Crash victim lived full life

Mark Reedy, an 'awesome friend,' excelled at everything

MARNEY RICH KEENAN

On Feb. 5, on an icy stretch of a two-lane highway in Indiana, some 60 miles outside of Cincinnati, the world lost two young lives, both full of promise and extraordinary potential.

But you may have only learned about one of them.

According to police reports, the accident occurred at 2:50 p.m. during a heavy snowfall, when a 2004 Grand Cherokee driven by Brendan Burke, 21, of Canton, Mass., and carrying his passenger, Mark Reedy, 18, of Bloomfield Hills, slid sideways and was broadsided by a 1997 Ford truck.

The driver of the truck was not injured.

The coroner said both Burke, a senior at the University of Miami (Ohio), and Reedy, a freshman at Michigan State University, perished at the scene.

Burke had been visiting MSU because he was interested in its law school. The two young men had met just weeks before, and Mark was getting a ride from Burke to visit friends at Miami University.

The news of the fatal crash spread across the Internet almost faster than next of kin could be notified. In part, that was due to the nature of social media. (In fact, Marcia and Cliff Reedy, Mark's parents, who had immediately driven to Chicago to tell Mark's two sisters of their brother's death in person, worried that word might reach their daughters before they did. So they stopped halfway, phoning ahead with the "horrible, horrible" news.)

Word of the fatal crash also spread quickly because of Brendan Burke's fame. His father, Brian Burke, general manager of the Toronto Maple Leafs, is one of the best known figures in all of hockey. And, too, Brendan had made his own national headlines in November when he publicly revealed that he was gay and, with the stalwart support of his father, both pledged to dismantle the sometimes homophobic culture of hockey.

Because of that poignant story line -- the man's man, tough, no-nonsense hockey father supporting his son's "courage" and "pioneer spirit" -- the loss of Brendan Burke took center stage without, it would seem, properly recognizing the loss of another stellar young man in his own right, Mark Reedy.

Not that Mark or his family would ever even think of feeling upstaged. When people at MSU said they had heard he was quite the diver, the three-time All-American (ranked second in the state in his junior and senior year in high school) shrugged it off, saying, "I was all right."

Mark was also an amazing soccer player and a gymnast. He had recently taught himself to ride a unicycle, and a friend said the first time he tried wakeboarding he did a back flip. He wanted to try skydiving next. No wonder his friends joked that he was Chuck Norris.

But it wasn't about flaunting his ability; for Mark, it was all about having fun. Consider how he recently presented himself at MSU's volleyball team tryouts. He extended his hand to the coach and said: "Hi, my name is Mark Reedy. I'm a swimmer, but I want to learn how to play volleyball and I'll do anything to learn."
Mark was also smart: He was a member of the National Honor Society. He was creative: His ceramics teacher at Lahser High School in Bloomfield Hills said he threw beautiful pots.

In the last year, he had been hard at work on a novel. "We thought maybe the book had been lost, but right before the funeral Mass, I was handed the flash drive," said his sister, Michelle, 24. "There are 40 chapters on it."

To comfort themselves, his wide circle of friends took time off from school and camped out at Mark's house with his mom and dad and his two older sisters. As a sign of everlasting solidarity, about eight of them had Mark's initials tattooed on their wrists or ankles.

Olivia Enright, 18, of Bloomfield Hills, also a freshman at MSU and lifelong classmate of Mark's, seemed to speak for all of them when she said: "He was the most awesome friend ever. For both of us, it was pretty hard our first year away, and he made sure he introduced me to everyone in his dorm. He'd walk me home at night to make sure I was never alone. He was kind and generous and conscientious. All of us have said: 'If we can live our lives even half as full as Mark lived in his 18 years, we'll all come out ahead.' I will always feel him with me throughout my life. I have his name on my wrist."

That Mark Reedy excelled at most everything he tried is of great comfort to his family, not necessarily because of the accolades it brought him, but because it meant there were no regrets.

As his mother, Marcia Reedy said: "Mark was really motivated and he was able to do so many things that he wanted to do. He didn't regret anything and we didn't, either. We knew how much he loved us and he knew how much we loved him."

Certainly nothing, in life or in death, can upstage that.

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