

A Welcome Distraction – Kan and Wayne

It was 3 months after my son had passed, and I was working my usual long hours in real estate, and basically working really helped me take my mind off my grief and thoughts. I love real estate. The most welcome distraction (not sure I realized it then) was meeting Kan and Wayne. I had listed for sale a beautiful home and was receiving bids. I had sold the home to the current owner (my client's husband had passed away the year earlier). I received a call from Kan who wanted to view the home, and of course I wanted to accommodate him (or any potential buyer). Well, he arrived close to 40 minutes late (which portended to be a habit of Kan's !), but informed me his friend was car sick in the car. So, I totally understood, and invited his partner in also – for how can someone buy a home without everyone seeing it! Kan signed an agency disclosure form on the spot and placed a bid later that evening. Unfortunately, it was not the winning bid although high, and thus started our relationship albeit with a strange beginning.



I had offered to show other homes in the area, and we started to meet and see homes together – all over the county! *Oh my!* Invariably late, but after I learned how Kan's Birthday was also in April (as AJ's had been), and he had also had cancer, there was a bonding connection for me. I can't explain it but we connected. Kan had me searching and showing so many properties, 2, 3 times a week and at the same time would be so caring (even though he was always infuriatingly late!). He wanted to take me to lunch and would invite me over and over again to the point I had to agree even though I explained how my husband was in a nursing home, was very ill, and yet Kan would still insist on taking me to lunch. So funny, but after I agreed, and as we were dining in a restaurant, he told me how I should be with my husband! I had to laugh as I was always telling him that my husband was ill, but what to do! It made me smile. Kan and Wayne have a great sense of humor. Another bond between us. We had chosen a Japanese restaurant, and then I learned that the quality of the restaurant was important to Kan. He was and still is a foodie! *Another connection*. I am certainly not a foodie, but I like to cook and appreciated that he loves to cook and was so impressed with the recipes he had made from the photos he had shown to me.

I think that Kan and Wayne just made me feel cared for? I would wake up , and there would be a text from them stating that breakfast was on its way via a food delivery service! Then a huge breakfast from a local restaurant would arrive at the door. One dinner delivery even had a (once) frozen cocktail included! Both Kan and Wayne made me smile, and we would discuss real estate, and I enjoyed their objectivity, absolutely loved their intelligence, and

their viewpoint from their different perspectives, their viewpoints on finance. We would go for afternoon tea as they would call it, but it was actually cocktails and a myriad of appetizers that was a feast. They always made sure the restaurant had good reviews. To me, being with new friends that made me smile was more important than the quality of the restaurant.



Thus started our relationship, and 2 years later we are closer than ever. I am called 'mom' and I call them my adopted sons! I am obviously not their mom, but I would like them to



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feel that I am here for them! We have shared birthdays together (they came to my home and cooked a great meal for me last year - (we could have gone out but I chose to be at the house), but it was complete with a cake, a lovely gift and we were together for over 5 hours. Such is our friendship. We can just talk and talk sharing our innermost thoughts. We have spent holidays (Thanksgiving and Christmas), and special events together and I treasure their friendship. The evening before my husband's funeral, I had a barbecue for close friends as it was a Memorial Day weekend, and both Kan and Wayne came. What was really touching for me was that they both sang a song to me. They chose Paul McCartney's "Yesterday" and it was lovely. My good friend, Bonnie was there too and we were both so touched. It was the first time they had visited my house, and it was supposed to be outdoors. It was so hot, Wayne suggested we go inside where the central air would be turned on. So funny, I have no air conditioning and we went inside to fans blowing! Bonnie and I laughed. Kan was hospitalized later in the year, and they ended up not buying a home and it was such a relief (after knowing he had recovered) as I could just be friends with them, and love it. No real estate. No-one being late!!



I took the boys out for Wayne's Birthday!

I have both taken them out to dinner for Wayne's Birthday, made dinner at my home for both of them, and our friendship has simply grown. Can't explain it but we have a bond. It might be sharing a few texts during the week, going out for dinner or having dinner at



I cooked dinner for Kan and Wayne

my house, but remaining good friends throughout. I love them!

