



photographer d. o'leary, photographer p. o'leary, photographer l. o'leary, photographer m. thomas, photographer e. o'leary, photographer p. o'leary, photographer l. jeffries (inset); designer n. fasanaro

Late student remembered for adventurous life, caring personality, and desire to help others

By *Olivia Potter*

He was a man of action. He was adventurous, outgoing, caring and compassionate. That is how friends of **Dermot O'Leary** remember him. When they think of O'Leary, they remember late night jeep rides, midnight Waffle House runs, and never-ending exploration.

Two of O'Leary's best friends, **Evan Nelson**, and **Mario Ciappa**, graduates, both will remember May 8, 2018, for years to come. It was a Tuesday morning when O'Leary was driving his motorcycle to school and passed away in an accident just off of Carolina Park Blvd.

Ciappa regarded that day and the days that followed as the hardest and lowest points in his life thus far.

"It took me a while to process it, just that fact that I couldn't text my friend or go, 'Hey buddy how ya doin' cause he's not with us anymore,'" Ciappa said. "That day and the few following were probably the saddest of my life and even the next few weeks were just really hard. He was such a peacemaker in our friends and he was just such a genuine person, you can't really replace that."

Nelson also found himself struggling to cope with the sudden loss of his best friend.

"In a way, I didn't take it in initially. I just learned to accept it," Nelson said. "What really hit me was the fact that I just couldn't see him anymore. Even to this day, there isn't a day that goes by where I don't think of him."

While friends' last memories of O'Leary are filled with sadness, they are overshadowed by the good times they shared.

"He always expressed himself through his actions. If you ever met him, he was never a person of his words, especially because he had such a low voice you couldn't tell what he said till he said it the second or third time. Through all the time I knew him he was always a man of action, going out and doing crazy stuff, just living life to the fullest," Nelson said.

Robin Thomas, graduate, dated O'Leary for just over a year and she remembers the little details about him the most.

"He was off tempo. People get confused when I say that but when he walked he walked differently than everyone else. It was almost like he was skipping when he was happy," said Thomas. "We first got to know each other because he took me to prom and whenever we would try to dance, his rhythm was different from my rhythm so it got really complicated. He would constantly try to dance with me but we never quite got it. We were always slightly off tempo which always made me laugh."

Thomas thought these memories would extend into the future, but she is still able to recall O'Leary's plans fondly.

"We all described Dermot as adventurous and very kind at the least. And he was going to pursue a career doing just that. He didn't know what he wanted to do until he had brought me along to one of Trident's apprenticeship fairs. Everything was meh as we walked to each booth. Then we came to an area that had officers, paramedics, and things like that. We both got our light bulbs when we walked by the firemen," Thomas said. "When we went home and talked about it, I told Dermot stories of my great-grandpa and my 2nd great-grandpa. They were both once fire chiefs in Colorado. I

showed him my great-grandpa Dennis Moorhead's fire helmet and it was like he suddenly knew what he wanted to do. He was like a little kid looking at that helmet."

With this newfound career path ahead of him, O'Leary set out to put his plans into action. Starting with the required courses that he unfortunately never had the chance to complete.

"As time went, he knew for certain he wanted to be a wildfire fireman and nothing was going to change his mind," said Thomas. "He signed up for college for the EMT courses as it was required for the fire department. That's where everyone was confused. He was certain he did not want to be an EMT. When he passed, everyone thought that's what he was going to do. Little did they know that he dreaded the EMT course. He wanted it over with so he can get straight to the 'wild part' of the job as he would call it. As dangerous as he would be, he was going to be heroic doing so."

Erin O'Leary, 11, Dermot's younger sister, remembers him in a similar way.

"Dermot was always adventurous and wanting to go explore and be with nature. I think his favorite place we ever lived was when we lived on Dewees [Island] for two years cause you were just surrounded by nature," Erin said.

While Erin has struggled with the loss of her big brother, she carries the loving side of him with her always.

"He has just always been such a good brother," Erin said. "Even when I was little, he always tried to be nice. He was always making sure that I was having fun and had someone to hang out with even if it meant making his friends be nice to me whenever."

Following his passing, O'Leary's friends have changed their outlooks and all learned a valuable lesson on the sanctity of life.

"I do things a bit differently now. In a smaller sense, he was a really big environmentalist. I take more of an effort with just small things like picking up trash because I know he really cared about that. He lived on [Isle of palms] and he loved it so much. He always would pick up every single piece of trash he saw, so now I try to do that. In the broader sense, because I lost him I care a lot more about everybody else," Nelson said.

Erin tries to keep her brother's laid back attitude with her in life.

"We got along really well, but we were always different because he had such a laid back and chill attitude," Erin said. "School was not his priority and as a result, when I would get super stressed over school, he always tried to calm me down and let me know it wasn't a big deal, which I think definitely helped leave an impression on me because he was so relaxed."

She also knows how it is important for her to keep his actions fresh in her mind.

"I miss him a lot. It's definitely hard because some days I'll be completely fine, but then I'll see a teacher I know he had or just little things that make me think of him. He left a lasting impact on so many people," Erin said. "For me, talking about it helps a lot cause I've always had a pretty bad memory so talking about him helps me remember things I've forgotten, and I like talking about him cause it's definitely what he would have wanted."