



Episode #36 - Phil Milroy

Gary (00:02):

You're listening to Rebel 5ive an interactive interview podcast with alumni, past and current parents and friends of Roncalli high school. I'm your host, Gary Armbruster, director of alumni and corporate relations at Roncalli And each week I will ask our guests five questions regarding how their lives have evolved and how key connections of experience, opportunity and alumni networking have propelled them to where they are today. We will talk challenges, how to overcome challenges and what they've learned along the way. Stay tuned.

Gary (00:33):

Today's guest, it's on the Rebel 5ive podcast is Mr. Phil Milroy. Phil, thanks for being here today, uh, under under some strange circumstances to a most, uh, talk to us about e-learning and how you've adapted to that.

Phil (00:52):

E learning is a strange and fearful beast. You know, I've been, uh, I've been telling my students, I've been reminding them all that every one of their teachers right now is a first year teacher. And so just like we're trying to cut them a little bit of Slack, they got to cut us a little bit of Slack because we're all trying to figure out how, how to do this. Um, I'm lucky. I think English is actually one of the classes that's a little bit easier to do that than some of the others. You know, I wouldn't want to have to teach chemistry remotely or something like that, but for me, you know, if, if my class was going to read pride and prejudice and we were going to do that together and their homework assignment is going to be read chapters 21 through 23 and do the study guide, I can still do that as an E-lesson. We're missing out on some of the classroom conversation, which is the best part and the most fun part. But they're still going to get to do the things that they were supposed to do. If my kids had to write a research paper, that's something that we're going to do largely in front of their own computers anyway. So there's no reason why we can't do it here.

Gary (01:49):

Uh, four years ago we went to one to one with the Chromebooks. How big, how big of an uh, uh, component is that? Ha. If we hadn't had that, we'd really be up a Creek. Correct?

Phil (02:02):

I don't know what we would do. Um, I think it would be particularly difficult given how quickly things escalated. We went from having, um, our Indiana's first confirmed case of Covid19 was one Friday and by the next Friday we were out of school for at least the next three weeks. Like that's insanely quickly. So without one-to-one, like I couldn't run off copies and distribute them or anything like that. I don't know if E learning would have been, it would have been possible without one-to-one. Um, I, I really don't know. I, I'm having a hard time envisioning how that would work.

Gary (02:40):

Well, we live in Perry township and Perry township. I'm not throwing stones at anybody. That's just the way it is. Southport and Perry Meridian, they didn't have one to one. And so, you know, they're passing out Chromebooks in the parking lot of school and I'm thinking, Oh my gosh, that just seems like such an I, I feel for them. I really do. And I'm so thankful that we had four years behind us to, to be prepared.

Phil (03:08):

You know, the way I try and think about it is if this would have happened 10 years ago, um, we would not be looking at a quarter of e-learning. W we'd be looking at just, okay, we had three quarters of a year, that's it. We're done. Go home. So anything that we can get, no matter how piecemeal, no matter how messy it is, it's, it's an improvement over what would have been otherwise. So are there going to be some gaps in these kids' knowledge? Yeah, I absolutely am. I going to have to clean up some more messes? Are we all going to have to clean up some more messes in the fall because of this? Yeah, absolutely. But it's still better than the alternative.

Gary (03:43):

Yeah. I, I, I think our staff, our teachers have done a, an amazing job. I've talked to, um, well I talked to Angie toner and I know math is an entirely different thing. Kind of what you alluded to earlier, trying to generate new material and I know she has spent a bunch of time, Oh, well in fact her whole spring break, um, trying to develop a plan and that sort of thing. So you're from Columbus?

Phil (04:09):

Yeah, the uh, Columbus, yeah, Columbus, North Columbus, Indiana. The unexpected and unforgettable Athens of the Prairie. My parents had a coffee book that referred to it as the modernist Mecca of the Midwest. Pretty big deal.

Gary (04:26):

Did, uh, did you go to Saint Bart's? Saint Bartholomew?

Phil (04:29):

I did. I went to St. Bartholomew First through eighth grade. There was no kindergarten when I started. Um, as a matter of fact, when I started, it was still all saints Catholic school. Um, and then it went back to st Bartholomew and then Columbus North high school. And I graduated there in 2003. You know, it's always a weird thing to say because they're going to be some people who listen and think, Oh, you're such a baby. And other people are like, you know, my students are like, Oh my goodness, you are ancient. Like you graduated high school before YouTube even existed.

Gary (05:02):

So did you grow up in Columbus as it just, obviously you went to grade school there, but before that, so you spent your whole life in Columbus?

Phil (05:10):

All of my conscious, my, I grew up in, or I was born in LaGrange, Illinois, somewhere on the West side of Chicago and I lived there until I was, I don't know, five or six. And then my parents uprooted us and moved us to Columbus. So effectively, consciously, my memory is just, yeah, from Columbus.

Gary (05:27):

Cummins is a huge deal in Columbus. So in the, your parents work for Cummins?

Phil (05:32):

No, actually, uh, sometimes it felt like they were about the only two adults I knew who didn't. And um, my, my dad was an institutional money manager and so he invested people's money in the stock market for a living. I think he, I think his firm managed some stuff for Cummins. I'm not a hundred percent certain, he didn't always keep me up to date on all of his work portfolios for some reason. And my mom was a mom and pretty darn good at it.

Gary (05:56):

CERAland. Not very many people will have any knowledge of what I'm talking about.

Phil (06:01):

But yeah, CERAland, it was a, it's a city. Well, CERA CERA, Cummins employee, recreational area. Um, it's sort of like a big city park. It's got, you know, a gym. It's got lots of outdoor places. It's got a pool. It's got, of course it's got little paddle boats and officially it's for Cummins employees in their families. But you can use it, you could rent it out for civic events. I know that every year, um, on the last day of elementary school would be like a field day. And so sometimes we'd get to go to CERAland to have some outdoors, these sorts of events and stuff like that. So fond memories. Absolutely.

