



NCSBN
Leading Regulatory Excellence

Past Event: 2023 NCSBN Annual Meeting - Regulatory Network Session: Living Your Best Life: Turning Challenges into Triumphs Video Transcript
©2023 National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Inc.

Event

Past Event: 2023 NCSBN Annual Meeting

More info: <https://www.ncsbn.org/past-event/2023-ncsbn-annual-meeting>

Presenter

Ronan Tynan, Singer & Former Paralympic Athlete

- [Barbara] First we have the amazing saga of Ronan Tynan, whose extraordinary accomplishments and voice echoed across thousands of miles and into your hearts.

- [Voiceover] Ronan Tynan always had a wildness in him that often sent him in several directions at once, despite the fact that he was born with legs that were shortened and deformed below the knee. Ronan knew there was one person who always treated him as if he didn't care how Ronan looked or walked.

His father Edmund, who encouraged Ronan to sing as they crossed the fields, and also bought him a white pony named Sunbeam to ride, hoping it might help strengthen his legs. And he soon began to ride in competitions. But the complications predicted by doctors because of his deformed legs eventually set in. And Ronan himself made the decision to have his legs amputated below the knee so he could wear prosthetic legs that would allow him to stand straighter.

He began training for and entering games for the disabled, including world Olympic competitions in New York and Seoul, Korea. And between 1981 and '84, won 18 gold medals and set 14 world records. The unstoppable Ronan, at the age of 27, caught his family unprepared when he called one night to announce a new decision.

- [Fiona] He rang me one night and he said, "I want to do medicine." I said, "You what?" "I want to do medicine."

- And by the age of 33, he had again accomplished the goal of a lifetime. Ronan Tynan was a doctor, assigned to his first year of internship at a Dublin hospital. As a lark in his spare time, Dr. Tynan entered a national talent show called "Go For It" in 1994.

- [Presenter] The winner of "Go For It" 1994, Dr. Ronan Tynan.

- The department heads at the hospital in Dublin, they took up a collection so that Ronan could go off to England to study voice. As always, when he reached one goal after another, he seemed invincible until the night he was asked to do an encore and pleaded to his conductor that his voice wouldn't make it.

- It was really traumatic because Ronan had decided to give singing a real try. And I remember having to, you know, ring people back that maybe would have booked six months, nine months in advance and saying, "Look, I am terribly sorry, I'm going to have to cancel."

- So, Ronan Tynan returned home. And he did what he had trained six years to do, he opened a medical practice. But having collected dreams as if they grew like wildflowers, he was also well aware of the rumors that he was done.

- [Ronan] They said, "Oh, Ronan Tynan is finished. He'll never sing again."

- One of the men who had been a judge when Ronan won the "Go For It" talent show was putting together a group of three tenors, The Irish Tenors. It was an enormous success. What Ronan had come to embody in all the stages of his 38 years was the dedication we admire in athletes, the care of physicians, the ability of performers to shoulder the emotions of a crowd.

A list that could almost make you forget that it began with the boldness of a disabled boy, never shy of his obstacles or satisfied with his success. ♪ [music] ♪ ♪ True you ride the finest horse I have ever seen Standing 16' 1" or 2", with eyes wild and green ♪ ♪ And you ride the horse so well, hands light to the touch ♪ ♪ I could never go with you No matter how I wanted to ♪ ♪ Ride on, see you, ♪ ♪ I could never go with you No matter how I wanted to ♪ ♪ Ride on, see you, ♪ ♪ I could never go with you No matter how I wanted to ♪ ♪ When you ride into the night without a trace behind ♪ ♪ Run your gun along my heart, one last time ♪ ♪ I turn to face an empty space, where once you used to lie ♪ ♪ And look for the spark that lights the night Through a teardrop in my eye ♪ ♪ Ride on, see you, ♪ ♪ I could never go with you No matter how I wanted to ♪ - Thank you.

It's a great pleasure to be able to perform in front of you. I'm no saint. The halo you see above my head is a reflection of the light on the bald head. Some of you might be familiar with this disposition.

I just had the pleasure to sing with you one of my favorite songs. It was written by a man called Jimmy MacCarthy. It was called "Ride On." And the interesting thing, it was written for a bald man. So, I'm not really going to go into all that. You heard a little bit about me from the TV clip you just saw.

And now, I want the opportunity to share with you some of my innermost thoughts. Some of you, too, have had your own special challenges. Many of you may be struggling at this present moment in time. All of us will continue to do this as we try to reach new heights in our professional lives, but more importantly, greater happiness in our private lives.