Grief

Grief affects people differently. We all cope or try to cope in different ways. That is our right, My younger son was so stricken with A.J.'s death. He felt that it should have been he to have been sick, and not A.J. who had accomplished so much and was



about to start his life as a Commercial pilot after his 1500 hours flight time had been obtained. Of course, not true as Brett has accomplished so much and his CV is very impressive (having played baseball around the world, was a drover in Australia, worked in an advertising company there, was a metal welder there – staying the length of his visa so he could stay with his then girlfriend), a restaurant manager, Coach for the Under 18 baseball



team in Sweden), but such was and is the love we all had for A.J.! However, I needed to make Brett feel better in himself, and to help him cope with everything. Since Brett had been playing baseball around the world for years (Germany, Australia, Sweden), he really hadn't been in the country for any length of time, and so didn't have a car. I wanted to lease a car for him, and to help take his mind off everything, We would visit various car dealers. This was 2022 and post Covid. Shipping was delayed everywhere, and prices were astronomical. I couldn't believe that for a leased car, a down payment of over \$7000 was required to cover taxes, etc. It just made sense to me to purchase instead of leasing. That is what we did. I didn't have extra time at all, and Brett would say he wasn't interested, but at night I would search the internet for a nice car. We found a great Mini Cooper in New Jersey, drove out to see it, and purchased it then and there! That \$7000 down payment went towards the car, and the interest rate was only 2.6 too. Perfect! You must have a car to get around Westchester before frustration sets in, and I would like to think that this small thing helped Brett in some small way. It took away some frustration which having no access to transportation caused. (the nearest bus stop is over a mile away).

Work

Thank goodness for work! I can recall burying my son one day, and then meeting with a client the following day to pick up keys prior to her relocation move. Of course, I never told her that I had just buried my son. It is important not to incorporate work and personal life – “ne’er shall the two should meet!” Of course, I then went home and continued grieving with my family, and being embraced by my friends who totally spoiled me with their love

and caring. *I was so spoiled.* I received so many beautiful letters and they all meant so much to me. I hope I responded to them all.

However, since I have supported my family for many years, work has always played a large portion of my daily life. Having that listing then forced me to take care of cleaning it (yes, I did that), and having my handyman paint the basement stairs and backdoor area. I



A robin would visit me each day .

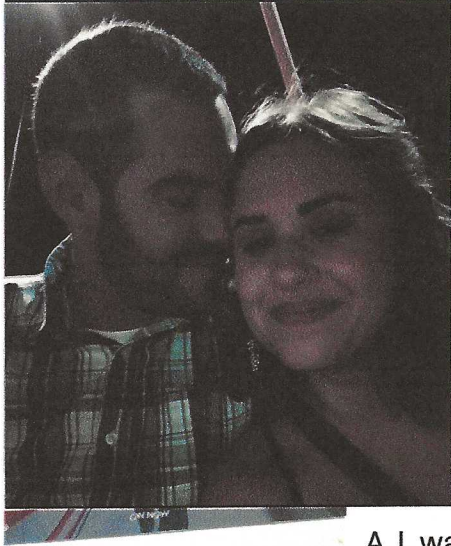
basically organized the house ready for professional photography, staging, digital enhancement, and you get the picture! *It kept me busy.* By staging, I would supply the towels, linens, etc. Preparing a home is much more involved than you might think. Many moving pieces. One nice memory was when doing some gardening at a listing and a robin sat a few feet away from me, and I understand it means someone from the afterlife is visiting you. I felt it was A.J. visiting me, and it meant so much. I continually saw a robin every time I would

walk my dog for so many months thereafter.

A few weeks after my son had passed, I was contacted by the past buyers of a home I had represented a few years earlier, and they had liked the thought that they had purchased the home where there were multiple bids through my marketing. I loved the challenge of doing the same for them. It was January 2022 and no one knew which way the market would go. We decided to list the home at the highest priced sale in the area as of a few months earlier, and after we staged (again with linens, towels, flowers), power washed the rear, prepared the home, we did obtain those multiple bids, and the home sold for well over list price (over \$100,000 more). A record for that area at that time. I only mention this as once again, it kept me so busy, and was very positive for me as it also kept my mind busy and away from other sad thoughts (of which there were so many!).

I had also been contacted by a previous client whose husband had died of cancer, and she was relocating also. This was the home I had represented (in multiple bidding) when I met my now good friends Kan and Wayne. Once again, having small repairs undertaken by my handyman, plumber, staging, etc. were all great ways of keeping me busy. Some people might just curl up in a ball when faced with adversity, I had no choice but to keep on working in order to pay for my bills, etc., but I must say I loved it!

