

SPANKY

It is not breaking news to report Mark Spangler, a Geneva fraternity brother, passed away on Dec. 1. And far be it from me to write a worthy eulogy. I saw Spanky two or three times yearly, but we communicated often through the technology of the internet. A couple observations I construed throughout my association with Mark was he liked golf, Ohio State Football, and hard liquor, especially sweet hard liquor like J.D. Honey. He lived with a constant smile despite his many hardships. His grin was genuine, not put on, which signified how much he enjoyed life. Everyone was his friend even individuals he never met. After beating cancer once before, he lost the rematch. He was 65 years old.

Within hours of his death, I received this communique from Tony McGuckin.

“Spanky (Mark) I am at a loss of words of your passing. I’ll never forget the day I came into the golf scene and the constant encouragement you always showed me in my lack of golf game. Watching me on the golf course was extremely hard to do, I know, but you always had tips for me and words of encouragement that kept me going.

“Winning the Gavin Cup this year with my partner Ron doesn’t happen for me without the many tips and words of confidence from you and many others in our golf leagues. The annual golf trips to Kentucky and Geneva-on-the-Lake will never be the same anymore. Friday Night Golf League and the Sunday Tour will have a void that could never be filled.

“Spanky, I wish we could have played one more round together with many beers in hand. Rest easy my friend until we meet again.”

Hear-Hear, Tony. My story shows much the same character but in a different light. Two years in a row, poor Spanky drew me as a Gavin Cup partner. My golf game has been an albatross to many partners as Blaise Plageman will attest. Blaise reminds me every year how I cost him the Cup with my play. That reputation did not bother Spanky. He was excited to join forces with me. The results were the same, out of the money, but he appreciated my effort. Mr. Spangler had a way of making me feel wanted and special.

He made everyone around him feel wanted and special. Spanky participated in the most recent Geneva Open and showed no signs the cancer returned. He shot his customary 88, 93, 85 scores playing even golf with his 16 strokes handicap. He developed an established practice of nearly 45 years sticking around until he heard the words "last call". No place more evident of that habit than in Geneva. He was a late-night participant at Lumpy's Geneva Clubhouse. There was a mason jar of Apple Pie to finish and anyone within arms reach was encouraged to help him consume it to the very end. When that was gone, he shared his flask of Jack Daniels Honey.

Charter Member Dick Barrett had a Mark Spangler story he relayed to me.

"When Jack and I started playing golf with Mark it was apparent Mark was about hitting big drives. He could take a triple bogey on a hole but if this hole involved a big drive, he was happy.

"One day on the course after Mark spanked one down the fairway a discussion came about how far he did drive his ball. Mark with glee said it was about 240 yards. I said something like...hell, Mark, that's about as far as Paula Creamer drives the ball on the LPGA Tour.

"From that point and several years thereafter everyone in our foursome called Mark 'Paula' every time he got a hold of a good one. He just loved this and would just laugh and try for another 'Paula Worthy' drive."

My earliest recollection of Spanky joining the Geneva Open was 2011. Before that year, details are fuzzy. There is more clarity on the beginning of time than Mark's early life. Much of that mystery stems from the fact he grew up on another planet called Bucyrus, Ohio. He started to play on the Sunday Tour when Dick Barrett was Commissioner. Dick first remembered Spanky at a Pine Hills event. Mini-Legend Jack Berger first saw him at a Valley View Tour stop. Dick thought Paul Flautt introduced Spanky to the tour, but Jack remembers a truck driver named Dewey as his presenter. And neither one of those guys do recreational drugs or overindulge with alcohol. Jack did tell me Spanky "was a printer for more than 20 years and was laid off when Covid started. He always told me he was the biggest prick growing up, never believed him. He is truly one of the best guys I have met in my golf journey."

The best way to close this eulogy for Mark Spangler is to reprint the last paragraph of "The Golfer's Prayer" which was printed on his holy card.

"And finally, when we've putted out on the 18th green, we pray that we will have demonstrated the integrity of our character, so that you will judge us worthy enough to join your threesome and play eternally on your heavenly course. Amen".