I recently reflected back on that vignette you've just seen and it started me thinking, "Where did that spirit come from that has allowed me to reach heights far beyond what a boy with physical challenges could ever have dreamed of doing? How have I been able to put so much into my life in such a short space of time?" Well, it's come down to two things, really.

Belief of others in me, and continued encouragement and reinforcement of that same belief. Belief in knowing that I would succeed, irrespective of the challenges that I was about to face in life. This belief,

love, and encouragement from my family and my friends developed positive attitudes within me that just couldn't be shaken.

Growing from this came the opportunity to live life to the absolute full. But learning from this, to succeed in whatever we do in life is not a solo flight. We all need someone. There was a great song that Barbra Streisand used to sing from "Funny Girl." "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world."

Wasn't she right? You heard my sister Fiona, an amazing woman. You glimpsed my parents. I stand in front of you, 6-foot, 4". 240 pounds of raw Irish beef. My father was a little bit... Actually, that picture kind of plays with him a little bit.

He was 5-foot, 4" and a half. And she was 5-foot, 5" in heels. The most amazing thing about those two is I don't have enough adjectives to describe her. Powerful, direct, focused. And she's the reason I stand in front of you here today. My father was an amazing man.

But, ladies, while I'm 6-foot, 4", I'm adjustable. I can be any height you want. So, if you're looking for a little Jack Russell, I can be that little dog. And if you're looking for a Dobermann, I can do that job, too. You glimpsed my musical mentors and my friends.

They had one thing in common. They always supported me. They never pushed. And that was a great thing. When I attended school, my sister, Fiona, used to always get concerned about the teasing that I was inflicted with.

And that's how badly it made her feel. You see, Fiona was my shield and my strength. But of course, being Irish, she could feel badly enough for us all. Irish culture is amazing. We come to shine so well in bereavement. Even if we don't know the people, we'll go to the pub.

And we will stay drinking and laud the people who have died, and we have no idea who they are. But when the drink stops flowing, we're gone. Of course, the teasing words got to me, but they didn't stay with me. Why?

Because of the love of many. But most importantly, because of the word my father used to say to me. "Ronnie, you're great." That was the most important thing to hear as a young child. What a mentor he was. People who mentor become a battalion of inspiration. Mentoring does make a difference.

All of you here today know that. Many of you may be sitting beside people you've mentored or whom have mentored you. What a great gift they have. Early on, I transcribed that message in my brain. And when I get up in the morning and look in the mirror, it's not bad when you look like this, I'd say, "You're great."

You see, if you do it often enough, you really do believe it. You see in yourself what other people see in you, a strength waiting to be harnessed. The man above gives us many talents. And sometimes we just have to open our eyes to see the two beauties. Not everybody is blessed with perpendicular ears.

But Irish people are good at self-deprecation. Well, a couple of... Well, many years ago, I was in New York and auditions came up for "Shrek." Not funny. I auditioned. And I made it to the last five.

And one thing you must do with yourself, "To thine own self be true." This was going to require seven performances in a week and a lot of hard work. And plus makeup, plus costume. And the costume weighed 60 pounds. So, you can imagine where that put me.

So, I had to realize that there would be a whole program depending on my performances. So, I had to focus on what I have and not what I want. And I realized that this would be more than a challenge than I could manage. But in the process of all that, the focus opened up realms of possibilities that were there for me.

But the biggest thing of all, it freed up my mind. So, if you're not doing it during this part of your life, tomorrow morning, wake up, smile at that mirror and say, "I'm great." You know, the luck of the Irish doesn't have to be reserved for the Irish all the time. And if you're Italian, just talk to an Irish person. They'll explain it.

You see, if you focus too much on what you want, you can end up dissatisfied an awful lot of the time. Life can only be learned from looking backwards, but we live it going forwards. There is no reverse gear in life, it's a forward motion. You get on with it, you embrace it, and you love it, and you greet it.

And that's the most important thing to do. In my wild teenage years, believe it or not, I was a jockey. I know you're thinking, "How, in the name of heavens, did this big giant ever ride a horse?" Well, if you recall, at the start of the conversation, I said I was adjustable. So, I would go into the jockey's enclosure standing at 6-foot, 1", I'd come out at 5-foot, 2". That's the beauty of prosthetics.

And of course, this caused major disdain and shock among the horsing community. I used to ride steeplechases. Which are big fences about 4-foot, 6", and it's a 3-mile chase. And my father used to love the whole idea of me going into that jockey room, coming out in miniature fashion.