A.J.



I am only recounting this for when we first learned that A.J. had entered the emergency room as having Covid the end of July, 2021 (July 28th), and learned that he had stage 4 cancer with 80% of his colon blocked, and 40% of his liver affected (in 2 different lobes), I was at a stumbling block. Of course, I only wanted to be with my son, but I had my husband's ailments, 2 cats, a dog to walk every day, my work, the house, and I could not believe that my son was deathly ill. We were all in denial. We thought he was joking when he first called to tell us.

— A.J. was always positive, joking was the norm for him, and said that the doctors were very hopeful, that they would give him chemotherapy once his Covid was in check, and as long as the cancer had not spread to other areas, they were hopeful. They mentioned seeing something on his genitals, his lung but felt it could be nothing and he would beat this. We all clung on to this of course, and I was so thankful to his dear friend Nate who had taken him to the emergency room, would visit every day and was in short, was and is a beautiful wonderful person! A.J. had another close friend, "Frenchie" but he was married unlike Nate, and so traveling was not as convenient but he was wonderful also. Love him too. Nate was very busy with school, flight training, etc. but he would be there for and with A.J. Love him. Then there was Nina. I had never met her, and yet A.J. had been dating her since before 2018! Nina was German, an ICU nurse in Germany and she was with A.J. bless her so. I loved her without ever having met her! She had been teaching him German for the past several years too. She had even sat next to him when A.J. had appeared on a New Year's Eve British comedy show in December 2017 (it was a segment on luge—very funny), and he never mentioned she was there!

We had all loved "Little Britain" (a funny British comedy show) and there was a character portrayed by Matt Lucas who was dressed up as a lady. Just seeing him in this role would make you smile. The character was an obnoxious person but so funny. I printed out a photo, placed it into a frame and sent it to AJ with the words 'love from your Aunt' inscribed. It made him smile! Brett and Mark took turns going down to Florida to help in any way with transportation, etc.

I had meanwhile entered a new listing and while this was before I knew AJ had cancer, I had invited a great associate who was a top agent in the Rye Neck area to join me, and I was so thankful I did. Without Rona's assistance, I would not have been able to work through

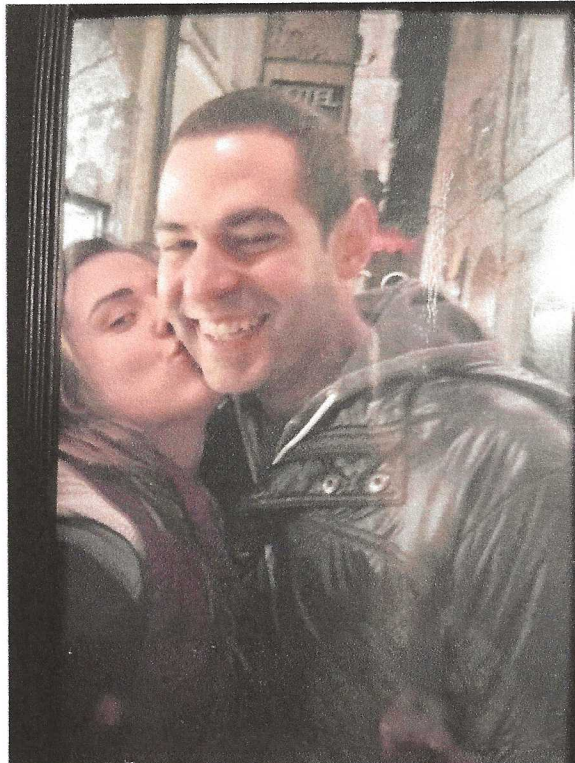
everything as it unfolded (not being able to be in 2 places at once!). Meanwhile, such is life and Rona too had her personal struggles with a son's illness.

Chemo started , and I was told everything was going well but he was hospitalized in early October. I was called and told that he had a complete colon blockage, and he would not survive the night. I immediately flew down leaving Mark to take care of my husband and house (bless him), and my first accessible flight took me into Tampa. It was a 1 hour and 30 minute drive to the hospital in Lake Monroe, Sanford. All I kept repeating was "he will live he will live, he will live, I love you A.J., I love you AJ I love you AJ.:" My mantra.

