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A Rizzo Family Mystery

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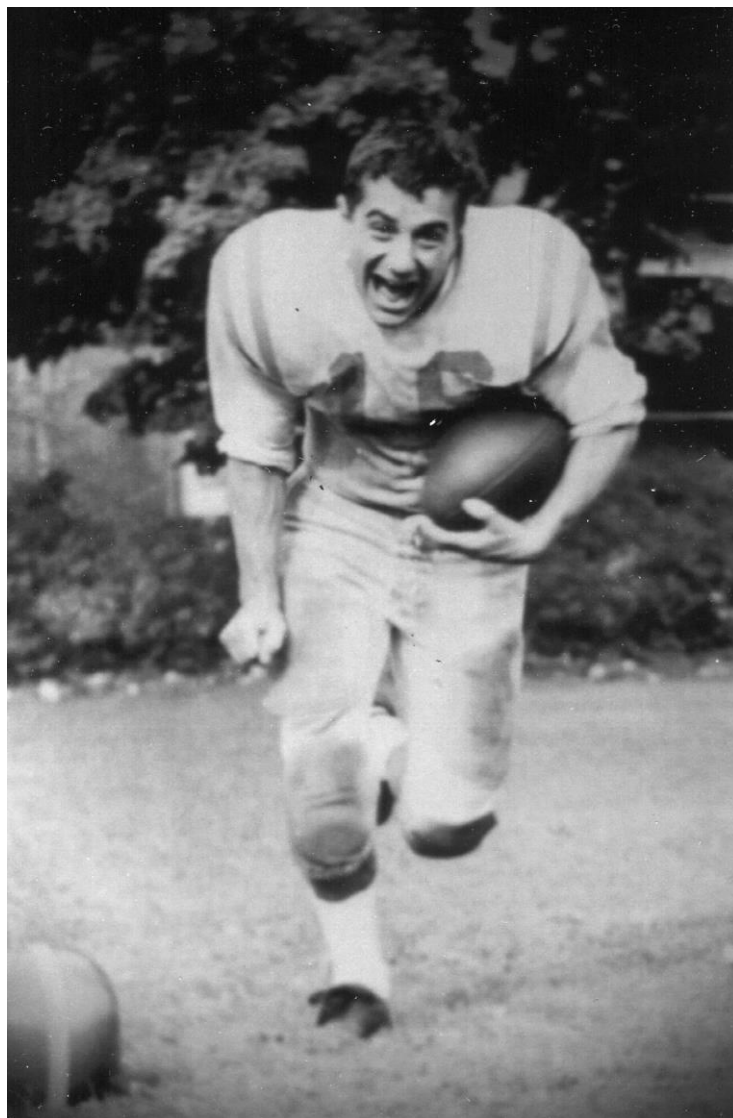
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A Rizzo Family Mystery



By Mike Hughes

A Rizzo Family Mystery

Kappa Delta Phi brother, classmate and football teammate, Marty Rizzo, died after sustaining neck injuries when he blocked a player from Brockport State University on a kick-off return in the last game of the season at home on Nov. 9, 1963. He lived in a paralyzed condition for two months and passed away after contracting pneumonia, Jan. 12, 1964 at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston.

He was buried by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Rizzo, in Puritan Lawn Memorial Park, in Peabody, Mass. Marty, who was an only child, was 24 years old at the time of his death.

The mystery began after Kappa brother Scott Enos '98 visited Marty's grave at Puritan Lawn on May 2, 2023.

Scott, who is Director of Operations & Logistics for Alumni and Development at BSU, had previously rescued a memorial plaque to Marty that had been placed on the wall at the entrance to the Conant Science Building in 1965 by his Kappa brothers. Scott, unbeknownst to almost everyone including members of Kappa, had removed the bronze plaque from Conant prior to that section of the building's demolition. This was prior to the construction of the new Mohler Faria Science & Math Center.

