

What is there to say?

I can say one thing with confidence, that very nearly nothing good comes out of losing our dear friend, daughter, mother, wife, granddaughter, cousin, niece. We had all planned to have her in our lives for many more years. There were supposed to be more adventures, hugs, phone calls, laughs and now we all have to figure out what our worlds will look like without these plans. It's so damn sad.

I think Aarika would have wanted me to start out with something like that. Not because she was dramatic or because she wanted to see me tear up in front of an audience (though, Aarika, I'm sure you would have gotten a kick out of that). I think she would have wanted that because one of the best parts about Aarika was her unwavering honesty—her ability to face the truth head on. I know I'm not the only person in the room who has at least one memory of Aarika laying down maybe a little more truth than they were ready to hear at the time. But it was one of my favorite things about her. I never had to wonder where I stood with her, and I always knew that if I needed advice, nobody could give it more honestly and as straightforwardly as her. It made her words carry more weight. You knew you were getting the truth when she told you what you meant to her.

One of those truths she told me was about a year after her diagnosis when she told me how important it was to begin accepting that she would die from her illness. She said it's natural for everyone to try to deny the truth and cling to hope, but even as hard as she was going to fight (and man did she fight!) she knew it was important for those around her to begin accepting and processing that truth while she was still here. As hard as this was to hear, I think it helped me.

She was really good at looking out for those around her and helping them deal with the various truths in their lives. She couldn't have picked a more fitting career than counseling, putting her best assets toward helping others. If the counseling she gave all of those young people was half as good as the work she did with me with me in the last 17 years, they're going to be significantly better off because of their time with her. I know that she was also a significant help to those in her cancer community, Colontown. The people she supported, shared resources with and visited are more than most of us will know. Probably all of us here have become significantly better because of our time with Aarika and the truth she has helped us see.

My name's Ryan by the way. But you are all here because you know Aarika, so if you know me, you probably knew me first as Larry. She gave me that name, and in every circle of friends from college, my name is still Larry. To set the record straight, I named her Larry first: the first time I met her, I told her I'd probably never remember her name or Megan Frahm's name, so I'd just call both of them Larry. It didn't stick for them, but Aarika made sure to introduce me to everyone from then on as Larry.

She had an influence on people like that. She was also pretty good at making sure things turned out her way, and nobody ever minded because things usually went pretty well for all of us when they were going Aarika's way.

Ever since I've been a Larry, I've had the most loyal friend anyone could ask for.

A friend, in fact, so loyal that when she was 21 and I was 20, she wouldn't stand for me being left behind from her adventures bar hopping, so she found an ID for me and insisted I come along (if any male here, a little older than me, lost their ID around 2005, I'm sorry...she did it.) Even

more loyal, when I was arrested, in front of her, for using that ID, she was also right there to bail me out of jail. That's a real friend. Thanks Aarika.

Aarika was and has forever remained good at being young. She never lost her quick wit, her sense of mischief, and her ability to find humor even in some of the darkest situations. Because of this, anytime I've ever wanted to feel 20 again (which, don't we all want to feel 20 again all the time?) the only thing I needed to do was call up Aarika.

One thing I've dreaded about saying goodbye—one thing I'm sure we've all dreaded about saying goodbye—is that there are certain parts of me that only Aarika brings out. [Like nobody else gets the art of starting a phone call with a round of crass name-calling]. Now that she is gone, I feel like there is a certain part of myself that I might not get back. I'm not that sure how to deal with this. Actually, Aarika was always the person I would turn to when I had something painful that I didn't know how to deal with. Ironically, many of us might agree that right now is when we probably need a little heart to heart with Aarika more than ever.

So maybe my original question "what do we say" isn't the right question. Maybe now that our friend, counselor, mentor, mischievous instigator, is gone, the question is "who do we say what we need to say to?" I know we aren't all ready to heal yet. We will need to experience our pain and loss for a while. But we do have a pretty solid Aarika fan club gathered here today. And I hope that in the company of each other we can pass around some of that comfort Aarika would have been so quick to give to all of us. I think she would feel proud to continue living through us in that way.

I'll always love you buddy.