

I'd like to share some words to express my gratitude for Aarika and share a bit about the positive impact that she's had in my life and the lives of our children. Although Aarika and I grew in different directions over the last few years, the bond that we shared with our family was strong and could never be broken. She was my friend. She was my partner in raising 3 amazing kids. I loved her. I will miss her.

To my loves, Libby, Ellis, and Thomas, I can't think of a harder thing for a kid to go through, than to lose their Mommy much too soon. And yet you all amaze me day after day with your courage and strength. It's no surprise really because you are all made of the same stuff as your incredible mom, and she was one of the strongest and most courageous people I've ever known. I'm comforted to know that Aarika's spirit will live on in the lives of each of you, as you each embody so many of her wonderful qualities.

Libby. Our first-born daughter. It became clear early in your life that you had your mom's incredible emotional intelligence. Once we could finally get that binky out of your mouth, you began to use your words to express yourself and your feelings in a way that just amazed us as first-time parents. Your mom used to just beam with pride to see her tiny baby turning into such a curious, thoughtful, and perceptive little girl right before our eyes. These traits that your mom shared with you were at the heart of who she was as a person. They fueled her passion for helping others with their mental health. They nurtured her many life-long friendships that she worked hard to maintain over the years. Most notably, the loving friendship that Aarika and Megan shared serves as an example to us all for how to find connections in our relationships that are richer, more joyous, and more meaningful. Libby, as you continue to grow, I can see that you invest that same kind of care, love, and empathy into your relationships with friends and family, and it inspires me.

Ellis. Our little tenderhearted Sissy Bear. Just as you show such kindness and sensitivity towards others, your mom also had immense compassion and constantly, selflessly thought about the needs of others above her own. This was true of her family and friends, her clients, co-workers, and after her cancer diagnosis, even complete strangers. Aarika found a strong sense of purpose when she joined the Colontown support community. She gave so much of herself to help other newly diagnosed cancer patients to navigate their scary new reality. Your mom was always so proud of you when she would see you doing things like making a card for someone just to brighten their day, or when you would generously share your things with your friends or siblings, or when you would recognize that someone was feeling sad and offer them a shoulder to lean on.

On the other side of the spectrum, you also share your mom's fierce determination and incredibly strong will. Some might confuse those last words with stubbornness. Well, in Aarika's case, stubbornness is definitely a fitting term. Ellis, your strong will is an important part of who you are meant to be. I see you apply these traits as you compete on the soccer field and strive to be better. And I recognize so much of your mom in you, when I see you boldly stand up for your convictions and speak out for what you believe is right and just.

And last, but not least, Thomas. Our incredibly sweet and lighthearted little man, Tom Tom. You and your mom shared a special bond. At the same time our beautiful baby boy was growing inside your mommy's tummy, so too was the cancer growing and spreading throughout her body. Despite being born during an incredibly difficult and sad time for our family, you came into this world bringing such positivity energy and optimism, and you helped to heal our broken hearts with so much love and joy. You light up the room with your presence, and it's clear that you got your charisma and charm from your mom.

One of my favorite things about Aarika was her sharp wit and great sense of humor. Despite being dealt with such a difficult and heavy situation, she never lost this side of her and continued to bust out jokes and sarcasm every day, until the very end. Last week when the home hospice team came out and were talking her through the intake process, one of them asked her a question on their form, "Are you a veteran?". Without skipping a beat, she responded, "No, I just look real tough". It was super funny, and we all had a good laugh. But she didn't just look tough. She was tough. Aarika was just simply made of tough stuff, through and through. I love that all my kids share these endearing qualities, each with your own unique sense of humor that keeps me smiling and laughing every day. I know that we will all continue to support each other through our grief and lift each other up with lots of hugs, love, and laughter.

I'm confident that as you three grow older, you will all continue to live your lives by the same values that your mom has always tried to instill in you. Aarika's hard work and ambition was uncompromising. If there was ever something Aarika set her mind to do, she dove in to confront the challenge head-first and just got it done. No matter what the task, or how difficult something might seem, or how hard it might hurt, Aarika put in the work – day in and day out. This kind of innate drive to accomplish her goals, no matter how big or how small, allowed her to live life with confidence and led her down a path of achievement and fulfillment. Now the only exception to all of this, is when Aarika would have to call in a takeout order at a restaurant, in which case she would cower in the corner and beg that someone else please make the call. This is something I recently learned was shared by Megan, and I really think she might want to talk to someone about that. I'm sure there are many referral opportunities here in attendance today. But in all seriousness, I was always in awe of Aarika's work ethic. It motivated me to be a better version of myself, and I know that you kids will all go far in life if you hang on tight to those values that your mom lived by.

My sweet kiddos, I know life will be a lot different without your loving mommy here with us. I will never be able to completely fill the void that she leaves. But I promise you that I will be there for you always and I'll work tirelessly to provide for you the good life that you deserve. Just as mommy would have wanted, our days of adventure and exploration are only just getting started. I will be with you every step of the way through the journey, and your mom's bright spirit will be right there inside of each of you – shining bright to help guide the way.

I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to the many people who provided such tremendous support to Aarika and our family over the years. Aarika had incredible teams of world-class providers, but there were a few who stood out for going above and beyond. I want to personally thank Dr. Bruce Jacobsen, Dr. Jonathan Wisanant, Dr. Brett Doxey, Dr. Travis Grotze, Dr. Francine Arneson, and Dr. Kenneth Kirton for their exceptional care and compassion that they and their teams showed Aarika. To Jennifer and Megan, I can't thank you enough for always being there for Aarika and our family. To Cathy, Alina, and Gabbi, the time that you were able to spend with Aarika in her final weeks was very special and meant a great deal to our family. And lastly, to Aarika, thank you for giving me some of the best years of my life and for bringing our 3 beautiful children into this world. I love you. I will miss you. I will never forget you.