

From Ally Mediratta

Hi Elizabeth, we met briefly at the service on Sunday– I spent a while trying to think of the right anecdote to write down and found myself at a loss for words, but I've been thinking a lot these past few days about my favorite memories of Zach and wanted to share a few.

This past semester, Zach started tutoring a friend of mine who I do mock trial with, since she had just taken on a new minor in computer science and needed some help. When I asked him about it, he said that he usually has to say no to tutoring requests because of his busy schedule but he said yes to her because he could tell she needed the help and he loved an underdog story. It's hard for me to summarize who I knew Zach to be any more perfectly than that.

He never would've brought up his tutoring if I didn't ask him about it because, as I'm sure you know much better than me, he didn't brag about how often he helped people. I watched Zach root for the underdog time and time again throughout the nine months I had the privilege of knowing him, quietly doing the right thing for no other reason than it being right. He refused to be paid for tutoring even though he did it multiple times a week for hours and my friend always offered. He also told me the reason he volunteered with younger kids regularly because he was worried about the formative years they lost to Covid and always returned with hilarious stories.

Zach and I also talked a lot about the books we loved, including a lot by Vonnegut and *Confederacy of Dunces* (which he said he enjoyed because it was a foundational part of your parents marriage) and his membership to the SNU book club, though he was offended that I thought he was joking about the concept of a frat book club. We also talked a lot about writing, especially because I took a class this semester where I had to write a short novel, so he regularly pitched me ridiculous story ideas. This included one that involved a nerdy college freshman who is randomly assigned to a drug-using roommate and gets over his initial aversion before deciding to rebel against his parents by using his nerdiness to make drugs, eventually becoming a mob boss (he swore this was not autobiographical nor a ripoff of *Breaking Bad*). Zach encouraged me to write more than anyone else that semester.

He checked in on my novel writing progress weekly, if not more often, and regularly asked me if he could read it, to which I always said: when it's finished. Eventually, he just set a reminder in his calendar for August 21, 2023, "read Ally's book," which he told me was binding. He made a point to remember tiny details about my life that even I had forgotten about, ask me about projects that I had mentioned in passing, reference

stories from months prior, listen to my thoughts on the subjects I love and ask questions with a genuine care and curiosity I can only describe as truly special. He would ask me when my next mock trial “home game” was because he wanted to be “cheering in the stands,” despite my repeated warnings that he would find it immensely boring. When he started tutoring my friend, he said he had to “pretend to know way less about mock trial than he actually did so he wouldn’t sound weird”, knowledge that he had because he spent so much time asking me question after question, with the understanding of what it meant to love an extracurricular, to have it consume your life.

My favorite thing about talking to Zach was that he was never without a strong opinion about something I had probably never really thought about. He once told me: “If you want to get in an argument about fruit quality, then fine, but do so at your own peril because my opinions are strong and my research is extensive.” (This was followed with the statement: “God put strawberries on this earth to make smoothies”) To be able to hear his thoughts on the merits of playing dodgeball in PE, why Thanksgiving food is terrible, which parts of the Midwest are the best and why, why he would trounce me in a guitar playing competition, what crafts are acceptable to make with duct tape (I drew the line at his decision to make a duct tape hamster grave), which philosophers were wrong about what, and the greatest places to take a road trip, was to see a way of looking at the world that was measured and thoughtful without ever losing his signature wit, levity, and humor.

I am sending all my love to you and your family, as I have been thinking of you nonstop since I heard the news. Zach constantly spoke very highly of you to me– he talked more about his gratitude for his family and hometown than almost anyone I know (although he did say that in high school he was voted most likely to spend the night in a Lake Bluff jail cell). Thank you for your beautiful words at the service, and thank you for the huge role you played in shaping Zach into the incredible person I had the unbelievable good fortune of calling a friend, now and forever.