Gary (06:39):

Something you didn't mention about CERAland. They also have softball fields. I didn't spend a lot of time. Well we did. And I spent many hot, nasty, cold, sometimes rainy, just you, you name it. And we experienced everything under the sun at CERAland playing softball. But some good times

Phil (07:03):

braver than I am. I was there under usually pretty idyllic conditions.

Gary (07:07):

So Columbus North. Yeah. I'm a bulldog. Yeah. So how do you get from Columbus North to Notre Dame?

Phil (07:15):

Uh, by the grace of God mostly. Um, so I, I loved Columbus North. Had a very good experience there. Um, I was a pretty good student. I was really a pretty good student. And so that, that helped a little bit. And um,

Gary (07:30):

You say pretty good student. Are you doing, are you being modest here or were you a very good student? I was a very good. Okay. That's what I thought. I was a very good student.

Phil (07:41):

Okay. And, um, that's, you know, 95% the gifts Lord gave me and 5% I tried to chip in and uh, I was very, very fortunate to be able to go to Notre Dame. I um, I toured it when I was a junior in high school and just absolutely was enchanted by it fell under its spell. I actually checked it out at the request or at the suggestion, but one year I was a sophomore in high school and for lent, um, my parents went to some faith formation event at our parish, at St. Bartholomew. It was a professor of philosophy, Ralph McNerney taught at the university of Notre Dame. He's world renowned. I didn't know that at the time, but he, uh, he was giving a speech on Thomas Aquinas and my parents dragged me along. I'm not certain how my brother and sister avoided this, uh, but I, I was there and my parents were probably the youngest people there by 15 years, which means I was really, really sticking out. And so the professor gave a talk for the first 40 minutes or so, and then when we adjourned for cookies and punch made a beeline for me and started giving me the cell and uh, said, so you ever think about Notre Dame? So I decided to check it out and I fell in love with it.

Gary (08:53):

Do you have a favorite, uh, Notre memory?

Phil (08:56):

Oh gosh. You know, I got a couple. It's tough to pick. So I think like anyone who went to Notre Dame, if I have to give an honest answer, at least one of the memories that's going to involve Notre Dame stadium. Um, my, I had never been to a Notre Dame game prior to, to enrolling there. So my first game was as a freshmen and a Notre Dame was down 19 at the half and they came back to another field goal in overtime. And at that moment I, I bought it. Right. Like at that point I was just convinced we are the chosen people. Like that's the only possible explanation. Um,

Gary (09:30):

Boy, if that's not the Notre Dame mentality in a nutshell, I don't know.

Phil (09:35):

Oh, I own up to it. I know we're ridiculous. I know that people from the outside looking in think that we're loud and back, just living on borrowed glory and all of it's true. And I don't care. I love it. And our hearts forever loved the Notre Dame. So, um, that was, uh, that was the top, um, memory. Another memory, uh, which again probably reveals an awful lot about me, but I was sort of kid who on St Patrick's day and the campus of the fighting Irish went to mass at the Basilica. And it was just the coolest thing. They did some of the readings in Gaelic they have, you know, the full choir sayings, Celtic folk tunes. Um, just, I went to a lot of mass at the basilica and an awful lot of them are near and dear to my heart. And then I was going to pick a third one.

Phil (10:23):

It actually kind of is a nice capstone to how I got into the whole mess. I got to be, you know, that professor Ralph McInerney gave that talk. I got to be in the last undergraduate class he ever taught. And at the end of the semester, a group of us took him out for drinks. And I, I told him the story that I just told you. I told him, I was like, yeah, you know, I'm here in part because of you. He had no recollection of this whatsoever. So it was so close to being the perfect heartfelt story. But in fairness, man have given a lot of talks. So why would I expect? But nevertheless, I thought that was a neat capstone that I was able to thank him in person for that.

Gary (10:58):

Well, full disclosure on my, my own, uh, my brother graduated Notre Dame, um, many, many years ago, 1975. Uh, my first Notre Dame game was 1971. And so my family, and we've had a, a major love for Notre Dame for a long, long time, but this isn't about Notre Dame. This is about the Rebel Five podcast. So I'm going to move on. You are married to Lauren and you are expecting your first child coming up in June. Talk about that.

Phil (11:30):

Uh, we're just so excited. Um, you know, it's, it's been just this very strange, uh, juxtaposition between the way the state of the world right now, generally speaking. And then the state of our own little world. Um, you know, we might not get out, we might not see anyone else, that sort of thing. We're doing the whole shelter in place and, but it's just, you know, I am, I guess it's every parent who listens to podcasts and just not along be like, yep, we know this, but it's just so cool when I, I can, you know, whatever, put my hand on their life and I can feel not just like movement, but Oh, there's something like hard and kind of nobby there that a knee is at an elbow, you know, those sorts of things. It's just, it's surreal to think that we're referring, we don't know if it's a boy or a girl.

Phil (12:15):

It's going to be a surprise. But we're referring the sort of code name is B. It's a long story, but it's just so weird. Like, Oh B, you know, my wife was like, Oh, B's having a party right now. And sure enough, he's moving and grooving in there. It's just, we're very, very excited. And then, you know, I'm fortunate enough, uh, God's timing actually worked out really well for this teacher because baby's doing early June, which means I got to stick around all summer and help take care of. Take care of the little oompa loompa, but before going back,

Gary (12:44):

Very nice on your bio sheet, you mentioned, uh, under hobbies, reading, um, of what kinda, what kind of books do you like to read?

Phil (12:52):

I've been reading a little bit of a lot of different things. Um, I, I would say that over the past five or 10 years, my pendulum swung a lot more in the direction of nonfiction. Um, and I think that's, you know, I never want to say I get sick of reading any one thing because books are marvelous and wonderful. And of course I'm an English teacher, I'm going to say that. But after being an English major and after teaching literature to my students all day, um, and reading student writing, which regardless of what they think about it is very often effectively fiction. Um, sometimes I just like to have something else just to try and expand mine a little bit. But actually the most, the two books I've read most recently with both fiction I read, um, there's a book called the Golem and the genie was sort of a mix of Jewish folklore and, uh, Islamic folklore. And turn of the century New York. Just pretty just today I finished off a young adult Scifi book that I, uh, called Skyward, which I read at the request of my niece and nephew, both of whom apparently just devoured it while they're stuck in quarantine in Cincinnati. So, uh, this weekend I'm going to have to give him a call. I'm going to have to have a book chat, which just warms the cockles of this English teacher, uncle's art. It's just so exciting.

