made some great memories together, and you raised a couple of fantastic kids. I realize Kevin left us way too soon, but I know that Caitlin and Nick will always be there for you, just as you and Kevin were for them.

Caitlin and Nick: I know from my own experience that you don't get over losing a parent when you're barely an adult yourself. But I do believe your dad's spirit lives within you, and in every life that he touched.

To the young men Kevin mentored as a Big Brother -- and some of you are here today: take those lessons he taught you and keep on making him proud. That would be the best tribute you could pay to him.

A couple years after his own wedding, Kevin was at the church when I walked down the aisle, and later on he was proud to become a godfather to my daughter, Melissa.

Meanwhile, as Kevin's practice grew he became a more active member of the mental health community. A respected speaker and a great resource for young mental health professionals. To keep healthy, he started cycling in the summer months, and cross-country skiing in the winter.

Just for fun, he entered a few mountain bike races, and had some decent results in his age category. He never won, but he enjoyed the challenge. He was in very good physical condition. Which makes it all the more puzzling that his heart gave out at the end of a leisurely morning of skiing.

So when were the glory days for Kevin? Were they his two years as the starting wide receiver for his high school football team? I don't think so.

The time he spent out of school trying to figure out what he wanted out of life? Definitely not, but they weren't lost years either.

What about the years he spent building a successful practice and helping people like me to find their way in life, both personally and professionally? Yes, but

Or the time he spent being a wonderful husband, father and friend? No question.

But really, there was no single point in time that I would refer to as Kevin's glory days. Instead, let's say he had a glory *life*, lived to its fullest and over way too soon.

But as much as Kevin was inspired by Bruce Springsteen to make sure his glory days continued throughout his life, he was also inspired by another 80s pop icon, the English ska group known as The Specials. They had a song that went,

Enjoy yourself. It's later than you think.
Enjoy yourself. While you're still in the pink.
The years go by as quickly as you wink.
Enjoy yourself, enjoy yourself.
It's later than you think.

So if I can offer any advice to those young people who are assembled here today, this comes straight from Kevin's life, if not from his own mouth: None of us knows how long we have on this Earth. So be like Kevin.

Go out and make your own glory days, but remember as you do so to make sure you enjoy all that this life has to offer.