

Hi, my name is Ami, and I had the privilege of sharing Zach with his family for the last three and a half years.

The first time we met for dinner, Zach offered to drive all the way to Baltimore City from Jacksonville, after his late shift at Papa John's, just to meet me after one of my graduate school classes. Because I was more familiar with the area than he, he asked if I knew of a good spot. I immediately thought of a nice, quiet restaurant, where I had attended a small birthday celebration for a colleague. At that party, our group had a little table outside, where we could enjoy a view of the Baltimore Harbor and talk easily, unencumbered by all of the normal buzz of a restaurant.

What I failed to consider is that the party had taken place at the end of August, around 6 P.M. It was now November, and we were meeting around 10 P.M. at a restaurant in a city neighborhood filled with 20- and 30-somethings.

We had about fifteen minutes of great conversation, before pulsating dance music—the kind that reverberates throughout your chest—started to play. Already-dim lights became lower, still. The doors flew open, and a flood of millennials spilled into the restaurant. Where we once had a comfortable amount of space, we were now packed like sardines in a crowd of people, who seemed to think that my so-called quiet restaurant was a nightclub. Though our table was tiny, it got to a point where neither of us could hear the other, even as we both yelled. So much for a

night of scintillating conversation—Zach, who had superior skills in scoping out great spots and planning unforgettable outings, **never** would have made a mistake like this!

In true Zach fashion, though, he rolled with the proverbial punches that night, and just never let me live down my well-intentioned, but ill-considered, choice of location. For a long time after that, each time I suggested somewhere to go to dinner, he would quip, "And you're **sure** there won't be an impromptu dance party happening there?"

[pause]

Zach faced some challenges in his life, but he forged ahead with strength and grace.

Throughout everything, he never lost his kindness and sense of humor. It seemed that he had a meme, or funny picture, for any potential conversation topic. He would get a twinkle in his eye that would give him away, anytime he was up to something. When he would tease me, he would always say, "Well, someone has to do it!" His smile could light up a room, and his infectious, jolly laugh came so easily. It was impossible **not** to feel completely joyful with him.

He once told me that he only gave sass to those he truly loved. Going by that barometer, his deep, unwavering love for his family was very, very clear. When he and his mom would exchange funny sarcastic banter, he would often grin and pause to say to me, "See? I get it honestly." He was also particularly excited to have started working at Skytech, the regional airport in Carroll County, because of his shared passion for aviation with his dad. When Zoe's

graduation date was announced, he immediately started talking about making plans to attend it. He could not have been more proud.

In the short time I was blessed to have him in my life, I watched him blossom before my eyes. He was so intelligent, curious, and ambitious. In 31 years, he achieved more than most: he was a pilot-in-training, a biologist, a businessman, a musician, a past member of the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets, an artist, a Mason, a survivor, an EMT, and an inspiration. He always had his eye trained on higher and higher goals. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, he never quite gave himself full credit for everything he achieved and the impact he had on others.

This past weekend, Zach looked at me and said, "Though you are small, physically, your presence looms large in my life." What I pray he knows, now, is how large his presence is in the lives of **so** many people who loved—and still love—him.

When the pain of his loss seems unbearable, I am trying to remind myself of the times when I was upset, and he would cheer me up with his signature sense of humor. I know he is still up to his usual shenanigans, as he loved to say, in Heaven, and wants us all to smile and laugh at that thought.

Until we meet again in Heaven, one day, I will draw strength from all of the memories I am so blessed to have made with you, and I will follow in your example to use my life to bring light and joy to others. I love you, Zach. We all love you. Fly free.