

Memorial Speech by Elizabeth Porter
May 28, 2023

As I look around at this group of people Zach loved, I can't help but hold onto a tiny bit of hope that like Tom Sawyer, Zach will walk up behind me, tap me on the shoulder, and say "hey betty" and then grab the mic and look out at all of you, the people who meant the most to him, and say something like "I didn't get the invite, whatttt are we all doing here?" Proving that this really has been some terrible misunderstanding after all.

But I'm afraid that won't happen. I'm afraid we really are in this moment, this moment that words don't reach, this suffering too terrible to name. Nothing I say up here can do justice to the loss humanity has suffered with the loss of my brother. The loss of Zach. Our incredible and perfect son, grandson, nephew, cousin, instructor, classmate, student, teammate, coach, confidant, partner in crime, and most of all, friend.

Hearing all of your stories these past few days about the impact he had on you has made us love, respect, and miss Zach even more, if that's even possible. There's nothing I can say to capture let alone dull the pain we feel. And no one deserved a long life more than Zach. No one.

The worst thing has already happened. So instead of talking about his loss, I'm going to talk about the gift that he was to all of us. Because Zach knew how to live a good, moral, fun and fulfilling life. So here are just a few of the lessons that we can take with us, to live a little more like Zach.

1. Useless, punitive or bureaucratic, rules are made for breaking. You are your own moral authority. Sit down with the principal, or pledgemaster, parent, or policymaker if you have to and tell them why they're wrong. Never accept "because I said so" as a reason, despite how many eye rolls ensue.
2. Call your family. Text your mom three paragraphs on mothers day. Handwrite letters. Tell the ones you love you love them.
3. Get yourself a nice pair of rubber soled slippers. Zach called his among his prized possessions, though maybe that says more about the state of our floors.
4. Be humble, Zach was smarter than most of us but he'd try his darndest never to let us know.
5. Don't put up with being demeaned or made to feel less than. Walk out. Even if it means you drop out of one frat on initiation night and threaten to drop out of another until you get them to see things your way. Stand up for yourself and your friends.
6. Learn for the sake of learning. Watch crash courses or listen to freakonomics before bed, rather than scroll mindlessly. Education is meant to educate. To teach you how to

think and live rather than teach you how to maximize profits for your future employer. Getting A's is a convenient side effect.

7. Ask for help when you need it. Because everybody has troubles, insecurities, and anxiety. Even the people who might seem like they don't. None of us can see ourselves the way others so easily do.
8. Ignore sunk costs.
9. Always use the best word for the sentence, even if somebody has to ask you what it means. In fact, Zach had a quizlet of words he came across and didn't know, and he would quiz himself until he could incorporate them into his speech effortlessly, ever in pursuit of accuracy and eloquence.
10. Be loyal to your friends and your stock picks. Ride with them through the highs and lows. But seriously, put your money in index funds if it's stressing you out.
11. Embrace your flaws. Though you might not be able to tell from these speeches, Zach knew he wasn't 100% perfect. For one thing he was bad with directions, genetic flaw, not his fault. But when his friends questioned him "are you really looking up directions for this place you've been 100 times?" he proudly admitted it, "yup." taking away any power for it to be embarrassing. And frankly I mean with modern gps does that even count as a flaw?
12. Listen to many different types of music. Make playlists for your friends. Learn to play an instrument. Then another one.
13. Root for the Cubs.
14. Don't buy things you don't need. Stuff quickly becomes a burden. When you are cleaning out your house, get the things all the way out. Do not let them get stuck in basement-or-garage-purgatory land.
15. Figure out what you enjoy, what you're good at, what you need, what makes your heart full, and who you want to be around, and then spend your time doing exactly that. Do not live to please other people and don't apologize for it. Start now. That way however long you get, it will have been a life well lived.

Death doesn't discriminate between the sinners and the saints, it takes and it takes and it takes.

I think all we can do in the aftermath of this, this unfathomable unspeakable unexplainable unfair thing is try to learn from him. Because Zach doesn't get to grow up and grow old like we do.

Look around, look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now.

We have to love each other, and we have to become more like him. We have to help each other fill the Zach shaped holes in our hearts and hole in the universe. Even though we will never be able to. We have to try.