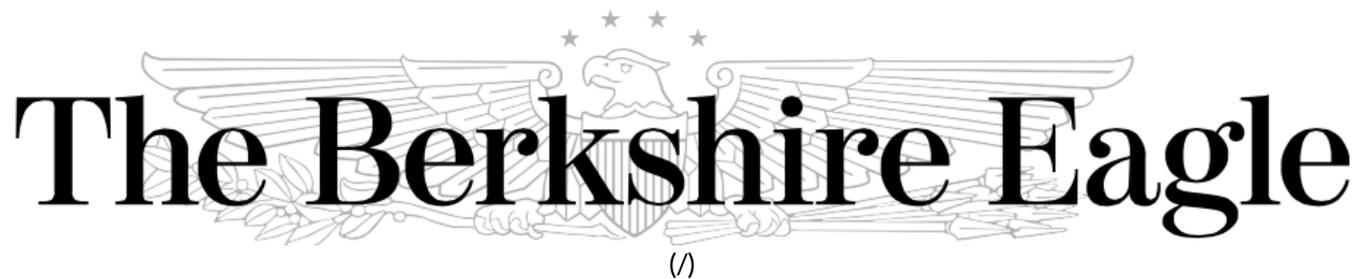


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Kevin O'Hara: Hats off to the late David Murphy, Jr.

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By Kevin O'Hara

PITTSFIELD — During the funeral mass for David Murphy held earlier this month at St. Mark Church, my mind drifted like incense throughout the solemn service, as I fondly recalled my dear old friend, who had died suddenly at age 64/

I first met David in Ireland in 1977, when he knocked on our cottage door, which my wife Belita and I had rented for the year. Dave, a recent graduate of Boston College, was accompanied by his parents, Callie and David Sr. They had been following our Irish adventures in the Berkshire Sampler, and surprised us while on vacation there, treating us to a wonderful meal at the Longford Arms Hotel.

As the years passed, I became close friends with Dave's younger brother, John, who took over the family business — Stevenson & Company — where I took out our home and auto insurance. While visiting John, I'd often run into Dave, now a well-respected Pittsfield attorney. Soon I was playing golf with this entertaining pair, enjoying their fierce but friendly sibling rivalry.

A found cap

One winter's evening, just in front of the Berkshire Common across from Park Square, I found a muddied cap by the curbside where my car was parked. Thinking it might come in handy once washed, I picked up the frozen hat and tossed it into my trunk. At home, I let it soak for a day, then gave it one good scrubbing. Sure enough, a handsome woolen ski cap flecked with color shortly emerged. Once it was dry, I pulled it

over my ears and looked into a mirror. Simply dashing!

The following winter, donning my sporty cap for its second season, I turned the cap inside out to find its country's origin, but only found a small white tag sewn into its felt lining with washing instructions. On the back side, however, was a seven-digit local phone number handwritten in pen. "Drats," I muttered, "who puts their home phone number inside a hat." But, then again, I reminded myself, who picks up ragged hats from city gutters? With some reluctance, I dialed the nameless number, and who answers the phone but Dave Murphy!

When I explained the reason for my call, Dave was ecstatic, as though I had just found his long-lost dog. He peppered me with questions: "Where did you find it? What shape is it in? When can I get it back?"

I played the monkey: "Hey, not so fast. Finders Keepers."

"What if I buy you a pint at Patrick's Pub?"

"Nope."

"Two pints!"

"Done!" I gladly agreed.

When Dave and I met at Patrick's for his glorious cap-to-head reunion, he told me the ski cap had been a Christmas gift from his mom, now deceased, and how he had lamented its loss ever since. While we enjoyed our pints, he never let the cap leave his grasp, and would often twirl it on his fingers like a happy schoolchild.

Every pew filled

As the soothing church choir broke into "Song of Farewell," I snapped from my bygone reverie and glanced at the forlorn faces that filled every pew of the spacious church — a bounty of folks ranging from esteemed judges to devout nuns. In the front pews sat the bereaved but proud Murphy clan; the middle pews were occupied by former teammates that Dave had captained on their winning PHS hockey team, along with mountaineering buddies who had accompanied Dave in ascending all 46 major peaks of the Adirondacks. Lastly, a scattering of elders who admired this "smiling and indefatigable young man," through his unflinching Meals on Wheels deliveries every Sunday.

Like myself, it seemed that all in attendance were trying to call up their own fond memories of this endearing gent who had touched so many in so many ways. Yes, a congregation of crestfallen companions searching for some semblance of peace, while mourning the loss of a dear and cherished friend.

Kevin O'Hara is a long-time Eagle contributor.

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