

Thanks Man

Colin Scibetta

Hey everybody, I'm Colin. I'm one of Aaron's many, many friends.

In the last few months, Aaron talked to me about this day. He wondered what it would be like. Who would come? What would they say? Would Eric play that song he wrote for me? What would the acoustics be like?

Well, it's not quite over yet, but knowing Aaron for the past 10 years, I think he'd be pretty happy with what we're doing here -- I think he'd be proud. Now it's my turn, and I really can't mess this up, so let me be clear about my goals:

- 1) To adhere to all of Aaron's rules
 - 2) To not embarrass myself by sweating profusely
 - 3) And to give you a sense of why Aaron meant so much to me and to so many of his friends
- I'm not quite sure where to begin, but I suppose it's only fitting to start where it all started.

It was August 2001—our first year at Wesleyan. I was unpacking boxes in my new dorm room, when there was a knock and in walked this guy with a giant head full of thick dark dreadlocks, peppered with beads, rings, god knows what else in there. I think he was wearing a Phish shirt, maybe it was Zappa, but I remember the pants. They were grey corduroy (the thick kind) and had colorful dancing bears sewn down each leg. Maybe because I had come from a preppy private school in LA or maybe I was just a bit of a square, but this look was very new to me, and I remember thinking: “must be a Maine thing”

As it turned out, that dread locked jam-band loving hippie became like a brother to me, and played a central role in my life throughout college, and up until today.

At Wesleyan, Aaron and I were part of a family, a family of friends that—though separated by great distances --remains very much intact today.

Aaron was able to find humor in everything, even when it made you cringe a bit. I'll never forget coming back to my dorm after a late night study session – exhausted and ready to crash in bed -- to find Aaron's infamous dreadlocks, freshly shaved after years of nesting atop his head, hidden within the sheets of my bed – his idea of a hilarious prank. I was horrified – those things were pretty sketchy. Aaron, as you might predict, could not have been happier with himself, – I don't think I ever got him back for that one.

During our junior year, while many of our friends, including Aaron, were studying abroad, we learned of his diagnosis. We all grew up a lot that year, with his resilience and maturity leading the way. In his singular style –confident and graceful, the core of Aaron persisted. His interest in politics and social justice was unshaken, his passion for jazz and world music flourished, and his quirky sense of humor –bizarre as it may have been- was stronger than ever....

Even as his daily routine became complicated by medicines, doctors visits, occasional difficulty with words and short term memory loss, Aaron never stopped being Aaron, and we all loved him for it.

Early on Aaron asked me to accompany him and his dad to Boston for a neurology appt -- perhaps because I was studying neuroscience -- but from that doctors visit, and the many that followed, a partnership developed that would last for the next 7.5 years.

I was always amazed – though not surprised – at how reliably Aaron’s irreverence and personality shone through, even during tense times when most of us would stiffen, or cower or even cry.

I remember at one visit, during a standard check-up, Aaron was instructed to copy a hexagon—a routine test of neurological function. Aaron, the excellent patient that he was, dutifully followed the instructions. The doctor surveyed the page and looked up, concerned at an irregularity in his drawing...but after a few seconds, he let out a hearty chuckle. Off one corner of his perfect hexagon, Aaron had made a joke—he drew an extra line attached to the letters “OH”-- for hydrogen and oxygen, transforming a simple shape into a organic molecule—an homage to chemistry and a little poke at the doctor’s meticulous exams. It was his playful way of connecting with his Doc, and reminding us that his brain was a lot more than motor skills and spatial reasoning. It was Chock Full of Chutzpah

Soon after graduation, our Wesleyan family dispersed, and Aaron joined me for an amazing month of adventures while I was living down in Ecuador. We rafted the Amazon, summited a 14,000 foot peak, Aaron even suspended his pescatarianism and took part in a local tradition of eating Guinea Pig -- a sacred delicacy – in a move that amazed me and honored our hosts. I’m pretty sure it’s the only time in ten years he ate meat, let alone a rodent.

After we both settled in San Francisco -- I began med school while Aaron began a job as a social worker, serving low income San Franciscans living with HIV. Far from his family, Aaron straddled two worlds while the rest of us knew only one. In the world of a 20-something, he worked a full time job, he hiked, traveled, dated, played music, cooked delicious food and always lit up parties with his humor and his fro. He did this while quietly and responsibly managing medications, doctors appointments, insurance complications and a lingering sense of his own mortality. He took excellent care of himself. He was the most grown-up 28 year old I’ve ever known.

When I think about Aaron, I feel grateful. Despite the sadness we all feel in the wake of his passing, let us be thankful that we had someone as awesome as Aaron in our lives.

In that spirit, I’d like to take a minute to give thanks.

To Fred and Alalia-- I want to thank you for giving us Aaron. Thank you for creating this wonderful friend of ours. Thanks for making him so cool.

Thank you for being so supportive of Aaron's desire to find his stride and become the man we all loved—who could take care of himself and bring joy to his friends—so far from his home in Maine. Thank you for bringing your son home to a place he spoke of so fondly, to pass peacefully, with you and Jesse and Sasha by his side.

To Aaron

Thanks Man. Thank you for being my friend and for letting me be yours. Thank you for always speaking your mind, for always telling the truth, for your constant puns and your witty impersonations – especially Harold. Thank you for calling me out when I was too controlling in the kitchen – I think we can agree that I've gotten better about that. Thank you for being the least obnoxious Red Sox fan I ever met.

Thank you for letting me ask so many questions at your doctors visits, and even more, for letting me sit beside you at those visits. As you know, I'll be graduating from medical school in just two weeks – and as trippy as it sounds – I'll actually be a doctor. You've seen me through every step of the process, teaching more than any book or lecture ever could, --I will be a better doctor, and a better friend, for having known you.

Aaron, on behalf of all your friends...WE LOVE YOU....

...and DAMN, are we gonna miss you.