Gary (14:08):

You grow up in Columbus, you're 70, 60 miles from Roncalli. Do you remember your first, first exposure to Roncalli?

Phil (14:18):

So my first exposure to Roncalli when it was nothing more than just a word, actually, was about when I was in, in high school. Um, I couldn't have found Roncalli on a map. I didn't know a darn thing about it, but I knew this. Um, my high school, my parish's youth minister was a Roncalli grad, Katie Stallings. Uh, I know on the show just just last week, you had, uh, Ben Stallings and Ben Briggeman and, and uh, so this would be Ben Stalling's sister. And so she would talk about it. She would talk about Roncalli. She would tease us that she was going to leave so she could go back and work in campus ministry Roncalli. Of course we were all aghast at the thought that she did possibly leave us for what some school, like how does that work?

Phil (15:00):

But uh, having been there now I get it, I get the draw. I can absolutely see that. Is Katie still down there? No. So she uh, she actually worked on the South side. She works for, um, community health and she and I and Lauren had dinner together sort of just before all the lockdown stuff started. Um, so we got a chance to catch up and chit chat a little bit and I, you know, I don't see her as often as I perhaps should or wish I could, but I, I still keep in touch with her certainly. And she's just, you know, I wouldn't be me without her on it. A big part of the reason why I teach at a Catholic school for example, is because of how important my faith experiences in high school were. And a lot of that I chalk up to her.

Gary (15:49):

Well that's, that's high praise. I'm jumping around here a little bit, but you graduate from Notre Dame. Uh, there's a couple of years there before you come to Roncalli. What did you do to do there?

Phil (16:01):

So in between graduating Notre Dame and coming Roncalli, I participated in the ACE program, Alliance for Catholic education, sort of our Catholic schools version of teach for America. I guess it's a two years graduate program. And during the school year you are assigned to a community and to a school and you teach, it's not training wheels teaching. I wasn't a cadet teacher, like I just had a classroom and uh, I lived in community with, with seven other teachers in Jacksonville, Florida. Is that a Notre Dame program? So it is a Notre Dame. It is run by Notre Dame Father Tony Hollowell was in. But yeah, it's open to people beyond, you don't have to be a Notre Dame undergrad to get in.

Phil (16:46):

But, so technically my master's is also from, from Notre Dame because of the ACE program. So taught during the year, during the summers I would take classes during the school year, I would take online classes and, uh, when my two years were up, I had a great experience, don't get me wrong. Uh, but the fact of matter is all of my housemates were leaving, so I had effect and they were, my social support out effectively had to start over. So I said, no, I want to be closer to home. So I sent a cover letter and resume to every Catholic high school in Indianapolis and Cincinnati and Louisville and I prayed someone would take me. And uh, I ended up at Roncalli. Thanks be to God for that.

Gary (17:22):

Do you remember your interview?

Phil (17:23):

I remember bits and pieces of it. Absolutely. I remember, uh, so the year that I interviewed, that was the year that we were building the chapel and what I still think of as the new offices. And so I, I was interviewing in the summer. I remember when I got the call about the interview from Chuck Weisenbach and the other on the phone. I was standing in the little fly stream in Western Wisconsin fishing with my uncle or my grandpa and my dad. And uh, I got to Roncalli and there were kids cleaning out the trophy cases in the lobby outside what is now the old gym. And just about every one of them greeted me. They could all probably tell I was there. I mean a guy shows up wearing a suit and tie and had asked for the office, like they can probably put two and two together. Yeah, I mean there's a pretty limited number of possibilities here. At this point. I was greeted in the office by a student worker and when she introduced herself as Grace Weisenbach, I assumed there was a connection.

Phil (18:17):

And then I went in there and, and had my interview with, uh, Chuck. And I remember the first five minutes or so were spent talking about fishing because I had been fishing when I got the call. And so he wanted to talk to me about that. And he, um, he interviewed me about a day before he left on his first ever pilgrimage, you know, the, this pilgrimage program has been a big part of Roncalli since and he was about to take his first ever one. And so I think there's a part of him just wanted to kind of get the hiring process squared away before he left. I didn't even even got to interview with my department chair, but at the time was Marsha Sanders. She was off grading AP tests somewhere. I apparently sold him. I was able to bluff my way through it or whatever. And uh, I've been hanging out ever since.

Gary (19:02):

Well, we're going to talk about the pilgrimage and we'll take a break here in just a minute, but I want to ask you a question before we go to break. Uh, when you started, you were young, you were a brand new teacher essentially. Did you have a mentor here at Roncalli that kind of took you under their wing?

Phil (19:17):

I would be afraid to start listing mentors for fear of um, one leaving people out obvious are far too many to mention. And two, I'm certain that an awful lot of them would say I don't want any responsibility for that. Um, I will say that my first year, um, was very difficult. I had a very steep learning curve and I was getting constant feedback from an awful lot of people at the time. Three people who stand out, you know, um, would be, you know, Chuck Weisenbach himself cause he always come in and observe classes. Marshall sander had a lot to say. Another person who I really want to appreciate is Pat Musgrave who directed the stars program for so long. I had no experience teaching students with with special educational needs or certainly not much experience. And so she was instrumental in helping me to figure out just what the heck uh, I was doing and how best to serve that population at Roncalli.

Phil (20:20):

But there've been an awful lot since, uh, in the English department. I can't think about a teacher in English department who I haven't turned to for help or consultation at some point. You know, Kim Striby and Beth Reel have been department co-chairs for awhile and they are just phenomenal. Anthony Walters. Um, I shutter to think how many of my materials I basically stole from him straight up. Marco Ray when he used to teach at Roncalli was just, uh, an abs, you know, a Prince of a man and a phenomenal teacher to boot. And that's just in my department. I could go on for a long time, but there've been an awful lot of people have helped to nudge me along one way or another, um, and helped me to become at least a semi functioning.