Scott kept the plaque in his office at BSU for 15 years and had it refinished hoping it could be placed somewhere appropriate on campus in the near future.

So, what does this have to do with a Rizzo Family Mystery? Well, when Scott visited Marty's grave, he had a photo taken of himself holding the aforementioned plaque over the family's in-ground bronze marker. He then sent the

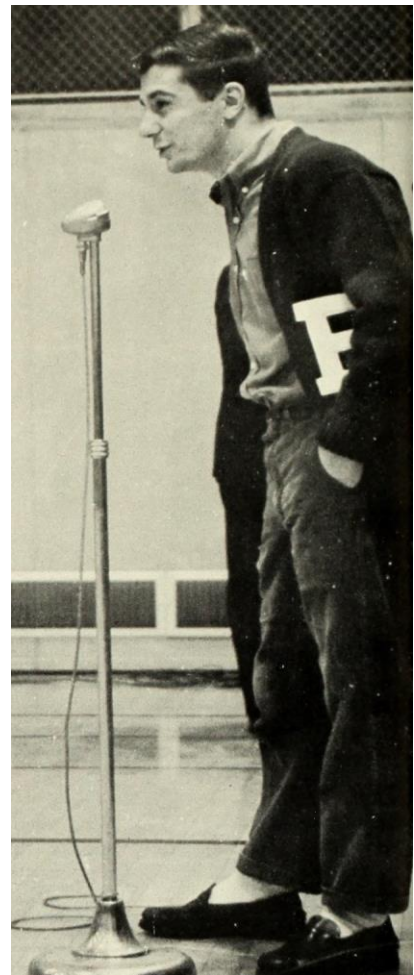


photo along with an explanatory email to the “Old Crows” of Kappa, as the elder alumni of the frat are known.

After viewing the photo, it was obvious to me and other brothers that something was missing on the Rizzo grave marker. Under the Rizzo name were located three smaller bronze name plates or scrolls. Each was attached to the marker with two bronze screws. The left scroll was engraved with, “Martin T.”



over, “1939 – 1964”, this being Marty. The middle scroll was engraved with, “Michael A.” over, “1914 – 1996”, Marty’s dad. The 3rd, or right scroll stood out rather shockingly because it was blank, thus the mystery. Why wasn’t Mrs. Rizzo’s name and dates on that scroll? Was she even buried in that plot?

A series of emails back and forth from me to Jim Tartari, ’64, and Bob Mason, ’65, also Kappa brothers and football teammates of Marty, took place. We agreed to try to solve the mystery of the blank scroll and, if possible, do something about it.

A short time later I received an email from brother Jim. He had made

contact with brother Dom Ottavi, ’68, who resides in Peabody, at an “Old Crows” get-together in Bridgewater. Dom, it seems, had seen Scott’s email and photo so he visited Marty’s grave bringing some of his Kappa jewelry to include in a photo with the Rizzo grave marker. He also found out that Mrs. Rizzo was interred in the plot with her son and husband. That part of the mystery was solved but the larger question of her blank scroll had yet to be answered.

I decided to do some investigating. First, I needed to know Mrs. Rizzo’s first name and years of birth and death before contacting Puritan Lawn Memorial Park for more information directly related to her burial there. I remembered

using a web site called "Find A Grave" for a book I was writing, so I gave it a try. I found the information I wanted and more. Mrs. Rizzo's given name was Helen and her middle name was Elena. The site listed her maiden name as Ferrante and her birth and death years were 1914 and 2006 respectively. She was born in Boston and died at age 92. Where she died was not mentioned, however. I was now ready to give Puritan Lawn a call.

When I called Puritan Lawn and made contact with an employee named Al Silva I explained what I was looking for and he agreed to help me. At the outset, however, he had some doubt that there were three scrolls on the Rizzo grave marker because usually there were only two as far as he could tell. He would have to take a look at the site itself, Section F-Lot 61- Grave 2, and get back to me the next day. He said he liked to get out of the office for little excursions like this one.