My husband's Birthday was October 18th, and I had arranged to take out the family and an old friend to celebrate his Birthday. Not the greatest time of course but I realized that Sidney was in the house the entire time, and he needed to be appreciated. When I was called on October 11th, I had to cancel that celebration. No choice, and I know he was disappointed.

When I arrived, I was told that he would not survive the night, and when I saw him, I had never seen so many machines around one body. There must have been at least 30-40 machines. They told me was dying, that his entire abdomen was full of cancer, and I told them that he was my son, he was a fighter, and he was not going to die. A.J. was in an induced coma, intubated and he had a fever due to the blockage. They asked if I wanted to meet with a minister, and I repeated that he was not dying. A.J. had 24 hour medical assistance and they were all phenomenal. They allowed Nina and I to be there in the room, and they could not have been more caring. They could not perform any procedure to unblock the colon since he had a fever, did not even have the capability to do so in the hospital, and they required that his fever go away before they could transport him to the correct hospital in Orlando, and to see if a doctor would undertake the procedure as it was so risky. We met with cancer surgeons, who all gave their opinions, and we all prayed.

Not to bore you, but A.J.'s fever went down, a wonderful doctor in Orlando (Dr. K) agreed to do the procedure and AJ was transported there 2 days later. Nina, and I stayed up that Monday night waiting to see if A.J. would



survive the procedure to unblock his colon or he would succumb . The procedure was successful, his colon was unblocked , a stint inserted and he made it to the intensive care ward. It is all a blur writing this now 2 years plus later, but AJ was in a coma for at least another week as I recall since he was intubated and when he awoke from the coma (the doctors had been carefully reducing certain medications), he really did not want to be intubated. *Who would?* You are thirsty, your throat is forced open continually. After a few days of that he pulled out the tubes in the middle of the night. Nina and I were called and we went to the hospital a few hours later when they permitted us to! *My son was back!* They called it a miracle, and it was!

He was so terribly thin, and A.J. said that he had been thin with Covid, and he was fine. He would beat it. I was concerned with getting nutrition inside him. Nina more so with tests. A.J. said under his breath in the early days that he didn't think he was going to make it but then he showed his usual optimism and cheerfulness. My goal was to get him to Memorial Sloan Kettering, for my husband to see him, and for him to get the best in medical treatment. MSK was the goal.

I wanted him to survive and fight this. I just wanted to have him put on some weight, and Nina wanted for him to stay in Florida to undergo more chemo but we all knew the chemo debilitated him more and he would not be able to travel after a treatment. I would go into the ward to find Nina shaving him, washing him and pampering him which was lovely, but he would not be having any physical rehabilitation that was on his schedule or eating any food because of it. Nina wasn't wrong as he loved her attention. No one was wrong. The first night he was able to eat, I brought in home made chicken soup! He had one spoonful of broth ! One spoonful of jello. That was it. The next day he fancied Vietnamese Pho. I drove to a nearby Asian area, bought Pho, and even bought a pretty bowl and soup spoon – all to make it look as appealing as possible for him to eat something. He had two spoonful's of the broth. That was it. But it was something. I had to stay positive.

So began a daily routine. My goal was to have him eat something, anything, and he needed to be able to walk out of the hospital in order to even start chemo again if that was to evolve and be the game plan. He could not walk. He was skin and bone, and had such trouble moving around. He needed to be able to learn how to walk again because of his being in a coma. I would bring in nicer oatmeal packets. I tried. We all tried . Nina made smoothies with fruits. We bought smoothies at the hospital's health food restaurant (it was good!). A.J.'s time was limited but we couldn't absorb that. We were blessed that we were able to enjoy him for a few months after he had returned to us after the coma, and whatever made him feel better then all was good. None of us was to blame for anything – only just loving him so much and wanting him to live. The palliative care administrator would speak to him

privately. We spoke in terms of his getting better. I am sure she was speaking in terms to him with his lessening the pain. He was in so much pain. We really believed he would get better. He was A.J. A fighter. The hospital nurses loved him. Loved his cheerfulness, his humor and were all rooting for him. They were great. He was designing a medical contraption (in theory) with a nurse to better aid people.