Gary (21:02):

So we were just having dinner with my family and two of my kids, Caroline and Grace were, were talking about this and, and realized that no, none of my three girls had you for class. An opportunity I missed, but Marilyn Miles came up. And so I thought I'd throw that out there.

Phil (21:21):

Marilyn Miles has forgotten more about teaching than I'll ever know. She, um, so first of all, she, she taught me plenty and gave me plenty of insight and plenty of support. Um, my one quick story about Marilyn is my first year of teaching. She was out one day and so I had to cover one of her classes, which was fine. They were all behaved like angels because they were terrified of her. And I was walking around her room and she had framed on her wall, a newspaper clipping of, um, an article about when she had been presented with a teacher of the year award and that, um, presentation took place on Saturday, October 13th, 1984. And I, I, I came up to her room the next day when she was back and I was chatting with her a little bit and I pointed to it, I said, I just want you to know that when you received that award, I was two days old and she ordered the action, get out, get out. And so I was like, that's fair. I deserved that.

Gary (22:15):

She's definitely a legend in the English department. And I figured cause there wasn't, there's not a whole lot of overlap between when she retired finally and when you started, but there was a little bit of a, there were a couple of years. Yeah, absolutely. We're going to come back with Phil Milroy on the Rebel Five podcast

Break (22:34):

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Gary (22:53):

We talked about the pilgrimage and we haven't really spent a whole lot of time in any of our episodes talking about specifically what the Roncalli pilgrimage is and most of our listeners won't know. So I'm going to give you the floor talk about since you were on really one of the, what, 2013 is that when you went? Uh, 2014 Oh my gosh. It almost just together. Yeah, let's say 2013 that sounds about right. Yeah. So, and you were on one of the first trips. So talk, talk a little bit about your experience and then I'll chime in with my experience.

Phil (23:39):

So for those who aren't familiar with it, one of the coolest programs Roncalli offers, it's something students, most students go their whole careers and never even know exists. Every year Roncalli sends a group of faculty and staff, uh, Italy to follow in the footsteps of Angelo Roncalli, our namesake, Pope St John the 23rd, uh, this is after a pilgrimage that Chuck Weisenbach and his wife took back in 2009 and we sort of do a distilled by eight or 10 day version of it. And we usually go over spring break. I think one year they went early summer. Um, but we usually go over spring break and it's, it's absolutely phenomenal. Uh, we fly into Milan and we go to Bergamo, uh, which is the city where, uh, Angelo Roncalli would have attended seminary and taught at seminary. Um, it's also the headquarters of the Pope, Saint John, the 23rd foundation. There's an archive there that's full of stuff. Um, from there, we're usually able to just grab a quick bus ride to Sotto il Monte, which is a tiny little village nearby, which is where he was born.

Phil (24:53):

You can see the house where he was born and the church right across the street where he was baptized the day he was born for a celebrated his first mass. Um, when I went on the pilgrimage, we went to Venice next because Angelo Roncalli was patriarch of Venice at the time of his election, the papacy, uh, I think subsequent years they go to Assisi instead. Right. You probably went to Assisi. We did. Yeah. Which is also a Marvel. I am fortunate enough to have traveled there, um, on a different European vacation, which phenomenal. Uh, and then we ended up in Rome and we get to see a lot of the places that would have been important to him in Rome. We see the church where he was ordained. We of course see the Vatican, we get to have Mass at his tomb. Um, it's just an overwhelmingly impressive program and, and such a phenomenal way to enrich the teachers.

Phil (25:45):

And in turn, I think I would really like to think that it pays dividends. I think that the teachers and staff who return come back with an extra bit of zeal for the mission of the school and were able to pass it on to our students. Whether it's directly by talking about the experience or just, you know, if, if we're changed people, if we're better people then we're going to be better at our jobs too. I think that follows pretty clearly. Um, so it's just in terms of all what is the pilgrimage? That's, that's what the program is. So yeah, I went in in 2013 I think I was in the second group to go. I also hold the

distinction of being a member of the only group to go that was not led by Chuck Weisenbach He had some sort of other familial obligations.

Phil (26:30):

So my group was led by sister Kathy Anne Lapore who was just absolutely phenomenal and I could not have asked for better guides are Chuck if you're listening, don't take it personally. Um, and that surprises me, not at all. Um, and then also on that trip, uh, Sarah Rose. Um, Sarah, she was Barna at the time. I had to think, I was like, which one was she at the time? I'm losing track. She's just Sarah. I was doing the same thing. Marcia sander was there. And then we also had the experience, we were also the only group ever to have two non-faculty staff people come along who weren't married to Roncalli faculty staff. We had, Paul and Marianne Sahm, were along for the trip also. And so the six of us just could not have had a better time and not just in terms of fun, but just, I think it was just incredibly spiritually moving and just overwhelming to get a sense of who this man Angelo

Phil (27:40):

Roncalli was really very impressive. When I came back, you know, people of course asked me questions and I think one of the things I kept saying the most, one of the most striking impressions I got, uh, and a lot of people who go to Rome feel this way, I think, but it's, you know, and it all really happened. You know, we, we hear about the martyrs of the early church. We hear about the early church, we hear about, um, Saint Peter being crucified upside down and on the Vatican Hill. And then you go to Vatican city and you see that obelisk and you think that obelisk was one of the last things Saint Peter saw that happened or you know, like st Paul, we know he, he goes from at some point and all that. And then you see like there are churches with relics on the st Paul and, and you know, the, the thing of the Holy apostles, um, uh, saints, uh, Phillip and James I think are entombed there, and, and on, and on and on.

