

My name is Michelle Kang, and Robert was my classmate at the College of William and Mary. I have never known anyone more kind, generous and thoughtful than this person whose life was much too short.

Robert and I met the very first day of freshman year. It was a hot and humid day, and we immediately bonded over the fear and triumph of flying high above the trees at Lake Matoaka on a zip line.

One day that first fall in Williamsburg, we decided that we each fit a role in the other's life that our families at home did not provide. I didn't have a big brother and he didn't have a sister. So we adopted each other – he became my “big brother” and I became his “little sister.”

As the “big brother”, he said that he felt it was his duty to inject a “healthy dose of Brooklyn pragmatism” to my deeply idealistic view of the world. As the “little sister”, it was my task to teach him about women. I think if he were

here, he would agree we were both only mildly successful with our tasks.

In college, despite his demanding class and extra-curricular schedule, he remembered if you had an exam or tough project and would call to check on you. I remember that even though I hadn't told him where I was studying, he would somehow find me in the recesses of Swem Library to give a warm hug and offer encouraging words. Robert had a way of knowing when people were in need and almost magically producing help. He dropped off cookies during exam time for both friends and random W&M students. He rallied volunteers to the bone marrow drive. He had an unlimited well of compassion for others.

This did not stop after graduation from college. When I was five time zones and thousand of miles away in graduate school overseas, he e-mailed me articles relevant to my research and local news that I was not even aware of. This is the kind of person Robert was – he cared so deeply about you as an individual that he wanted to understand the

world that you lived in. He remembered details about your family, your home and your job because he just cared so deeply.

Although he often called himself a hardened cynic, we knew that in reality, he was a gentle and passionate optimist. He was always ready to talk, with a tilt of his head and intense furrowing of the brow, about the ways that we could make the world a bit better. I remember when I confessed to him my ridiculous idea to compete in a pageant. Although he thought it was crazy, he accepted it and shared my desire to find unique ways to make the world better, especially for disadvantaged children. I knew how committed he was to my “crazy” idea when he accompanied me on a multi-state search for a certain pair of shoes. We laughed for years afterwards at the memory.

After college, many of us here have been the fortunate recipients of a personally written note in his unique handwriting at Christmas, on an anniversary and even major life events like a new job, even if you had not

directly shared it with him! I always looked forward to opening a letter or card from Robert, knowing that the note inside would provide the evening's challenge – deciphering the handwriting to get to the prize of his warm and witty message.

Robert's personal touch and intense devotion to each of us will live long in our memories. He has inspired us to make the extra effort to reach out to each other and strengthen the bonds of friendship between us. He leaves an indelible imprint on my life and many of yours that will never fade away.

Michelle Kang-Ackerman

William & Mary Classmate, Friend