We also needed to get him to a rehab center prior to his being accepted to MSK in New York. There is a whole procedure. We were told that he would not get chemo in Florida unless he was able to walk in for the treatment. So, in truth he needed the rehab center and based on his condition, we were able to find one that would take him for a few weeks in his condition. During that time, it was my goal to try and get him an appointment at MSK. A.J. would fancy a Philly cheese steak one evening, and I would go and buy him one. Perhaps one bite? A half bite? The next night he wanted shrimps – so shrimp it was. He loved lamb chops, and so I wanted to make him lamb chops, but couldn't find mint sauce anywhere! I went to 3 different supermarkets and could not find any mint sauce, but was able to find some fresh mint and so made my own mint sauce, and took that into him. He actually ate a little lamb with the sauce! I was doing what moms do. Trying to coax with food. Whatever he wanted, I brought it! Middle Eastern food? No problem. Anything and everything. All the time, he was losing so much weight. He had no appetite, and his pain medication was increasing.

Nina, by necessity had to return to Germany to work, and so it was me and my sons. Well, as a mom, I was thinking long term and A.J. getting better, and so as I was staying in his apartment, I took to making repairs! The toilet would not flush properly and they had been using a bowl of water to flush the toilet, and the bowl was terribly stained. Well, I called maintenance, and had the toilet fixed, and I scrubbed the bowl clean! Yay! I replaced the stove top liners, so they were all new and clean, had the CAC filters replaced, and cleaned! Not that the apartment was dirty. It wasn't but I just wanted A.J. to return (if he did) to the apartment to find it comforting. I wanted him to know that we were taking care of his apartment on his behalf. Of course, there were 2-3 flights of stairs and it was impossible for him to have returned to the apartment but we were staying positive. A.J. was a genius. Not just saying that but he had an I.Q. of 145, and perhaps because he was dyslexic, it had made him work that much harder. He didn't need directions in order to put things together, he just knew how to do it! A few years ago, I was selling a beautiful home in New Rochelle and there was a huge room used as a gym. My clients had a townhome in the city (among other homes!), and didn't need the equipment. I had suggested it be donated to our local Boys and Girls Club. My client said 'great', and asked I take care of everything! I had called the various companies who could dismantle the expensive gym equipment, and it was going to be astronomical in price. No problem! I called in A.J. who took everything apart,

then traveled to the Boys and Girls Club and then promptly put everything together from memory. Done. A.J. always wanted to be a pilot, and so after his Olympic career ended, he absolutely dove into becoming a commercial pilot. I understand he was the top of his class. He loved it. I got sidetracked but I mention this in relation to his apartment as he had programmed the lighting in his walk in closet by sound. All you had to say was 'lights on' and the lights would turn on. Well, I told him that I had 'fixed his lights' so the switch now worked. We all cracked up, but that is our silly humor!

A.J. and I would watch television together in the rehab center. One day we were watching 'Curb your Enthusiasm' and it featured someone with Stage 4 cancer referencing the fact that you had to believe someone with stage 4 cancer with whatever they said. A.J. was still able to laugh. A. J. said that it was so nice that we were able to spend some time together. Yes, it was. So, really and truly nice. I was blessed.



Nina, Frenchie and Nate with A.J. at the Air B 'n B!

Nina had wanted for him to go to a hotel after rehab, have chemo and go to NY once his tumors had shrunk. I had no money for a hotel at all and without going into that, I opted for an Air B 'n B with a lake view, while we awaited an appointment at MSK in New York. We stayed at the Air B 'n B for about 3-4 nights. Again, a blur. The room and view were nice, and his friends came to visit him. Nate brought in Spanish tacos trying to tempt him. Each night I would try and buy

something he fancied that day to eat but he wasn't eating much at all. Truly nothing. Nina flew in from Germany, and we both accompanied him to New York where Brett and Mark met us at the airport.



Nina, Frenchie and Nate at the airport!

One very said story was A.J. sitting in the wheelchair at the airport, and his seeing a fellow flight graduate walking by as a then new pilot. I cannot imagine how A.J. felt seeing that.

I won't go into the awful details once A.J. returned to New York and his decline. I am writing this blog on coping. All I can mention is that we all loved him so much. SO very very much, and we kept praying for the best up until a few days before he died. He made it

MSK, and they were not as compassionate as the nurses in Florida. I must state that. He did not have the same attention he had there. We sort of felt he was written off by the ICU, and we were not allowed to stay with him as we had been in Florida. One nurse recounted how Katy Couric's husband had died from colon cancer so thus informing me that it happens to everyone. Perhaps it was the process that required us to need time to accept - meaning we could not accept his leaving us. They knew it was happening but we were fighting it (emotionally). One doctor showed me a scan of his liver which was only 10% functioning at that point, and his whole abdomen was filled with cancer. SO, when we had been informed in Florida of the severity of his cancer, they knew he was dying, they all knew, but we were blessed in having him with us for a few extra months. Blessed. I told the doctor that parents lose their sons in war. This was A.J.'s war. *His battle*. I tried to put things into perspective. My pain was no greater than another mother's.

