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Speech delivered at Student Assembly, May 5, 2011***

I'd like to begin with two points of trivia:

1. Mr. Walsh has worked at Regis for longer than I have been alive. He has literally been roaming our halls since before I was born. I find this amazing.

2. You should know that Mr. Walsh is here in this assembly entirely against his will. He really wants no part of it. We had to wait until this morning to announce we were doing this because we feared he would not come in to work. He did not want us to make any sort of fuss over his retirement from full-time work at Regis, he would have just preferred to kind of move on quietly. So, we knew this. We thought about it. We considered it. We reflected on it. And then we said—*too bad*, sorry, we are doing it anyway. We are gleefully ignoring his preference. You don't get to retire after 37 years of working at Regis and not be celebrated, at least just a bit.

It did make us think, though, how do you honor a guy who does not wish to be honored?

Mr. Walsh's contributions to Regis are really beyond measure. His trademark has always been his honest and compassionate concern for the students who have been in his care during their years here and beyond. This was the single thought behind the special project we decided to do for Mr. Walsh.

This is what we did: About a week before the Easter break, we informed the alumni community that Mr. Walsh would be leaving Regis. We asked if they might like to send a word or two to celebrate this milestone in the life of our school community. Maybe they would like to send a short note of good wishes, or perhaps something more substantial acknowledging the role he has played in their lives. Maybe they could share a humorous story of their time with Mr. Walsh or something else they are always reminded of when they think of Mr. Walsh. We set up a special email account to receive these messages, and we asked the alumni to please send their notes along within about a week or so.

Instantly, the response was both tremendous and inspiring. Notes flooded in from around the world from Regions who spoke with depth and sincerity of the profound impact Frank had, and continues to have, on their lives.

We received notes from Singapore, England, Austria, Yemen, Cairo, Tokyo. From Washington DC, California, New Hampshire, Atlanta. The west coast, mid-west, east coast. You name it.

Notes from Regis graduates from the Class of 1974 all the way up to last year's graduating class of 2010. From men who are about 55 years old all the way down to 18 years old.

Notes from men who are both students and college professors at Universities around the country – the likes of Stanford, University of Washington, Duke, Yale, Harvard, UPenn.

Notes from alumni in advertising, public relations, accounting, investment banking, those who work on Capitol Hill, who are writers and authors, lawyers, doctors, teachers.

Notes from sets of brothers who are Regians who got together and coordinated their messages to Mr. Walsh. Even a few parents of Regians got word of the project and sent in a note.

I had too-many-to-count emails back to me saying how much the alumni enjoyed the chance to say thank you to Mr. Walsh. How as an adult they probably don't do this enough – thank the people that matter -- so they appreciated the opportunity to send along their gratitude. I had calls asking a variety of questions related to the project: if they could come to today's assembly, if we were throwing a party in Frank's honor, if it would be okay if they sent a note that might contain some off-color jokes (of course, knowing Mr. Walsh, I said yes, the more off color the better). The alumni, in other words, were excited to be a part of this.

It was really an amazing experience to gather this collection. I had a ball checking the special email account as the notes poured in. And they literally poured in, hundreds of them. Regians spoke about how Frank instilled in them a love of reading and writing during his days as an English teacher, how he made them believe in themselves during his days as Assistant Headmaster. Grown men who referenced a note Frank had written decades ago that still resonated with them today. It was truly remarkable to think of all of the small and every day gestures that meant so much to these alumni. We heard funny stories, serious stories and everything in between.

We told the alumni we would collect all of the notes as a surprise to Mr. Walsh, to be presented at today's student assembly. We asked them to keep this a secret, and I think they actually did. I'll have to ask Mr. Walsh about that later.

I will share a few excerpts of the notes to give you an idea of the thoughts gathered in this collection. I actually chose a sampling of my favorite notes, and there were hundreds to choose from. Here they go...

From a Regian Class of 1979

"Dear Mr. Walsh,

I was at Regis from 1975-1979 and I am not sure I ever officially had you in an (English) class. Nevertheless, I remember you very well and know that you made a positive impact on so many of my classmates. Of course, the two most stunning pieces of news came after I graduated.

1. Mr. Walsh married Ms. Otto! Holy Cow.

2. Nice Mr. Walsh traded jobs with terrifying Mr. Tricamo. I assume you became terrifying Mr. Walsh and he became nice Mr. Tricamo. I have not checked to confirm this..."

From a Regian Class of 1998

"Dear Mr. Walsh,

One of my first memories of high school comes from Welcome to Regis Day. Along with 135 other bewildered 8th graders, I was herded into the auditorium for a presentation on some long-forgotten topic. What I do remember is an unnamed sophomore volunteer leaning over my row and stage whispering, "Don't believe a thing they tell you - Frank Walsh runs the place." I had little idea who he was speaking about - he couldn't possibly have meant the quiet man in the maroon blazer, could he..."

