

Greg Barber's Letter to Newsday about Golfer John Daly 3/28/11

I am a golf fan and so is my son Neil Barber. Neil used to play a lot of golf until he became Mentally Ill with Schizophrenia.

Neil was also a star Lacrosse Player, and on his way to a division 1 scholarship, until his disease hit him, starting in his Junior Year at Manhasset High School, back in 1991.

No one could figure out why his Lacrosse skills started to wane. His former CYO Basketball Coach from 8th grade at St Marys'

In Manhasset, Deacon Frank Bice, stated on a You Tube featuring Neil Barber, that Neil was the best athlete he had ever

coached, and he saw my son play his final PG year at Canterbury prep in Connecticut, and couldn't figure out what was happening

to Neil's skills, and then we all found out that Neil was diagnosed with Schizophrenia.

This story, so far, is like a lot of mentally ill stories, except, a former coach of Neil, Coach Bob Rule, a Lacrosse Hall Of Fame player and a highly

Successful coach at Manhasset High School for 38 years, made a major impact on Neil when Neil was down and out. I ran into Bob Rule at a lacrosse reunion and

told him he probably would not see one of his best players again. He said why, and I told him Neil became mentally ill, and now Neil is in Pilgrim State

Hospital, in Brentwood, Long Island for the past 10 years.

He said he wanted to visit Neil and we did, and he said to Neil, "You are a member of the Lacrosse Community, a respected member of the Lacrosse Community, and we will not forget you".

He meant it! He is also a middle school teacher at Manhasset Middle School, and he asked us if he could talk about Neil's journey dealing with mental

Illness, and we both said yes. Our motive was to help teach kids that it is OK to talk about a tough subject like mental illness. The kids were mesmerized

by some of the stories of Neil running away from his illness. Escaping from mental hospitals, hitch hiking across the country, and staying at Homeless Shelters and being well fed and cared for.

These Manhasset kids wanted to donate cakes and cookies at Thanksgiving, 2009 and Neil was thrilled, but he also re-directed most of the goodies to 6

Homeless Shelters in Huntington Station, L.I. The gift giving continued into 2009 Holiday Season, and then all year round, as Homeless and Hungry Families

do not take a break from their hunger.

Then Coach Rule came up with a dance in Neil's honor, last December 3rd, at the Manhasset Middle school, and the entrance fee was 3 cans of nonperishable food. They raised 821 cans of food. That was so impressive that it caught the attention of Lisa Rosenthal of "Our Kids In Action", from Huntington, and she asked me if OKIA could do a Food, Fund Raiser game at the Nassau Coliseum, in Neil's honor. I was amazed, and Neil was ecstatic, and now April 2nd, next Saturday, there is going to be that Fund Raiser at the NY Islanders versus the Hurricanes, at 7 PM.

I read your story about John Daly, who is one of my favorite golfers, and I know personally that an athlete, like my son Neil, can be side tracked with mental illness, or drugs, or alcohol, or teen pressures, and I applaud him for openly discussing his journey with the kids on Long Island. This is what I am doing. I make speeches at schools to tell the students, not to be embarrassed about talking about any subject. Tell the coach or the parent or a teacher that you or a good friend needs help. That may save the life of that person, or it might get that person help in time to change their life.

I thought Neil was going to be a star in college lacrosse, but now he is a star in raising food for Hungry Families, and he is a star for Mental Illness Awareness. NAMI has chosen our new foundation: www.neilswheelsny.com (Neil's Wheels NY), as part of a nationwide documentary that will educate students about mental illness, and show that people like Neil, and his Neil's Wheels NY team, are trying to incorporate this subject into the mainstream topics in health classes in Middle Schools and High Schools throughout the United States.

There are athletes' and actors and everyday people in our country that can work and be productive, that do suffer from mental illness, and alcoholism, and they need to tell their stories, like John Daly did, and we, as a society, can help them and ourselves.

Greg Barber
Neil's Dad
Neils Wheels NY