

# Uncle Aaron

*Jesse Thaler*

Let me tell you about my brother Aaron, who gave us so many gifts over the years.

Some of Aaron's gifts were really cool. Like the ultimate guide to being a hipster Jew, complete with instructions on how to convert your iPhone to an oyPhone. Some of Aaron's gifts were really... um, unique. Sorry dude, but somehow Sasha and I managed to misplace that gyrating saxophone-playing black-faced animatronic jazz man.

Aaron's most precious gift to me was the gift of his time. Often, we got together to eat exorbitant amounts of sushi, all of which we charged to our parents' credit card. Not to mention the many jazz shows we attended, both traditional and not-so -- I know he instructed us not to mention Jesus today, but I will never forget the rocking time we had on Christmas Eve at the Church of Saint John Coltrane. Anyway, our parents should count their blessings that they revoked our credit card privileges by the time we moved out to the Bay Area and discovered... Yoshi's: Jazz Club \*and\* Sushi Bar. A perfect night out for the Thaler boys.

Even though I was his older brother, I still somehow managed to walk in Aaron's footsteps. It was Aaron who clued me in to the 10 day, all-expenses paid, birthright trek through Israel available to all those sufficiently be-schnozed. Aaron sometimes wore my hand-me-down clothes, but I always listened to his hand-me-up music: Medeski Martin and Wood, Bad Plus, Gotan Project, Trombone Shorty, all awesome. (Ok, still working on Zappa.) But you know, despite Aaron's rave reviews, I still haven't been to the Jazz and Heritage Festival, so I guess it's next year in New Orleans!

I will always be grateful for the gift Aaron gave to me by welcoming Sasha into our family. Well, maybe Aaron was a bit too welcoming back in 2001 at the Ben & Jerry's Festival when he started to put some moves on my girl! "Yo, Sasha, can I have this dance?" Of course, any of you who were at Sasha's and my wedding know that Aaron ushered us into blissful matrimony with a truly epic best man speech. Never before in the history of wedding toasts has the best man performed a blues song, with backup harmonica accompaniment by the groom's father, where the momentous birth of the groom was likened to the shock wave produced by the groom's supersonic exit from his mother's reproductive system. And Aaron's version rhymed.

Aaron's last gift to me and Sasha came in his words today, which Ben channelled so perfectly. Over the past few months, one of the saddest thoughts we've had is that our future kids won't have a funky, free-spirited uncle to keep them from turning out to be unmitigated dorks like us. But armed with Uncle Aaron's Gibson ES-335 semi-hollowbody guitar, his Fender Twin Reverb Amplifier, his 352 gigabytes of music, and the memories and stories of everyone here today in body and in spirit, our kids surely will be saved from total nerddom. So when I finally take a break from all my physics travel, and Sasha takes a break from running her crazy marathons, and we get down to some serious baby-making, we promise that Uncle Aaron will be a larger-than-life figure for the little Thalerinos.

Uncle Aaron, who survived the perilous game of "wig", popular in the late 1980s, wherein his brother (that'd be me) would lie on his back, Aaron would lean on said brother's outstretched legs, and said brother would launch Aaron through the air, carving a graceful arc into the bookshelf.

Uncle Aaron, who elevated the clean plate club to new heights, by eating not only all the food on his plate (and all the food on his brother's plate) but also his grease-soaked napkin.

Uncle Aaron, the anti-Medusa, whose voluminous mane would turn onlookers not to stone but to high-fiving, fist-bumping, give-me-some-skin brothahs.

I'm talking about the guitar wailing Uncle Aaron and the African drumming Uncle Aaron.

That's right, the Uncle Aaron with the natty dreads who went to South Africa, and the Uncle Aaron with the killer mustache who went to South America.

You've heard about the Zappa extolling, Phish jamming Uncle Aaron. But did you ever hear about the Grandpa Joe imitating, timpani thumping, soccer ball kicking, sunglasses sporting, body surfing, triple-word scoring, sushi noshing, latke frying, Half Dome climbing, Cessna flying, dog sitting, elephant riding, bird flipping, 2004 Red Sox whose-your-daddy-now-ing, Uncle Aaron?

What, you haven't heard? Well, then, let me tell you about your Uncle Aaron! Let me tell you about my brother Aaron, who gave us so many gifts over the years.