Phil (28:45):

I think that sometimes it's really easy for me, at least when I hear those names, they're almost mythological, right? It's almost, um, it's like hearing about the feats of Hercules or something like that, but there are no churches to Mark the tomb of Hercules there aren't. Um, and so all of that then comes to, uh, uh, had really with all of these visits focusing on this person, Angelo Roncalli when I am, you know, having a conversation, a face to face conversation with his personal secretary. So now I know he's a Saint. I know he's a big deal. His name is all over my school. I get all that. And yet then I'm remembering like he is a real person. He was a little boy running around this compound at one point, skinned his knee over there. Uh, he said his first mass at this little rustic Italian church. I deigned to stand behind the alternate lookout and try to imagine that's what he saw when he was saying his very first mass. I, you know, I, I prayed at his tomb. I got to see the man and just all of that, it's just so surreal is it just keeps coming back to the whole and it all really happened. This is all real. This is all very, very real and in a way that, that I never would have appreciated without that pilgrimage.

Gary (30:07):

No, I, I, I hundred percent agree in and Darla, my wife and I were fortunate enough to go two years ago, uh, and our trip was a little bit different than yours, but, but the gist of it's the same. Um, I mean, I remember getting off the train in Bergamo and you get on the bus and you're on Papa Giovanni, the XXIII Boulevard. I mean, he's a rockstar. He's, he's everywhere.

Phil (30:33):

You know, Bergamo tragically is sort of at the epicenter or was that the epicenter of that coronavirus disaster in Italy? Um, and so I was reading about it and you know, I saw a YouTube video from the chief of medicine at Papa Giovanni, the 23rd hospital in Bergamo. And I was like, that's my guy. That's my guy.

Gary (30:56):

Well, and you stayed, you stayed in lower Bergamo. We stayed in the, at the foundation and upper Bergamo Papa John Giovanni, the 23rd seminary. Um, and just, Oh my gosh, you're so right. It's just a, it's an amazing trip and it gives you such an appreciation for who he was and how fortunate we are to have him as our namesake all these years later. It's just an amazing thing.

Phil (31:22):

You know what? I was talking about that with my students once when I came back and I told them all, you know, when little Angelo Roncalli was growing up and running around Sotto il Monte or even Bergamo, you know, it would not have been within the prospect of belief. If you could just like appear there time travel and tell them like they're going to be a whole bunch of kids in suburban Indianapolis who wear your name around proudly and think about nine of your charisms on a nearly daily basis. That would have blown his mind. But you know, that's, that's the beauty of, of how vocation works out, right? That's probably not the plan he would have chosen for himself. But it's the plan God chose for him and he cooperated with that grace and, and look at where he ended up and look at what he ended up doing and look at how his, his life continues to resonate to ours right now. That's amazing. And then the punchline to all that, right, is that how many students, so you don't know what you're going to end up doing and who you're going to end up affecting, but you know, God has some sort of a plan for you too.

Gary (32:27):

You alluded to it, but you didn't mention his name, but you talked about being in the same room with his, with uh, John the 23rd's secretary Copavilla. I mean, yeah, w he had passed before. We got to see him unfortunately. But I mean that's, you can touch him. He was in the same place.

Phil (32:46):

Yeah, I gave him, I gave him a hug. Right. And he had given, I mean, I've seen, we've got pictures in the school frame photographs and the school of, uh, of Capavilla standing right next to John 23rd. I've watched documentaries to John 23rd and I can see a young Capavilla just right there, his shadow, um, Capavilla even says that he remembers when, when John the 23rd first mentioned uttered the possibility of summoning a church council, right. Which we know ends up becoming the second Vatican council, which, you know, pretty massive impact on the church in the 20th century. And, and just to think like this guy was in the room when that idea first hand, I mean on some level, right, that that's like the equivalent of whatever talking to someone who's like, Oh yeah, I delivered the ink to Jefferson before he wrote, you know, the declaration of independence or something like, that's incredible. So that was mind blowing.

Gary (33:46):

We didn't, like I said, Capavilla had passed away a couple of years before we got to go. But there's a statue in the courtyard of Saint Mary of the field. That's what a Saint Mary of the fields, and it's in Stezzano, Italy, which is just outside Sotto il Monte on your way back to Bergamo. And there was this statue there of John the 23rd that we have outside the chapel on a postcard. And Chuck was talking to Don Giovanni. Oh yes, he's marvelous. Awesome guy. Awesome priest. And so we go in. Long story short, we find this statue in this courtyard outside of st Mary, the fields and the Archbishop Emeritus Gaetano Bonaceli lives there. And so Don Giovanni goes and gets him and he's 90 I see. We've been 93 years old and so he walks out and I'm thinking 93 years old, this poor guy's going to be in a wheelchair and he's going to be, he's going to be mad because these people from God knows where bothering him.

Gary (34:56):

Well, he comes skipping out and like I said it, it was an amazing thing. What? Come to find out, he knew John the 23rd and John the 23rd had been there at this st Mary the fields church many times. So we didn't get to meet Capavilla but we certainly met somebody who knew John the 23rd so it was a, it was a great trip and so thankful that we offer that to our faculty and staff. I think we've got now 30 maybe 35 alumni of that trip, so, uh, it's definitely had quite the impact on Roncalli high school.

Phil (35:31):

I think so. I would certainly hope so.

Gary (35:35):

We're going to take another break and we're going to come back in just a minute with Phil Milroy on the Rebel Five podcast.

Break (35:42):

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Gary (36:01):

All right, we're back on the Rebel Five podcast with Phil Milroy. Again, Phil, thanks for being here today. Before I leave the pilgrimage, I just wanted to go back for one last question. Do you have a favorite memory or a favorite story from your trip to Italy?

Phil (36:29):

My guess is you're the same way. You've got a bunch of stories you could tell, but I'll tell one that I think, uh, no, no other group has, has, would be able to tell. Um, when we, we took a high speed train from Venice to Rome, um, and we got off the train, got into a taxi, brought us to the hotel. The hotel was like a seven or eight minute walk from St. Peter's square or something like that. So we run in, we just chuck our bags behind the desk. We can't get into our rooms yet. We run out of the hotel, we scurry to Saint Peter's square and we get there just in time for the liturgy of the Eucharist of Pope Francis, inaugural mass. Oh no, that was the timing. I got to know them on the day. We knew that I was going to happen.