And of course, the bookies gave us no chance, but we sorted that out, too. You see, I used every aspect of my physical, mental, and spiritual strength, and I ignored my weaknesses. And that's what we all need to do. Build on our strengths. And we all have them.

My father would stand in eyeshot on a peripheral view when I would come to a fence. And as I approached, he would raise his leg. And as I'd land, he'd drop his leg. He was with me all the way. He never left me. My mam, as I said, there are no adjectives to describe her, but this was one part of my life she wasn't embracing.

She would go to the races, sit in the car park, and say prayers. It worked. I always returned. I dared to dream the greatest steeplechase of all, which is in Liverpool in England. And it has a big, huge fence called Becher's Brook. It stands at a 16-foot drop.

I still think I could do it, but I'm just not sure there's a horse that could carry me over. When you win gold, or achieve success, as all of you have done here today, remember those who saw your talents and wanted so much for you to succeed. We all have long lists.

Those who supported us right throughout our journey, and even gave that little nudge of encouragement when we needed it most. All of us are ordinary, God-fearing people, but we can be recognized for doing the extraordinary. Look at you here. You've done the extraordinary.

And listening to yourself talk, you really have done the extraordinary. The most important thing is that that's what makes you great. That's what makes everyone great. I often recall the joy both my parents would show when I would achieve in any aspect of sports, academia, or music.

My father would hug me. Grab me around the neck, it didn't matter if we were even in public, and just tell me, "You're great." He said this from the moment that I could understand those words, and kept on saying it until the day he passed.

That picture you see there is, believe it or not, I still retain the world record for the long jump. And that was the World Championships in Sweden. I was a little bit more toned then. And you have no idea how he behaved when that was achieved. He went absolutely nuts.

You see, when words like this are said enough times, you really do believe them. Because they're coming from such a place of great love. So, my message for you today is don't be slow in giving or accepting encouragement. You have no idea the benefit it reaps.

At every stage of my life, this encouragement and support has allowed me to live life to the absolute full. Looking at the way my life has started, and the turns and twists that I have taken, I can see now more of the endless possibilities that are there for me. Just think about this.

I might never have achieved status in sports with two perfectly abled limbs. But with the limbs that were designed for me, I became, in 1984, the most outstanding disabled athlete in the world. I ran the 100 meters in 13.8 seconds. Wind-assisted, of course.

I set a world record for the discus. I broke it six times. And on the sixth throw, they immediately escorted me to be drugs tested. They were convinced I was on something. More fooled them. I revel in the fact that my physical challenges have made me take risks far beyond what I could ever have dreamed of doing.

But I believe the biggest risk in life is not taking risk itself. I've also discovered something more amazing. When you focus more on what you have in life, you get so much more from life itself. But the greatest gifts of all are fulfillment and happiness. There's no doubt in my mind that life is driven from within.

When you focus on being happy internally, it seeps out through your very nature. People feel comfortable around you. You know, that's the most important thing we could ever wish for. For when you're happy, people gravitate towards you because they sense an inner peace with you.

And that's a huge gift. When I was going to university, Fiona, once again, was the worrier. And she wondered how I would navigate getting up stairs into the college rooms and the university itself. But what she didn't realize was her strength, my family's support and love, and my friends were there to give me that lift.

Their hands were there to help me get there. They gave me that extra shout of encouragement. Not that I can do it. I will do it. And I'm doing it right now. You see, one thing I've learned about us all, we are not all equal in ability, disability, background, or the choices that are afforded to us.

But if we concentrate on the task that is in front of us to the very best of our ability, then no more than that we can ever do. We have given our 100%. I had a father who encouraged me like no one else. He was obsessed with everything that I did.

He wanted everything for me. I had a mother that was so powerful and directed that she commanded my life to be something special. This photo is very interesting. That competition, that singing competition that they alluded to, "Go For It." After I won it, somebody took this picture.

My mother had to hold my father down. Because he wanted to leap up off the stage in front of 3,000 people and grab me. He used to do this... You know, the funny thing is, the very first performance I ever did. He came back to me after the first half of the show and he said, "You're doing good, but you could do better."

I said, "Dad, you're killing me." And he said, "Oh, no, no. You're singing well, but there's more. There's more." So, I said, "Okay." Thinking, "This is a tough call." But he used to love a song called "Roses of Picardy." So, I decided to open up the second half of the show with this song. And the interesting thing about this little theater, there was only about 400 people at it, but it was packed.

