



**“Did he slow down?
To the contrary!
He rose up and did more.**

**... Nothing was out
of his reach.”**

— Gary Richert H2002

I first met Rick Leone in August 1973. He was a shy, stuttering young man reporting to pre-season football camp. It was his first year and mine as well at St. John’s Military Academy. It was a tough time for the school. Declining enrollment and aging facilities met us at the door. I had been hired by Academy President William I. West with one objective: revive the sports program. This was the theme that first year and by Rick’s senior year, we were playing for championships in all sports.

Rick was an outstanding football player, a fierce wrestler and a top golfer, and served as a lieutenant in the Corps of Cadets. We had an almost father and son relationship, but really boy and older brother relationship. I was only 12 years older than he and like to think that his parents, John and Willie, entrusted him to my care with the purpose of making him into a positive member of our society. It was tough! He was a rough and tough daredevil



▲ **ABOVE:** Gary Richert speaks about Rick Leone at The Excalibur on April 28, 2012.

◀ **LEFT:** Rick Leone (#63, standing far right) on the Lancers football team, fall 1974, with Coach Gary Richert holding the football and Assistant Coach Hugh Caldara.

▶ **OPPOSITE, LEFT:** Rick Leone’s 1975 yearbook portrait

OPPOSITE, RIGHT: Rick Leone at Commencement & Reunion Weekend 2009.

A Lasting Tribute to John Richard “Rick” Leone III

October 1, 1956 – April 16, 2012

by Gary Richert H2002



kid who was driven to excel. Rick would do anything for a challenge. I will not attempt to tell you all the stories, the saga, the journey and the tests he put all of us through because that would be this entire magazine! I will say that many stories are so humorous that they could be a television mini series.

Along with his chief pals, Leigh Mitchell S1976, John Loebel S1975, Steve Murphy S1977, Bart Czachor S1977, Charles Wood Jr. S1977, Bill Hogan S1976 and Steven Barnes S1975, and other cadets at the time, they made the 1970s one of the most memorable and colorful decades in Academy history. These young men were looking for an identity and their place in the journey of life.

As I stated when I gave his eulogy in the Noble Victory Memorial Chapel on April 24, 2012, I miss those days and those kids! The catchall phrase of “Be Somebody” was the embodiment of their goals. Then after three good years as a football player at Lakeland College in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, tragedy struck.

In 1979, Rick suffered a life-changing accident that would confine him to a wheelchair for the remainder of his life. When his father called me from their then home in Europe, I immediately drove to the hospital in Sheboygan to find a man

suspended and held together by wires for a broken neck. Our first conversation was brief. On my second visit, he said he wanted to quit; his life was over. I calmly stated and joked how could he possibly do that? He couldn't even get up to go to the bathroom. After laughing and crying, I simply stated, “Don't ask why; just go on. Don't quit. You can still be somebody.” As they say, the rest is history. Rick went to rehab and moved on with his life. Did he slow down? To the contrary! He rose up and did more. Fiercely independent, he became more of a doer and a daredevil than ever before. Nothing was out of his reach.

In 1985, he visited me at St. Leo University in Florida where I was athletic director and basketball coach at the time. When I returned to the Academy in 2001, he was one of the first to call me and offer his help.

By that time, Rick had joined his father and sisters in the formation of their company, Bonney Forge, in Mount Union, Pennsylvania. By the time of Rick's passing, the company had become the leader in technology and manufacturing of products for power, oil, gas, chemical, marine and construction industries worldwide. For the past 27 years, Rick led the sales department. By 2009, he had risen to the role of executive

vice president. His infectious smile, positive can-do attitude and ability to never quit helped to turn the company into a world-wide organization with manufacturing facilities in the United States and China.

In 2009, Rick received the Honored Old Boy award during Commencement & Reunion Weekend. He gave one of the greatest speeches in Academy history. He used no notes. It was straight from the heart and there was not a dry eye in the house.

Rick's giving spirit, his philanthropy, was basically centered to help the less fortunate or needy students and student athletes. In a meeting in Pittsburgh in 2008, I asked him to assist us with the new athletic complex for football and lacrosse. His only comment when I gave the dollar amount was, “Coach, will that be enough?”

What a man! He leaves us all with a feeling of great respect for his accomplishments. While he may no longer be with us, his spirit and the facilities he helped build are here. His cremains were placed in The Columbarium on campus. I stop periodically as I walk from the Holt Alumni House to the Alumni Office just to say hello and thank you, and mostly to tell him that *he was somebody*. ▲