From a Regian Class of 1994

"Dear Mr. Walsh,

I remember vividly going getting a note from you. I was almost shocked by it - my entire elementary school education was in public schools, where the standard of interaction was professional and depersonalized, and even at Regis I still was not expecting to be treated as a human being by adults - and I could see that you had noticed things about me and made the effort to remember and later to record them. There was no inflated, prefabricated nonsense: everything you wrote was based on accurate observation and grounded in real anecdotes. They could still be used to describe me.

Everything real lasts. I still remember this, when all sorts of high-falutin' automated Hallmark-tributes will be forgotten. It has served as a standard for me: I know I am grounding my love in reality when I notice things about people, when I have stories to tell about people. It is an art and a habit of a religious life, which must always be rooted in what is real, and like all good teachers, you taught it by living it..."

From a Regian Class of 1996

"Dear Mr. Walsh,

When I received a grade of "Unsat" in 3 different subjects my freshman year, you told my mother and I that I could pick one for Summer School. You also said that, if I didn't perform at an "A" level, I'd be sent packing. I did (Latin), and never looked back.

When I got caught on an ugly Friday afternoon half stupid in the locker room, you told me to never do it again.

When I did it again, and confessed before you could find out second hand, you said that it was my honesty that kept me there - and this time, the strike would be the last of the at-bat.

When I told you on Graduation Day that you were the reason that I made it through, you shrugged it off and told me that it was myself who did all the hard work.

Now that I'm a teacher, coach and impromptu mentor for kids in a private school here in Queens, I always think of you first before acting. That second - and third - and fourth - chance I got from you taught me more about teaching - and myself - than I could ever learn on the job. Your impact is felt by tens of kids who have admitted to me throughout the years that I "Got them through."

When I shrug them off and tell them that it was them, it was actually you..."

From a Regian Class of 2008

"Dear Mr. Walsh,

Along with many other alumni, I received an invitation to send these notes to you several weeks ago, with the request that they be submitted before Wednesday, April 20. I'm sending this on the evening of April 20, in flagrant violation of the Regis Study Skills Guide's exhortations to plan ahead and manage time wisely.

That said, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to tell you how much your wisdom, honesty and compassion meant to me during my time at Regis. From the first day of Freshman year until the final march through the nave of St. Ignatius Loyola, I found comfort in the knowledge that your third floor office was always open for consultation. I know I'm not alone in feeling that by believing in me, you helped me to believe in myself.

I pity the future generations of Regians who will miss the chance to benefit from your presence. Then again, they'll have the privilege of studying, praying and growing up in the beautiful school that you helped create. They may not be aware of it, but they will be living out your legacy every school week..."

From a Regian Class of 1994

"Dear Mr. Walsh,

With the countless young men you've seen walk through the Regis hallways I'm sure you can't remember them all. What I can tell you is that many of those young men, myself included, fondly remember you.

As my years since graduation grow, the specific circumstances of many of our interactions blur. But, there are a few that I can remember as clearly as if they happened last week. These conversations took place in your office outside of the auditorium. The subject of each was where I should go to college - well that's where the discussion started, and you followed as the conversation of a then 17 year old tended to meander. What I remember most about those conversations is your pragmatism, patience, sincerity, care and sense of humor. Despite the fact that we revisited the same topics, the same pros and cons, over and over again, you showed no signs of fatigue. I was lucky then and for that I am truly grateful.

It's a common tale: a teacher or coach who students remember many years after their last interaction. You can find this tale celebrated in books, on TV, in movies and in the words of countless former students. Know this, for hundreds of Regians, their parents and children, you are that person..."

There are plenty more of very meaningful notes I could share, but the truth is, I can't get through reading many of them without getting teary-eyed. Since I don't wish to stand up here blubbing in front of you – and even if I did, Mr. Walsh would kill me shortly after for gushing too much praise on him – I will leave those deeply personal notes for Frank to read later privately

I will say that I am inspired by this entire project on so many levels:

As an educator, it seems to me this is the way it is supposed to be.

We spend a lot of time at Regis talking about community. Community of students, of faculty, of families, of alumni. This was a *real* representation of the lasting effects of the Regis community *at its best*, and it makes me proud to be a part of it. I love the image of Regians from the past four decades around the world receiving an email in their homes and offices, and taking the time to write a truly thoughtful note to a person from their high school days who made a difference in their lives.

On a human level, I was inspired by the tangible difference *one person* can make in the lives of so many. How much difference one individual can make when they treat their work not as work, but as a vocation. When they treat those around them, no matter their station in life, with respect. When they approach all they do with integrity and conviction, *because it matters*.

This collection represents in a real and meaningful way the palpable difference Mr. Walsh has made in the lives of so many. The personal messages contained in this collection reflect the magnitude of his influence on our community – and the people in it -- over the past 37 years.

The truth is, we could never properly convey our own admiration for all Mr. Walsh has done for Regis, so we are letting the alumni speak for us. We remain in awe of how he has shaped and molded generations of Regians. He has set a standard to which we can all aspire.

So, on behalf of the alumni who are as much a part of the gathering of this collection as we are, it is my pleasure to present this collection of good wishes and gratitude from Regis alumni to Mr. Walsh. We hope he enjoys it.