Phil (37:18):

Well, I mean obviously not during the planning stages, but remember my last, my last day at Roncalli before we left for Rome was the day the white smoke went up. Um, and so then, uh, just the way it worked out, the inaugural mass happened to be the day we got to Rome. So we just ran there. And so to, to be there for that, to hear all the different languages being spoken around me, to see all the, I mean, I don't need any more explanation of the universal church, not after that, that was just, it was a goosebump moment. I'm getting goosebumps thinking about it right now. It was just phenomenal. One of the coolest things I've ever been a part of.

Gary (37:55):

I do have a similar story. Okay. Did you go to St. Peter in Chains?

Phil (37:59):

I can tell you that the St. Peter in chains church closes for a Siesta right around the time we got there. And that's all I'm going to say about that. That's all I'm going to say.

Gary (38:09):

Well, we, we walk and we're walking up the front steps to St. Peter in chains and there's about six big, huge black Suburbans like mafia, like type things, you know, I'm thinking, well, what the heck's going on here? So we walk in and, uh, Cardinal Wuerl from Washington D C is having mass. No kidding. I am thinking, are you kidding me? So we're now 4,500 miles from home. We walk into St. Peter in chains and Cardinal Wuerl is celebrating mass and he had just started, I mean it just started. So we, we uh, we go sit in the back pew and we go to mass and, and come back. Well, come to find out, um, when you're a Cardinal, you are presented a church in Rome to basically take care of, and St. Peter in chains was a Cardinal Wuerl's church. And so he had all these dignitaries cause part of that is raising money.

Gary (39:06):

Also when we were in St. Peter's, we're just kind of standing around in the middle of the church there. Basilica right in front of the St. Peter's altar. And who comes by? There's these lights and these, uh, press, it's Cardinal Dolan. He's walking over to John 23's altar. And so Chuck had a good conversation with him and well, of course we have Roncalli shirts on. That's true. So Dolan looks at Cardinal Dolan looks at and he goes Roncalli and he points over to the, uh, sarcophagus of, of, uh, Papa Giovanni and, and, uh, so it was, it was just, just crazy, just a crazy trip. So anyway, we've spent enough time on the pilgrimage. Um, and I thank you for sharing some of your memories on that. I want to move on. Uh, you've been at Roncalli now for 11 years, correct? Taught in the English department for 11 years. Um, how long have you been in that classroom you're in now

Phil (40:07):

Ten of those years? My first year I was teacher on a cart. I had five classes in five different rooms and then, um, because they built the new offices, they got to convert some of the old offices into classrooms. So room 101 is huge and spacious and I love it. And it has no windows, which is tremendously useful for continuing a war of psychological oppression against my students.

Gary (40:31):

Well, back in my day, I graduated in 81 that, that was our chapel, that room

Phil (40:37):

I've noticed. So because half of one of my walls is just plain cinder block and the other half isn't. There was a mural there, I was told.

Gary (40:45):

That's right. That's right. And it broke my heart when they, uh, did that renovation and they painted over a lot of our listeners, if they're in my, it would be very disheartened to know that that had been painted over. But yeah, the half of it was a classroom and the other half was our first chapel built in about 75 or 76. So teaching you, um, have been called to do this. What are some of the best things about teaching that you come into school everyday and you just can't wait till you get it?

Phil (41:14):

Uh, talking to the kids, like I have to imagine darn near any teacher would say that. I think any teacher who legitimately does not like children is not going to be a teacher for long. I love getting a chance to interact with these young people at a moment in their lives when they are absolutely, positively, still half baked and they know it. They're, they're still forming. And so it's a tremendous privilege and responsibility to get a chance to try and shape them a little bit at that, at that point in their life. I've taught sophomores all 11 years. I have also taught freshmen and juniors and seniors at various points, but the one through line is I always teach sophomores. They are competent, you know, they don't have the learning curve that freshmen do. They know what they're doing at Roncalli. They haven't quite become convinced that they know everything yet and so that means that they're still willing to listen just a bit and I absolutely positively love that.

Phil (42:13):

I love getting a chance to read some of the books or plays that I teach and just, you know, they claim that I seem to be able to read their mind. I know exactly what question they're going to ask. I can answer their question before they even ask it and they think that I'm clairvoyant and I remind them like, no, it's just because I've taught this chapter for 11 years in a row now I know what the questions are going to be like. You think that you're going to have different questions than that? All fours read this seven years ago, like, Nope, it's the same stuff. I know how this is going to work and I love that. I love getting to, uh, to build that relationship and to interact with the students. I love getting to share the stuff that I love. Um, and that obviously English literature, um, that's my love of language.

Phil (42:55):

It's the love, my love for them. I think that, I would hope that they feel affirmed in that. Uh, and above all else, my love for the faith. You know, if they walk away and they don't realize that I take my faith pretty darn seriously. I don't care how much you know about semi-colon usage. Like I've, I've probably flopped somewhere as a teacher.

Gary (43:18):

You obviously do take your faith very seriously. Where does that come from?

Phil (43:23):

Grace, I mean, is, is the probably the answer I'm supposed to give, but my parents take their faith very, very seriously and always did. And so I had excellent role models growing up. I still look up to them as role models. I still have that. I mentioned her earlier, but Katie Stallings, right? My youth minister when I was in high school, I think watching her live out, her faith and so on and so forth, I think that was pretty important.

Phil (43:47):

I had a couple of really powerful experiences when I was a young person that I think, um, really helped God to get his hooks into me. You know, I went to NCYC once upon a time I went to world youth day and saw the, uh, you know, hope Saint John Paul the second from 10 feet away as he came one by in his Popemobile. I think all of those things, and then I of course would be remiss if I didn't also mention my wife. You know, the purpose of marriage is to get your spouse to heaven and she certainly seems to take that seriously and she's got more work to do than I do, but she seems to go about it cheerfully.

