

Remarks of Caitie and Rich

Carleton Memorial

September 26, 2021

Aidan's curiosity was endless and intense, and frankly--as a parent--could sometimes be exhausting. He was funny, creative and courageous. He developed depths of knowledge in many obscure topics including jazz chord forms, linguistics, comedy, horror movies, podcasts... He also curated a vast meme collection - and had a meme ready for any occasion. From the earliest age, he played music with great emotion and passion-- and loved to get others to sing and play along with him. And it was so much fun to spend time with him.

As we were preparing for today, I was reminded of a family trip we took together 2 years ago to the Trinity Alps in Northern California, and how much it embodied life with Aidan.

On the 5 hr drive up to the far reaches of Northern California, Aidan persuaded us to listen to back to back full length musicals (rather than trading individual song choices). First was Ragtime, near tops on his all-time list. The second was Rent, which he was about to start music directing during his gap year. There was always lots of stopping to talk and debate about the best version or performer of each song, and toggling between versions using his encyclopedic knowledge of all things musical theatre.

On the backpacking portion of the trip -- I was slowing us down, my pack was heavy! So each day, when we divided items to carry, Aidan willingly took more of the weight from my pack. He wanted the heaviest load. He liked a challenge.

Aidan had a gift for sensing when the people around him needed to be lifted up with a joke or a song or a game or a story. He'd initiate dividing up the singing parts on a challenging song from *Les Mis* with Emmett--the two boys would go back and forth to make the miles go by more quickly. He relished complex, clever wordplay or would start a game of "Contact" or "20 questions" to distract us from the heat and exhaustion of the difficult hike.

On that trip, we were in separate tents, kids in one, grown-ups in another. As usual, Aidan was reading late into the night -- he had brought a copy of *Fahrenheit 451* that Caitie had given him for his birthday. When the unmistakable sound of a lumbering bear came down the ravine where we were camped. In our tent about 50 feet away, I awoke to Aidan softly and calmly saying, "Dad, dad...there is a bear right next to me, any advice?"... I spent a terrifying 10 minutes when the bear sniffed and snorted and stumbled around before heading back up the ravine and out of earshot.

Throughout his life, Aidan had an unusual calm about him in situations any of the rest of us would find tense. As a baseball player, he thrived as a "closer" -- the pitcher who comes in during the most tense part of the game. Later as a center handler in ultimate, he calmly handled the frisbee in crucial game situations.

He wanted to play with the best musicians, the best frisbee players -- he didn't need to be the very best himself -- he often would shy away from elaborate solos in the jazz band, preferring to keep the section tight rather than steal any spotlight. But, he had to be with people who would inspire and challenge him to help create something larger than any one of them could do themselves. And he wasn't shy about praising, coaching, and lifting up others so they could be their very best.

When Aidan was in Cuba studying with Berkeley High's top Jazz Band, he was on trumpet, but as many of you know, piano was his first love. That year a kid named Graham had beaten him out on the piano. Graham is a phenomenal pianist, and a year younger. The great part of this annual trip was that the band could go out to clubs and see the best Cuban musicians performing late into the night. Occasionally, the students were invited to sit in with the professional musicians onstage. Graham was invited, but refused...at first. Until after Aidan's encouragement, and maneuvers to the front row where he could feed this young man the chord changes, which Aidan was catching by ear! Graham's solos were spectacular, but it really was a two man team up there on the keys, even though Aidan was 5 feet away, and never touched the piano.

Aidan was blessed with many natural talents and passions and he was able to squeeze a ton of living into his life. He was clear about his priorities. He had his "non-negotiables"-- essentially he recognized the importance of enjoying every moment and prioritized spending time with the people he loved -- maybe his clarity was heightened by living much of his life with an unpredictable chronic disease.

Given Aidan's focus on community, it was no surprise that the main reason he chose Carleton was because he felt so comfortable when he visited as a prospective student. Of course, he had been here a few times before. In fact, Aidan's first visit was for a memorial for Paul Wellstone, one of my closest mentors as a student. I brought Aidan to that event when he was just 18 months old. Carleton has always been a huge part of our lives -- we wouldn't have met had it not been for Carleton! And the friends we made here have been there for every part of our life for the last 30+ years--many of whom are here today. While Aidan's time here at Carleton was too short, he made incredible friends -- throughout this past year he was excited to tell us about them, introduce us on Facetime, and share dreams they had for the future.



As I was reminiscing about that camping trip in the Trinity Alps, I picked up the book Aidan was reading the night that bear was lumbering around his tent. I had given him *Fahrenheit 451* for his 18th birthday and he was so engaged by it that he began to write a musical version of it during his gap year. When I paged through the book thinking about today's event, I was struck by this passage that I'm sure Aidan had read in the tent that very night and I have been reflecting on it as I think about Aidan's life. The passage comes towards the conclusion of the book. The main character Montag is talking with another character named Granger, who tells him:

"Everyone must leave something behind when he dies...A child or a book or a painting or a house or a wall built or a pair of shoes made. Or a garden planted. Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die, and when people look at that tree or that flower you planted, you're there. It doesn't matter what you do, he said, so long as you change something from the way it was before you touched it into something that's like you after you take your hands away"

Since Aidan died, we have seen with new eyes how many things he touched, how deep his contributions were to the world. Not just in the obvious ways like the music and other tangible things he created, but in how he fostered community, loved and believed in the people around him, how clear and purposeful he was about that being what mattered most.

I am so thankful for the incredible joy, love, and unique perspective that Aidan brought to our lives. The community that Aidan created, shaped by his hand and heart and mind, brings us together today and will carry us forward into the future.