

Kevin Conway Memorial Award

This is an excerpt from a letter written by Megan LaBarr Powers in response to a request for information about Kevin Conway.

Thank you for contacting me with this request. I really thought I'd come up with a little more information than I did; however, nineteen years is a sizeable amount of time.

Everyone that I spoke to had very fond memories of Kevin Conway. We all remember that he had a brother one-year-older than him and a sister one-year younger. There was a lot of healthy debate on if they lived in Metuchen or Edison.

All three of the Conway children were both swimmers and divers. Back in the "old days" the diving meets were held right before the swim meets and all the swimmers came early to see the divers. The points scored by the divers were added to the swim meet so it was very important that the divers did well. Pretty typically, you were either a "diver" or a "swimmer" back then. The three Conway children both dove and swam. Kevin was exceptional at both competitive endeavors. The team could always count on Kevin for a first place in his diving age group and he very often finished in the top two in his swimming events. He was unique because he swam all four strokes proficiently; however, he favored the breaststroke.

Kevin spent most of his time at diving practice helping the younger children. He would then return to the pool later in the day to practice his own dives. His favorite diving coach was Cathy Sherman who was the wife of John Sherman, the legendary St Joe's Swim Team Coach. Kevin often spent "additional" time practicing both his swimming and his diving.

Kevin always had a younger child sitting on his lap during the diving and swimming meets. He never played favorites, he loved us all and we all loved him. He always had a kind word to say about each swimmer and would spend endless hours with us going over stroke technique.

One summer Kevin broke his arm at the beginning of the season. He spent six weeks kicking with the kickboard trying to stay in good enough shape to be able to swim in the Championships and Conferences. He would do the entire practice with the board even if it meant staying much later after practice was over just to finish. The boy's 15-18 yr. old relay ended up winning that year which clinched the Championship for us. We could not have done it without Kevin.

Kevin was a well-built healthy All American type boy. By the end of the summer his hair was always bleached out and his nose was missing many layers of skin from sunburn (this was, of course, way before we all learned about the danger of

the sun and the benefits of sun block). The sun exposure would never prove to be a problem for Kevin because his life was taken from him at a very young age. During his sophomore year in college at the University of Rhode Island, Kevin's life ended as he was photographing a sunset off a nearby jetty. A surprise wave swept him into the water and caused him to hit his head so violently that he went unconscious and drowned. Each person that I spoke to remembers hearing about the news in a different way. Each person, however, was physically and emotionally moved by the news. Most of us younger kids were still swimming on the swim team when Kevin was killed. We had lost a hero. We had lost one of our own. For a large number of us, we had lost a friend forever. Kevin always had a special relationship with the water. His death reminded us all that on occasion "Mother Nature" demands respect.

All of the individuals that I spoke with sincerely hope that this tribute will continue in some way. All competitive swimmers and divers at the Metuchen Municipal Pool should know of Kevin Conway—if for nothing more than to be able to identify those truly special individuals who are similar to him. You see, we all know a Kevin Conway. He/she is the individual who goes the extra yard, extends a hand to his/her fellow teammate, who even in times of diversity is a true leader. He/she is the individual who is always holding the hand of a younger swimmer and rejoices in the accomplishment of a friend far quicker than his own is. He is the young adult that all of us parents dream our children will become.

Thank you again for allowing me this trip down memory lane. I remember Kevin as always having a smile on his face. That is the way I'll continue to remember him.

Respectfully submitted,

Megan LaBarr Powers