Gary (44:24):

Eleven years you've been doing this, what's next year?

Phil (44:27):

Year twelve. No, so that's a great, that's a great answer. I have always said that I will continue teaching and if I have my way, I will continue teaching at Roncalli until um, they get rid of me, which is always a possibility.

Phil (44:45):

Or, um, I used to joke, I would leave, um, for a woman, well, I'm married now and she's here, but my wife's from Wisconsin and I know that the gravitational pull to go close to home is very strong for her. So I, there's probably a, a world in which we end up relocating there someday. And then the last thing that I would say is only partially tongue in cheek is if the angel of the Lord appears to me and tells me to do something else. Um, and while I don't expect, you know, a great, a great multitude to, to, to appear or anything like that, I do recognize that if this is a calling, if this is what I'm supposed to do, there's no reason that can't change. Right. I mean, my understanding is Angelo Roncalli was a mighty fine teacher and then God called him to do other stuff also.

Phil (45:35):

And he might have really wanted to stay in the classroom and God said, no, no, no, no. There's so much more you can do. Um, St. Peter might've been a very fine fishermen. I don't know. So while I don't want to put myself in the same category as Pope Saint John the 23rd or a Saint Peter, um, I am aware that that's how, how life works. Maybe God has something else in store for me that I can't even envision yet.

Gary (45:59):

Extracurriculars at Roncalli you've led the speech team. I have. How did that come about?

Phil (46:05):

I was not a member of the speech team in high school. Uh, I had never even taken a speech class. I just talk a lot. When I went to Jacksonville and taught in that ACE program, what we were told by our ACE overlords was, whatever the school asks you to do, you say, yes, I'm happy to do it.

Phil (46:22):

And so when I got there, the principal came to me and said, we're looking for an assistant coach for the speech team. I said, yeah, I'd be happy to do it. I had no idea what I was doing. I muddled my way through a couple of years and then when I was leaving there and I wanted to get hired, I wanted to make myself look as impressive as possible. So I listed that as one of my experiences. And then I sat down with Chuck at his interviews like, you know, our speech coach just left, did you have an interest in running the speech? He was like, yeah, sure, fine. Absolutely. And so now here I am, 11 years later, award-winning right, award winning, although I have to give credit where credit is due. My predecessor, the speech coach who I took over for was a woman named Tristan Jones who has now returned to Roncalli.

Phil (47:07):

She's Tristan Litz and when she returned she started coaching with uh, we started co-coaching and this year we were also assisted by a Tom Sheridan who's a theology teacher. But Tristan and I have been like the, the, the power duo of, of coaching speech for years. Now we've, we've got a system, we've got things set up and we've had some success. Thanks be to God.

Gary (47:29):

No, you've had some very good success. Uh, one other thing and then we'll go into the Rebel Five questions. Uh, talk about senior retreat.

Phil (47:37):

So the senior retreat program is such a huge deal to so many of the rebels who walk through the halls. It's uh, I mean for a lot of seniors that really is a defining moment of their senior year. Uh, I had a senior retreat of my own kind of my youth minister because she was a Roncalli grad wanted her public school kids to have a similar experience.

Phil (47:57):

So she found a way to condense the retreat to from Friday night to Sunday night. It was absurd. And we told, um, I didn't have a very good experience when I went on senior retreat. And so I started working retreats basically to try to, um, be there for the Phil Milroys in the room who might not have been having the time of their lives. But once I, once, once I saw it done properly, um, I became much more attached to it. I, and just last few things we'll say about Senior retreat. The first is, um, I sort of check off working a retreat with coworkers. It's, it's like a special trophy achievement. Like, yes, I've worked for a treat with that person. Yes, I've worked treat with that person because working retreat, I feel like I get to know those people and in a deep way that I would never otherwise have gotten to know.

Phil (48:53):

And some of the people I consider to be my closest friends at Roncalli are people I've gotten to know in part because of the stories you shared with one another on retreat. The second thing, um, and I'm a little to toot my own horn on this, but I'm going to go ahead and say it. Uh, several years ago I at Jeff Traylor's requests and Gerard Striby's request. I took a look at the outlines that the staff used to do retreat talks. We were still using the same outlines that the program used in its original incarnation, like the seventies, 78 and they just needed an overhaul. They just needed to be updated, not, not in terms of content. I wasn't trying to rewrite the retreat. Let me be clear on that. But just in term, I just thought that they could be done more usefully in a way that would especially help the college leaders produce higher quality work.

Phil (49:49):

Um, I maintain to this day that if, you know, if that angel, the Lord appears to me tomorrow and I leave Roncalli and my time with Roncalli has done, um, my greatest contribution to that school is not going to be the English classes I taught or anything like that. My greatest contribution to that school is going to be in the realm of helping to improve that senior retreat process. I am proud enough of that, that I felt the need to say something about it.

Gary (50:17):

No that's, that's a, it's a transformational experience for a lot of kids. Yeah. And to have any bit of, um, enhancement in that program is just huge because how many kids is that going to affect positively? Um, not just in your time, but I mean, I graduated in 81 and the program I just mentioned started in 78. It started at Scecina high school. You know, that's two generations of, of Roncalli Rebels who have had that experience and it hasn't changed much at all.

Phil (50:57):

One of the retreats I worked with with Pat Crosley and he made a mention once of how even the wallpaper and all the rooms is what he remembered from when he was on retreat there. So some things never changed I guess.

Gary (51:10):

Uh, what's it mean to you when a kid comes back from college or maybe past college post-college and comes back and says, mr Milroy, I cannot thank you enough for what you taught me and it helped me do this, this and this. What's that mean to you?

Phil (51:25):

You know, early in the podcast we were talking a little bit about, um, my high school experience and I mentioned that I was a pretty good student and I grew up in a, you know, like all students, you do work, you get instant feedback, you see the number or the letter written in red and it's tremendously validating and affirming. And then I went into a line of work where it's almost impossible to get that, um, except for those conversations. And to me that's an indication. And very

often it's the kids who kind of bless them. It's not that I forgot about them, it's not that I didn't care about them, but not necessarily ones who I thought I was doing much of anyway. It just means the world. You know, I, I tell my students all the time to go thank their teachers is I don't care how goofy it makes you feel like who's ever wanted to be upset about getting thanked.