And anyway, I sung the song. He leapt up out of his seat and he turned to the audience and says, "He's fantastic." And my mother grabbed him, "Sit down, sit down." And he grabbed her, he says, "Get up." He says, "You're the reason he's here." That was the type of man he was. He was extraordinary.

You know, he often said, "Blaze a new trail, that's your style." And it became my style. To blaze this trail, I received so much help along the way from amazing people. And the one thing I will say to you about this is always be gracious and humble when you receive such help and encouragement from wonderful people.

People who recognize your ability and your talent, and want so much for you to succeed. What an amazing gift they give. When I was training back in 1984 in Ireland, particularly for athletics, particularly the discus, we didn't have the magnificent facilities in Ireland that America has.

And I used to throw the discus in a recreational field. Now, I had no idea the angle of trajectory that this thing was going. And people were walking on the sidelines, as recreational walk. They had no idea what was happening.

And I noticed people were giving me a big distance. So, I said... So, there was this man, and he was watching me, and he approached me. And he said to me, see, "Do you want a hand?" And I said, "I surely do." So, in discus throwing, you have to transfer weight from one leg to the other to do a one-and-three-quarter turn.

So, this man's name was Bernie Hartigan and he was a discus thrower himself, and had won European and top-level competition. So, he said to me, "Ro," he said, "the most important thing for you here is you have to learn how to waltz." Now, just think about this. 1983 in Ireland, in a big, huge field, people are recreationally walking around to relieve stress and strain.

Now, they see something else. Two grown men waltzing along the field. Now, I know it raised eyebrows. Well, we're in 2023. Nobody minds who dances with anybody these days. Well, eventually, I succeeded. And Bernie told me, he said, "Ronan, you'll win the coveted gold medal."

And I said, "Why is that?" "Because you have the will to win." And I learned that's what winners do, they have the will to win. But they prepare and polish, and prepare some more and polish some more. They never become complacent. You cannot become complacent.

So, all I can tell you is take actions on your big dreams. They're in your heart. Make them real. You have to believe with your heart and your soul that you can achieve anything you want. And I know from my experience, this will is inside us all. And when you capture it, it brings the finest from you.

That year gave me tremendous inner strength. Success came like no other. I won the Olympic medal, I broke the world record. That was in 1988. It still stands today, which is, I suppose, in many ways, amazing. So, you can imagine now, you're in Seoul, Korea.

You need a bunch of change to make a phone call to Ireland to tell them what's going on. So, I went to the nearest phone. I had a bag of change, I was putting it in like mad. Dad was at the phone. And in our house, not only one person answered the phone, two. So, every time the phone was picked up, my mother was right beside him.

It's not that she didn't trust him, but she never gave him an opportunity to have another idea. So, I said, "I did well." And I could hear the emotion. He said to me, he said, "I'm so proud of you. I'm so thrilled." And he said, "What was it like?"

I said, "It was great." But I said, "At the end of it, I was drugs tested, and I'm clean." And that moment gave me the full confidence that I was suddenly being recognized as an athlete, as a serious athlete. I rang my father. As I was talking to him, I talked to him, and he said, "I'm thrilled for you." And I could hear Mam saying, "Put me on, let me talk to him."

So, he said, "I better hand you over to top management." Take note of that, gentlemen, "top management." And he also called her "she who must be obeyed." So, it always worked. And she said, "Ro, I'm delighted for you." I said, "Thanks, Ma."

"But I'm more delighted you're not on drugs." I said, "How can you say that?" She said, "Look at how big you got." And I just said to her, "It must be in the genes." I've also realized we cannot become what we need to be by remaining the way we are. Change is painful, but ever needful.

But the curious paradox about change is if you accept yourself as you, whether you're large, whether you're slim, whether you're balding, whether you have beautiful, triangular, perpendicular ears, it doesn't matter. As long as you accept who you are, you can make any change you want to your life. But the first change is acceptance, accepting me.

Then it always works. Well, certainly, my road through life has had some real twists. And yes, I have been challenged. Nature cannot be tricked or cheated. She will only give up of your struggles when you have paid her the price.

Many years ago, I fell from a horse and fractured some nasal bones. It didn't come back to haunt me until I was about three years into my musical career. And at that stage, I had to stop. And I turned to my dad and I said, "Dad, what am I going to do?" He says, "Go back and go into medicine. Go back and open up your practice. You have a lot of work behind you, you've done a lot of special things. So, start from the roots."