The next day I received a reply from Al and he said I was correct about the number of scrolls. We then made arrangements to have the blank one engraved with "Helen E." over "1914 – 2006."



Jim, Bob and I would share the expense involved in the engraving as a tribute to Marty and his father and mother. We felt it was the right thing to do since Mr. and Mrs. were like parents away from home for Kappa during Marty's time at BSC. We remembered that they came to the VFW on one occasion and cooked a spaghetti dinner for the entire frat and their female guests. They also invited brothers to their home in Revere for meals, their hospitality being boundless. As far as we know they also attended most of our home football games.

When making another call to Al at Puritan Lawn that included me relating Marty's story, he said he had actually spent a couple of weeks in pre-season workouts at BSC prior to accepting a football scholarship to a Division 1 school in Pennsylvania. I knew I had found an ally. He said he would send me a receipt for the engraving fee and when it was completed, he would send me a photo of it. When I asked about the three of us visiting the grave, he stated he would be glad to meet us at the cemetery, show us the grave, and take a photo of us there. Everything seemed in place and on track and we were feeling good.

After a couple of weeks, I called Puritan to ask about the receipt I was supposed to receive and to check on the progress being made on the engraving which had to be sent to Pittsburgh to be completed. I was jaw dropped to hear that Al Silva no longer worked there. The receptionist instead put me in touch with an agent name Chris De Piero. Chris immediately put the success of our project in doubt by informing me that legally we couldn't get Mrs. Rizzo's scroll engraved because we didn't own the plot and weren't close relatives or any kind of relative for that matter. It was the law in Massachusetts! Needless to say, I was floored and very disheartened. I rallied and did some fast talking about how Marty was an only child and how the Rizzos had no living relatives as far as we knew. In fact, Jim Tartari had come into contact with some very distant cousins, years earlier and they told him about the family's lack of close living kin.

After listening to me Chris agreed to do some investigating on his computer saying that he did this often as part of his job. While I stayed on the phone with him, he quickly found that Mr. & Mrs. Rizzo owned the plot. He found that Mrs. Rizzo had died in Daytona Beach, Florida and from an obituary from there learned the name of the funeral home that prepared the body and shipped it north to a funeral parlor in Lynnfield that would bury her in the family plot at Puritan. To his surprise Chris discovered that the blank scroll was paid for but the Lynnfield mortician's records stated that no money remained for engraving. Also, recorded was the fact that no close relatives could be found or contacted who would be responsible for paying for the scroll's engraving. In addition, he found the record of our payment for the job and stated he would email me the receipt. More importantly Chris found that Al had successfully put the engraving job in the cemetery's active job pipeline or queue. After finding all that information he stated he saw no reason for not going through with engraving

Helen Rizzo's scroll. It would take from 6 to 8 weeks normally, sometimes sooner, to get it done, sent back to Puritan and have it attached to the grave marker. Once all this was completed, he would email a photo of the marker and new scroll. He also volunteered to meet us at the cemetery once I called him back for a visit date. This all took place in July.

I called Chris the second week in September about the scroll and he happily informed me that it had arrived and was attached to the Rizzo grave marker in the appropriate space. To say I felt relieved would have been the greatest of understatements. He informed me that he would send me an email with a close-up photograph of the marker with Helen's name and dates on it. He did, the next day, and I was un-expectedly overwhelmed to see it. I immediately forwarded the email and photo to brothers Bob, Jim, Dom and Scott. Shortly after Jim Tartari replied, "Now, may she rest in peace"!



With undiminished fraternal love a group of aged men were able to make sure that the missing name and dates of one family member were finally engraved on the Rizzo family grave marker completing that memorial to the family's final resting place.



Bob Mason '65, Dom Ottavi '68, Jim Tartari '64 and Mike Hughes '65

For closure our final act will be to visit the gravesite.

"May the Spirit Never Die"!

Mike Hughes '65

2023