

Grapevine

Rotary Club of Naples, NY

Dinner Meeting, February 13, 2017

We had a very nice turnout of members and guests, this past Monday, as we gathered for our February Evening Meeting. Though it was a wintry evening, and school had been cancelled that day, President Bo made the executive decision that “the show would go on”, and I think that we were all glad that he did! Twenty-two of us welcomed guests, Sherry, Sharon, Katie, Pam, and our special guests, Tom Mannella, and his lovely wife, Missy. Bo got us started off, as we joined him in saying The Pledge. Next, Patrice said the Traditional Blessing, followed by Jack, who led us in a fervent round of God Bless America. Bo recognized each of our guests with a warm welcome, and we were especially glad to see our Brenda back with us!

Joyce announced that the Oratorical Semi-Finals, held last Saturday here at NCS, went very well. She thanked many members who had helped; especially Skip, Judy, Jack, those who had baked, and those who had helped set up, or provided supplies and refreshments. Two of our Naples students, Claire Radak, and Maeya Yeatman, have been selected to go on to The Finals, which will be held March 4th, at FLCC. Congratulations to these young ladies for a job well done, and to Kendall Wilt for the coaching you provided them. These impressive students certainly are a credit to Naples! The Spelling Bee went well on Saturday. The team of Bo and Pat made it to The Finals this year! (Thank Goodness, Bo knows some extra languages!) The 2017 Vintage Vines and Valentines was very successful according to John F. Kayc told us that the Valentines For Vets numbered 831 this year! Many thanks, Kayc, for your hard work on this project!

Jack introduced our special guest speaker, Naples’ own Tom Mannella, whom Jack referred to as “yet another wonderful product of Naples”. Indeed, we would all agree that Jack was “right on target” with this befitting description of a young man who has grown up in Naples, and who has become very successful. Some of Tom’s accomplishments include his being a member of the 1999 State Soccer Champions, mentoring the Oratorical Speakers, becoming a highly respected and beloved H.S. English teacher in Naples, and becoming an acclaimed writer. It is on this last aspect that Tom focused this evening, as he shared his story, *The Zipper Club*, with us. *The Zipper Club* is a personal account of Tom’s growing up years, and the challenges he faced, having had to endure three heart surgeries. The book, his memoir, is divided into three parts essentially: Childhood, Adolescence, and Young Adult. Tom read to us from various sections of his book with such eloquence and candor, that, for many of us who have watched him grow up, it triggered some emotion. Woven into his story is his sweet wife, Missy, who has been a vital part of his life since childhood. As the years passed, Tom knew Missy was “The One”, as she stood by him, lent support, and proved to him that he could get beyond his scars. She truly would be, and has been a “Partner For Life”! Tom concluded his talk with the words, “If you have survived childhood, you have a story!” He also welcomed questions from us afterwards, which was enjoyable as well. *The Zipper Club* took 7 years to complete Tom told us, and he is currently working on a fictional piece. Another interesting note is that in 1998, when Tom had his second heart surgery, Jack had the entire team from Valparaiso sign a card of well wishes for him. He was sent a “metaphorical heart”, which surely must have bolstered his spirits. In addition to being an excellent writer and an eloquent speaker, Tom is a very humble young man. Two years ago, he received a n invitation from The Breadloaf Writers, a program in Vermont, which was begun by Robert Frost. Tom received a scholarship to attend the second year. I understand that he also was the recipient of the 2016 American Journal of Nursing Book of the Year Award. *The Zipper Club* is a must read, and we thank you, Tom, for sharing your moving story with us!

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Tonight's fines were as follows: John B. had been to St. Thomas, and had visited Margaritaville. (Thanks, John, for the kisses and cozies!) Alex didn't have her badge, and Laurie, Carrie, and Billy had missed meetings. An abundance of Happy Bills were given in appreciation of Tom's Talk, and in memory of Maddy and Don. John F. was glad that VVV turned out well. Jack had officiated at the Renewal of Vows. Judy was glad the Oratorical Contest had gone well. We were all pleased to have Our Brenda back!

Our Ace of Hearts Kitty is up to \$211. Brenda picked Karen's ticket, #036. Karen drew The King of Hearts. Speaking of "Sweethearts", many thanks to Joyce and Judy for all your work on the Oratorical Contest. Maeya and Claire will come and present their speeches to us at a later date. Alex had our Win-Win for us this evening. (Bo and I were exempt!) How many languages does Bo know? The answer is 6!

Hope everyone has been having a nice week, and not minding all the snow! Bo and I will see you all on the 27th. (We're going to try and find some sunshine next week as we head south!) Our sincere appreciation goes out to John F. and to Jane, for filling in for us at the Feb. 20th meeting. Take care, and see you soon!