So, on a Wednesday, I opened up my practice. And I had done a lot of work in sports injuries and rehabilitation. So, I had one patient on the Wednesday. Well, I actually had two. Because my father sat in the waiting room. And I thought... You know, as much as I kind of thought it was strange, I accepted the fact that he was there and it was good for me.

So, on the Thursday, I had six patients. Now, Dad was deadly to talk. He loved talking. And he loved telling stories. And the beauty was he would never let the truth get in the way of the story. And you could hear the same story 1,000 times, but it was different, but it was the same. You know what I mean.

And then coming home on Friday, which was the... I had nine patients. Now, he was like a hen on a hot griddle. He was flying. So, we're going home and I said, "Dad, is there any harm in asking you why you stayed in the waiting room while I was working?" He said, "Oh, yeah, well," he said, "it's very important to make up the numbers." I said, "Okay."

So, he said, "Listen, let me explain something to you. When I go to a GP, or a doctor," he said, "if I go into the waiting room and I don't see anybody, then I don't think he's any good. So, I wanted your patients to know you had a patient." I said, "That's fantastic." And he says to me, he says, "I had one concern." I said, "What's that?"

He said, "The concern I had was that if the fellow on Wednesday came back on Thursday and saw me there, he'd realize you hadn't cured either of us." So, I said, "Thankfully, that didn't happen." Well, by late 1998, my voice was coming back to its strength. And my dad's health was deteriorating quite significantly.

And rightly or wrongly, I was looking after him and I was keeping him going. It's very hard to let go of somebody you really love. And if you think you can do something to lengthen that, you will go to the ends of the earth. My mom had developed Alzheimer's.

So, we had two things going on at the same time. And he was dealing with that, as well. And so we had challenges, there's no doubt about that. And I brought Mam into my practice as a receptionist. And let me tell you, that was an experience and a half. My mother was a good-looking woman.

So, when I knew that we had Alzheimer's, I used to say to Mam in the morning, "Put on your Sunday best." My mother was huge into tweed. Tweed for everything. And she wore black stockings, patent black shoes, the hair put up in a French bun. She was a stunner. You know, look what happened.

But, you know, anyway, eventually, I felt both my father and I were given back to nature. He was giving to me something that I could never return, and he passed. The first time I sung, after those years, was at his funeral. And while it was very hard to understand and accept, I felt he was there with me, and has always been.

Don't ever lose sight of the people you love because the depth of love surpasses death. They're there. They're in your heart and they never go. My mam, sadly, really got extremely bad. But we had a lot...

I want to tell you something. We had a lot of fun with her. I know Alzheimer's is tough. God knows I know. And I think it's harder for the carer than it is for the person itself. But she was a riot. If something didn't fit with politics or religion, all hell broke out in that waiting room.

And they used to wind her up to the point that she was insane. And she'd come in, "Ronan, you can't treat that person. They're not the right type of politics that we deal with." And I said, "Mam, it's okay. It's okay, I get it." The way to my mother's heart then was Fry's Chocolate Cream.

She adored it. And she adored jelly. And if you traveled with her, you bought two bars. But when you took the one...when you went for the one that she left, she'd snap you and she'd say, "That's mine, too." They were extraordinary people.

I think now, in the many things that I've done in my life, there's two people up there pulling a couple of strings. My inclusion in The Irish Tenors came about as a result of that "Go For It" competition you saw earlier that I won.

And a typical Irish affair. They asked... This guy rang me up in 1998, he said, "Ronan, would you like to be part of The Irish Tenors?" I said, "Yeah. I think it would be great." Next question, "Do you know anybody else that would?" That's what happens.

And it went on to be huge. And an actual fact, on December 6th, we're coming to Chicago. So, if any of you are in Chicago, I'd love to see you. Anyway, I have the great pleasure to sing to people all over the world. I wear a small little hat for medicine. But when the pandemic broke out, I had my license, I kept it going. So, I worked in a hospital for two years.

And it was great to get back. Now, I want to talk to you about different things. So, I'm going to ask David to play something for you. And just listen quite attentively to this.

- [President Bush] Ronan, George Bush here. Appreciated very much your calling. Barbara's fine, all is well here with the Bushes. And hope it's the same for you. But hang in there, and hope our paths cross soon. We love you. Goodbye.

- So, I was very close to President Bush and Barbara. So, this picture... This is a few pictures I'm going to go through with you. So, Barbara had asked me to be one of the authors at her book for children and literacy. Now, I wrote one book.

They had people there that were ridiculously-famous authors. Famous authors. Famous, famous, famous. Like, what's her... Patrick. What's her name? James Earl Jones.