Phil (52:25):

So there you go. Listeners, there's your homework from Mr. Milroy. I go, Oh, you one of your teachers if you can. To me it is a, a powerful reminder that what I'm doing matters. And intellectually I know that. Um, but there are days when it's just like, alright, I, I really don't want to talk about, I am iambic pentameter for the third class period in a row. And then I know as soon as I get done with that, Oh great. The other class we're doing grammar drills, so I get to talk about what a relative pronoun is. This is just a fine day. Why did I get out of bed? I went to Notre Dame for this. You know, that all sort of thing. And then you get those, those conversations, those emails. And I remember, yeah, this is, this is what God wants me to do. I hope for now.

Gary (53:12):

Those are, that's a great answer. And not many people, unless you're a teacher, have that experience or get that satisfaction of having someone come back and say, you know, you meant the world to me. And not only that, but you enabled me to be successful at what I'm doing today. It's a goosebump moment. It really is. Cool. All right.

Gary (53:35):

Rebel Five questions In another life. What would you want to be or do?

New Speaker (53:39):

My students ask me all the time what I would do if I couldn't teach and my flippant answer is live under a bridge. Um, I don't think I have a skill set to do anything else on. So I'll give a fanciful answer. It's not so much that I like to write, but I like having written so maybe in a world where I was a little bit more disciplined and can make myself do it. I would love to write.

Gary (54:00):

A favorite time or place when you've run into a Roncalli person.

Phil (54:04):

The first one that pops into mind was actually this past summer, um, I met my wife's whole family. We all decided to have sort of like a mini family reunion in Chicago just for a long weekend and we were walking down by Lake Michigan and I was commenting to them that it was just so nice to be in Chicago instead of Indianapolis because I finally didn't have to have Roncalli student radar. Like I didn't have to have that constant lingering worry that someone's going to just be mr Milroy. And then exactly one minute later, mr Milroy and this girl comes running up to me from across the way. I'm like, all right. I asked her that. That one was my fault.

Gary (54:49):

So what do you wish you could tell your younger self?

Phil (54:53):

It'll all be okay. I mean, right? Isn't that what I think on some level we all need to, I mean not that I think my younger self, depending on when you check in on him, um, it was all going to be what was all that concerned.

Phil (55:07):

But I just think how tremendously, what sort of looking for comforting would it be if all of a sudden a 10 or 15 year older than you version of you appeared? And that was all that he had to say. It was just, it all turns out okay. It doesn't mean that there's no bumps, it just means that one way or another big picture everything's okay. And then if you knew that, um, it would be a lot easier not to let the small stuff ruffle you. Um, so that's, that's one part. Um, I guess another thing would be, um, think long and hard before you add assistant speech coach to your resume.

Gary (55:49):

You are a very unique person in such a good way, I think with the way that you relate to kids and after school, if anybody would ever come down the hallway and go in your room, you have your followers. Yeah, I was just saying I'm not there alone. No, I know. And I love that because not everybody can, can, not everybody has that appeal with kids like you do.

Phil (56:15):

So life advice, anything. I think the biggest piece of life advice that I would give right now, and again keep mind, I'm used to talking to students, I'm used to talking to 16 year olds, so this is probably not going to be a mindblowing thought to many people, but the 16 year olds, they're like, you know, as an English teacher I love stories and I think about life in terms of stories and I think it's very natural for all of us to think about our own life stories.

Phil (56:42):

And my biggest advice to people is to remind them that ultimately their story isn't their own. You know, we are invited to participate in a much larger story. Um, on some level all of our stories are just different chapters of the story of God's love for his people. And we are called and invited to be a part of that in a big way or a small way. We don't know. But to me, having the humility to realize that at the end of the day, um, this isn't about me. Um, what I do should ultimately not be about me. Um, I just feel until you asked me what does it mean if a student comes up to me and said, Hey, mr Milroy, you helped me to succeed. You helped me to enable you enabled me to do some of the things that I do now.

Phil (57:31):

That's amazing. And I love hearing that. Um, but if I have a thousand of those conversations, but I don't get a single conversation like that at the Gates where I get to run someone else who says, Hey, you helped me get here, then my career was kind of pointless. My life is kind of pointless. Cause that's ultimately, you know, my story isn't about me. It's, it's about, it's about God's love for others and how I can help be a part of that story. So I don't know if that's life advice, but I think it's just acknowledging that, you know, uh, Bishop Robert Barron, right? One of his slogans that he likes to say all the time, it's your life is not about you. And I think that's, that's important for people to hear once in a while.

Gary (58:13):

I want to thank you for being here today as I've been more, um, I think there are certain teachers in the building who, and you're one of them, not just teachers, but administrators who have these beautiful faith lives. And I'm much older than you and I feel like man this guy has got it going on. And I know they're, like you just said, there's, there, there are bumps in the road. And, and I know that. And believe me, I know because I've lived, I, I've made a lot of mistakes in my life, but to be around people like you and be around people like Chuck and Joe and so many others that have these beautiful faith lives are just an inspiration to, to the rest of us. And so I, want to thank you for, for being you and for being such a great teacher and a great representative, Roncalli, and, uh, for being here today on the Rebel Five podcasts. Thank you.

Phil (59:10):

Well, thank you so much. It's just been an honor to be a part of this and, uh, I've enjoyed our chat. I know that we had to jump through some hoops in order to make it happen, but I'm glad it worked out because these have a way of working out.

Gary (59:22):

Phil, thank you. And Go Rebels, Go Rebels.

Gary (59:27):

I'm Gary Armbruster and thanks for joining us today for this episode of the Rebel Five podcast. To find out more information about the podcast, please visit 50.roncalli.org/podcast.php. Again, thanks so much for joining us today and until next time, We'll fight ahead!