

Aaron Johanson's funeral took place at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Palatine, Illinois on Sunday, June 14th, 2009. The following words of remembrance were shared by Jeanne Hedgepeth, one of Aaron's teachers from Palatine High school.

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Aaron Johanson: Class of 2009 - class speaker at the Palatine High School Senior Breakfast - class clown - class leader - late for class - just visiting class - world class learner - film class aficionado - first class drummer - full of class - in a class by himself.

Aaron was a man of all seasons - a Renaissance man. He enjoyed learning anything and everything. He was just as capable of discussing science, politics, and philosophy as he was discussing the arts.

Music was his first love. He enjoyed singing, dancing, listening to music, and creating it. He played the drums with the same passion that he lived his life.

As a voracious reader, Aaron **read** anything and everything. We were constantly surprised at the depth and breadth of his knowledge, which must be credited to his love of reading. Aaron had the good fortune of meeting one of his favorite authors, Brian Jacques who wrote a series of books about the fantastical adventures of a mouse and other animals, set in Great Britain. This quote represents the author's theme "A mouse is small and can go unnoticed: but there is no limit to what a **brave heart** and a **fearless spirit** can achieve."

No wonder Aaron identified with these books. He too lived with a **brave heart** and a **fearless spirit** - and we all knew that with all of his passion, talents, and knowledge - he was surely going to leave his mark.

And that **is** just what he has done - he **has** left his mark.

He has left a mark on each one of us - whether we knew him briefly or for his entire life. No relationship **ever** ends because **we** carry it with **us** always, and it grows and changes, as we grow and change.

The relationship each of us had with Aaron will continue to grow and change because in some way - large or small - he touched our lives. Allow me to share some of the ways that he has left his mark.

He exemplified my definition of **class**. That definition involves respect for others - showing respect to all people - not just the cool people, or people you like, or people who can do something for you but each person you encounter. Aaron was respectful of everyone. He had class.

Not only did he treat people with respect but there was something about how he interacted, that made people feel like they mattered. He might do this by giving you a nickname, a compliment, or gently teasing you.

He called, Rachel Sons Bartlett, "Liz Lemon" because she reminded him of Tina Fey's character on *30 Rock*.

One day as he entered my classroom he complimented my hairstyle, with his usual exuberance, and shouted “LOVE THE POOF!” - [This Poof is for you Aaron.]

He might gently tease you such as when he told his Christian youth leader that his sweater reminded him of Blues Clues. However he went about it, Aaron managed to make you feel special by finding a way to connect with you.

I really got to know Aaron in the past year by having him in class and directing him in a new comedy called The Palatine High School Laugh-In. Imagine, Aaron in a student-written comedy with improvisation - yes - it was a perfect fit - and - as you might expect - he was hilarious and a big star of the show.

Many of you have shared stories about Aaron that showed the impact of his sense of humor. If he didn't make you laugh with his wit or his off the wall remarks or funny stories - then he made you laugh, when he laughed about something himself - because - his laugh was contagious - it just made you happy to hear him laugh. And because he was so good at seeing the lighter side of things - he managed to laugh A LOT. He knew not to take anything too seriously and he helped others do the same.

While his humor is memorable, what struck me most about Aaron was how smart he was. He was really smart. Not in the way that society usually gives credit for: A's on his report card, academic scholarships, or being invited into the National Honor Society - (by the way he attended the National Honor Society meetings anyway - even more regularly than the inducted members.) No - he was the kind of smart that really matters - he was **smart about life**.

He was **smart about life** because, he was able to see the big picture, knowing what was really important and making connections in ways few can - especially rare, in someone so young. He really knew something about everything. He was a deep thinker too. Not superficial. He once said, very seriously, “There are no accidents. I don't believe in chance.” I asked, “Then you don't think anything is just a coincidence?” And he said, “Exactly.” - He had a distinct sense that there was something behind all of our experience - that there was a purpose - life was not accidental.

We discussed a quote in class each day and he and I agreed that the last quote of the year was the **best**. It was by the founder of Daoism, Lao Tsu. It says simply, “There is **no way, to** happiness, **Happiness, is** the way.” He exemplified that as well, by expressing himself so joyfully.

He was *also* **smart about life** because he had the **courage** to be himself. It takes a **brave heart** and a **fearless spirit** to live by your own rules - to not care about what others *might* think of you. And this is **exactly** what he did.

He did not live by anyone else's rules - and - he was **not** concerned with getting approval from others - who but Aaron could pull off wearing the elephant sweater - or a kilt - or travel through Ireland in a pink knit cap. He was not going to try and impress you by “fitting in” - although he would try to make you laugh - he was simply himself - enjoying music,

laughing out loud when life tickled him, listening with both ears and his heart when someone needed him and learning wherever he went.

He was *especially smart about life* because he knew how to live life fully with passion and enthusiasm - probably more than anyone I have ever known.

In order to pass my class Aaron needed to submit a final exam project. Of the many options available he chose the one called, "Looking In the Mirror" which required students take a personal inventory of themselves.

There was something that really stood out to me when he presented his project. A requirement was to list things you like about yourself and one of the things he said was: "I am childlike but not immature." I remember thinking, SO TRUE and SO SMART.

His zest for life was childlike: imaginative - animated - and spontaneous.

Aaron left us *too soon*, but no matter how long *any* of us live - life is always *too short*. We only get to do this once - so let us all continue our relationship with Aaron by living life as fully as he did - *fearlessly*, with a *brave heart* - *like a child* whose world is a playground.

His was not a spirit to rein in - his was a spirit that needed to soar and today there is no doubt that his *spirit soars* with the angels - and with God and with *each of us* as we remember Aaron's example of how to live life with passion and enthusiasm. Life - this precious life has a purpose it is not accidental. Thank-you God, for the gift of Aaron - and his indelible mark on our lives.