Tom. There were a huge amount, and then there was me. So, during the reading, James Earl Jones talked for 10 minutes, read, and that was it. And we were supposed to talk for an hour. So, George, President Bush, came to me, he looked at me, he said, "Is your book funny?" I said, "Yeah, there's funny bits in it."

"Go out and get that audience going." Now, we're in Texas. There's 3,000 people. And I thought, "What am I going to do?" So, I went on stage and I said, "This is my book. It's called Halfway Home: My Life 'til Now." And I said, "I'm not going to read from it, but I'm going to tell you about it." So, I gave them all the anecdotes that were funny.

How I dealt with chickens that pecked on Fiona's legs, I fed them whiskey. And I'm going to tell you more stories about everything else that was in the book, but he loved it. So, when I finished, they were all giving a standing ovation and all the rest. And he said, "Go back out there and sing a song."

I said, "But I have no backing track, I have no pianist." He said, "You don't even have one of those when you're singing in the Irish pub, do you?" So, I said, "No, sir." So, that thus started a huge friendship. So, the next photograph you're going to see, this was at the White House for the 60th wedding anniversary of Barbara and George.

And on the far right is Fiona. And when we arrived at the White House, President Bush, Jr. met us. And he grabbed Fiona and he said, "Fiona, I'm going to bring you on a tour of the White House." And he took her all over it. And when she came back, she was in the floods of tears.

And I said, "What's wrong?" She said, "He's such a lovely man," she said. "The media are really hard." I said, "That's media." But that year, President Bush announced that... in this big 300 dinner, that he had 60 gold nuggets with Barbara and himself.

And he said, "I want to give this to my 60 closest friends." So, anyway, like, I mean, I knew President Bush, but I didn't ever, ever see myself as being, you know, a friend. Oh, yes, I was a friend in my head, but I didn't think that, you know, you could be a friend of a president because they have so many people around them.

So, he approached Fiona and he put something in her hand. And he said to her, "Don't give him this until you get back to the hotel." So, I said, "What is it? What is it?" So, I got back to the... And he had labeled all the nuggets and the pictures. And on mine, it was number 60.

And she said, "What do you think of that?" I said, "Either be first or be last. But you win." So, that was that. So, next one. She was incredible. She was extraordinary. So, many...actually, seven years ago, President Bush asked me to come down and see him in Houston.

And so I flew down. And this was before he got ill. And, you know, before a lot of things. So, as I'm knocking on the door, Barbara comes down the stairs. And she used to call me "son." And she'd open...and when she opened the door, "Well, son, how are you?"

and big hug. She said, "Do you know why he's called you here?" I said, "No, ma'am, I don't." She said, "He wants you to sing at his funeral." And I said, "Well, that's not going to happen, please God, for a while." "Oh, no," she said, "but, you know, everything has to be prepared. He has already picked the songs, he knows what he wants you to sing.

So, I said... Well, anyway, I was kind of a little bit taken back. So, President Bush was coming down the stairs. He said, "Well, Ronan." I said, "Sir, how are you?" And he said, "I suppose she told you." And I didn't know whether to say "yes" or "no."

I didn't know how to play that card. And he said, "You know, Ro," he says, "she can't keep her powder dry. She has to let the world know." So, he said, "Are you okay with doing that for me?" I said, "Sir, of course I am." So, at that stage, I knew maybe eight years prior to his passing, I knew that I was going to be singing at his funeral.

The same way that Nancy Reagan rang me up the day before they announced President Reagan's funeral...passing. And I remember coming out of an elevator in New York. And I didn't know the number. And this lady said, "Can you hold for Nancy Reagan?"

I said, "Sorry?" She said, "This is the Reagan Library. Mrs. Reagan would like to speak to you." And, you know, when you hear these phone calls, you think, "That's a prank. I mean, that's mad." But anyway.

So, anyway. I got out of the elevator and she said, "This is Nancy Reagan, Ronan." And I said, "Ma'am, yes?" You know, I thought to myself. And she said, "Ronnie wanted a tenor to sing in the cathedral in Washington and to fill the walls of the church." And she said, "I think you're the right person for the job. Will you do it for me?"

I said, "Yes, ma'am. It would be a great honor." And the following day... And that was a Friday. On the Saturday, I was singing in Belmont at the races. Funny Jones...or Smarty Jones was trying to win the Triple Crown. He didn't. And the trainer blamed me because he reckoned I put the horse off.

But anyway, the bottom line is it was announced that President Reagan had passed. And then I was told that maybe he had passed the day before, but they allowed Nancy have the time with him, the dignity of that, which I thought was fantastic. She made one request, that I wouldn't sing on any television before the funeral, that I would do no interviews.

I said, "That's not a problem." But I've got to tell you one thing, the media really can press. We got phone calls, and, "Why can't you do this?" And I kept saying, "No, sorry. No, sorry." But anyway. So, that was Mrs. Reagan.

Next photo. This was the house after he had asked me to do the job. This was in their own home. The next one. This is a great photo. It was his 90th birthday party. And you'll love this.

I had just got the Green Card. And he was thrilled. They didn't get it, but he was holding up the card, "I made this happen." So, that was him. And he was a beautiful man. You know, if you take politics away, he was just a beautiful, beautiful man. And I was very fond of him.

She was a riot. I loved her. She used to come to shows. And next one. This was Taco Tuesday up in Kennebunkport. And that was about a year before he passed. So, and he always wanted me to come.

And of course, you had to sing a few songs. And the tacos, they were hot. And I was never good at hot. But anyway, and finally, that's herself. And I love that photograph because she was... they were wonderful people. So, that was my experience with the great presidents.

I've sung for President Clinton up in New York. And the one thing I can tell you about him, he's extremely charismatic. Extremely. I haven't sung for President Trump. And I was... You know, but you lookit, I've sung a nice few ones. Anyway, I wanted...

So, that's that part of my life. Well, now, I want to share with you a couple of stories about performing in opera. My first role in opera was to sing "Madame Butterfly," it's Puccini. Now, if you're not opera fans, this is the one to start with. You know, this is the one to start with. Or "La bohème."

The music is so beautiful, it betrays what's going to happen. In "Madame Butterfly," I played Pinkerton, who's an American lieutenant who falls in love with a Japanese girl called Cio-Cio-san, or Butterfly. My Butterfly was about 5-foot, 1". I stand in front of you 6-foot, 4". And at the final part of Butterfly, Butterfly lies center of stage.

She has died. And Pinkerton is to come in and caress her. But I was so delighted that I actually got through the program without too many glitches, I was talking to the chorus backstage figuring out where we were going to go. And next minute, the stage hand, on his Tannoy, said, "Tynan, you're on."

So, I did "Chariots of Fire." I ran from upstage to center stage. But what I didn't see was there was a small lip on the floor. In six weeks, I never saw this lip. I didn't caress her.

I landed on her. And when I landed on her, all you could hear is, "Ow!" And I said, "Oh, I'm so terribly sorry." "Ow!" And the stage manager didn't realize his Tannoy was open to the house, it was about 2,500 people. And he said, "Well, if she's not dead, she is now."

Of which the audience were cracking up, but my Butterfly wasn't very happy. So, my next story for you is kind of interesting. And you'd have thought that maybe, you know, you're sharp enough to think, "Maybe opera's not for me. I don't move that well."

But then I decided... I won this huge competition in England and the prize was to do an operetta called "Land of Smiles" by Franz Lehár. It doesn't matter if you're not familiar. They set up this big Viennese stage. Right? Where you had a massive stairwell coming down from the gods, coming right into center stage. But as you well know, that when they're doing these big stagings, it's not straight down.

They have a bend on it. So, there was a fairly acute bend. And with the limbs, I'm not great at going down stairs. I'm better at climbing. So, I was partnered with, how I would describe, a Wagnerian-built lady. Bless her, she was huge. And she wore a mustard dress, and there was reams of material in it.

But she wore a big, long train out the back. I don't understand, ladies, why you wear trains, because all they do is gather dust. But anyway, the orchestra starts. And she's on the outside, I'm on the inside, and the banister is about there. I'm already nervous, I'm perspiring like a lunatic anyway.

As the overture is being played, we get to the bend, and she leans in. So, I got nervous and I pushed her out a bit. And she took off about five steps. And next minute, there was a... My left leg was on the train, but I didn't know it.

And behold, I saw a vision. Sacred heart of God, it was huge! And I didn't know what to do. And I hadn't even opened my mouth to sing. And I thought, "Oh my God. Oh my God!" So, I bent down, picked up the train.

Now, ladies, can I give you a bit of advice from kind of a simple area of dressing? Just use Velcro. Just use Velcro. Because then when you push something in, it doesn't... So, she had tacked the train with pins. Oh my God, when I shoved this thing into her, she horsed another few steps.

And I had to sing "Love, What has Given Me this Magic Power?" There was no love. No magic. And we were supposed to go stage right. Right? And you can imagine.

Now, this is 3,000 people attending this. And it's a big, massive orchestra, 90-piece orchestra, The Hallé orchestra. And if you can imagine, stage right is, say, there. And at that part of the stage, the basses and the celli are playing. So, in this particular arrangement, the tenor and the soprano were to sit down over the edge of the stage.

And I was to sing the aria to her. "You Are My Heart's Delight," or "Dein ist mein ganzes Herz." And I thought she was behind me, but she wasn't. She stood over there. She must have felt the breeze or

something. But anyway, I turned and the conductor started. And so there was a part in it where the producer said, "When you get to 'shine through my dreams,' let your arms...let your body go and show her how passionate you are."

So, I did. When I did that, my right leg fell into the pit. Yeah, you don't write this stuff, this is unbelievable. The conductor looked. I knew her reaction would have been, "Oh my God." And the audience went...

You know that unearthly quiet, that very quiet moment where people say nothing but know something catastrophic has happened? So, I looked down and I said to the cellist, I said, "Can you hand me up my leg?" And he was as white as a sheet. And I thought, "We need"...

"Can you hand me up my leg?" And he looked at me. I said, "Will you give me up the leg?" So, he caught it and you'd swear I had leprosy. He was terrified. Now, to put on a prosthesis, you know, you have to take off the pants. Well, that audience wasn't ready for that.

So, I kind of shoved it on as best I could, went behind stage right where the big curtain was. And there was the producer, and she was bawling her eyes out. She was crying uncontrollably. And I looked at her, I said, "What's wrong with you? I'm having a nightmare out here." And she said, "How much more of you can fall apart?"

Well, I said, "You'll have to wheel me back out." So, you know, there have been other incidents. But, you know, one thing I'm going to say to you all, everyone at some stage or other would like to turn back the clock and undo the mistakes of the past.

We all want to do that. But it's neither possible or desirable. So, don't waste your time on dreaming, wondering what might have been. Those mistakes we make in life, in our life, are quite valuable in the lessons they can teach us. And as a result, can bring so much more success into our lives, simply.

Now, there's one point I would like to utter about this. That's presuming, of course, you're the kind of person who knows how to learn from them. And so I've actually stopped singing opera. And usually when I'm performing, I usually stay to the left of the conductor.

So, if I fall, I'm going that direction. There are two others beside me. When I sing and perform, I usually sing by the piano. I stick my backside into the belly. So, I've learned how to kind of control the outbursts. People might have thought I had tonic-clonic seizures and things like that. You know, what can you do?

Things happen. My experiences have really reinforced a belief I hold that is very dear. Success is a team effort. It's like you are here today. It's like a family.

Two people meet, that's the beginning. By keeping together, there is progress. And by working together, there is success. Sometimes you encourage. And sometimes you yourself are encouraged. My hope is that you will remember some part of my life struggle when you have to throw the discus of life that little bit harder.

It's important to remember the people you meet along the way. The believers. The encouragers. Belief and encouragement are the matches which light the candle of achievement. I'm walking proof of that.

Sharing my life story, its struggles and successes, I hope, will be helpful in some way to you today as you move through your many challenges, both in your professional and personal lives.

One of my favorite quotes which I feel epitomizes my faith and belief, "Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings while the dawn is still dark." My hope for you is that you will feel this light and truly sing your song of success before the dawn of another day.

It's been a great pleasure talking to you this afternoon. I'd like to finish the program by singing for you a song that I auditioned for "Shrek" with. It is fond memories and it was written by Leonard Cohen. And I had the great pleasure of singing this particular song for his sister.

And it was after Leonard had passed and she said, "You know," she said, "Ro, I think Leonard would have liked this." Thank you so much. ♪ [music] ♪ ♪ I heard there was a secret chord That David played and it pleased the Lord ♪ ♪ But you don't really care for music, do ya? ♪ ♪ It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth The minor fall, the major lift ♪ ♪ The baffled king composing Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Maybe I've been here before I know this room, I've walked this floor ♪ ♪ I used to live alone before I knew ya ♪ ♪ I see your flag on the marble arch Love is not a victory march ♪ ♪ It's cold but a broken Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah ♪ - This is...the next piece is just the instrumental.

So, just enjoy it. ♪ [music] ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah ♪ ♪ I know there is a God above But all I ever learned from love ♪ ♪ Was how to shoot at someone who outdrew ya ♪ ♪ It's not the cry you hear at night It's not someone who's seen the Light ♪ ♪ It's cold but a broken Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah, ♪ ♪

[music] ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ - Thank you.