My husband Sidney

My husband had been failing for years. Please know I tried everything to keep him moving around. First, I adopted a dog – (Binky! Now 14), hoping he would walk the pooch, and thus exercise. That did not last long at all. I bought a new exercise machine, and a special machine for his back, a reclining lounger (he couldn't wait for it to arrive but then complained it put him to sleep!), and I would try to have him look to the internet for chair exercises, but it was so hard as I was working full time (upwards of 50 hours a week), supporting the family, cleaning the house, cooking, and so I was limited to say the least. I would still have the family over for holiday dinners in order to keep the family together and to again keep my husband's mind working.

After he had retired which was in truth more or less 13 or so years earlier although he would state he was working, he just went downhill. He had an operation in 2018 to remove some calcified bones in the neck, and he no longer drove as he couldn't turn his neck. With hardly any exercise, he developed diabetes (he loved his gummy vitamins, had a sweet tooth), and yet I never knew he had diabetes until 2 years or so after he had it. I had decided to go to the doctor with him, and to see what was happening with him and first learned about the diabetes then. I immediately stopped his 3 fruit yoghurts a day, and basically tried to limit his sugar intake. Yoghurt became plain yoghurt with fresh fruit like blueberries, etc. I always tried to cook healthy dinners and continued to do so, but my husband loved his daily chocolate milk (said he could only take his medicine that way), and always seemed to find ways to access sugar. Since he was able to dress himself at the time, he would come downstairs with shoes on, and so it wasn't until he was 1 month away from being hospitalized did I even notice he had issues with ulcers on his feet from the diabetes. For whatever reason, he wouldn't tell me things that were ailing him, and it was frustrating.

Communication is always important and it was always lacking from Sidney. For the past 4 years of his life, he was wearing diapers, but I never realized that having diabetes also helped towards having urinary issues and an overactive bladder. I would have the waterproof mattress protectors, double disposable waterproof sheets on the bed, a chair rail (as he would slip out of bed), yet every morning, everything would be soaked. I couldn't believe it and found myself having 4 loads of laundry every day. Real estate was a respite!

Brett and Mark took care of my husband and the house and pets while I was away. I had returned for 5 days from Florida to meet with clients (to clean a rental -yes!), placed a bid, and in trying to help Sidney with the process as he wasn't able to travel, I thought it would be nice for him to get together with his brother and sister-in-law. I suggested we all meet for cocktails on the Friday evening (I had arrived the evening before). It didn't go that well. Sidney had trouble walking, and my in laws reproached me for not keeping them up to date with A.J. What could I say. Sidney knew and spoke with his brother. I was just taking care of everything and was not going to apologize. I wish I had not suggested it. I was just trying to be nice and it wasn't for me – it was for them and Sidney. *You try.*

After A.J.'s death, Sidney went downhill fast. I was glad that he got to see A.J. before he went to MSK though. He had trouble walking to the bathroom, needed assistance, and I could afford no help at all. I had been supporting the family for years, my husband had retired with loans in place, had canceled his life insurance without telling me as he was so embarrassed, and I think that all of that put him into a depression. For years, he just sat watching the television each day. He fell going into the bathroom one morning, and we

took him to the hospital 2 days later after he complained about his back. His back was fine, but we were then told he had Covid and needed to stay in the hospital, and it was only then that an astute ER doctor told us he had Parkinson's also. We never knew but it explained why he couldn't straighten his legs and had trouble walking.

I had been paying for A.J.'s rent in his Florida apartment plus his loan for the flight school so practically \$2000 a month. I still owe over \$60,000 for that loan (have paid nearly \$50,000 – yay!), but I cannot have it dismissed as a school loan based on it being in my name as he had been too old for a school loan. SO, when it came to Sidney, I could not afford home care and we were not eligible based on my income. I had no residual funds to fall back on.

So, with regards to Sidney, thus began a series of a few weeks in hospital, followed by his going to a nursing home, and then returning to the hospital. I never had the Covid shots, and so I was required to be tested at a CVS Pharmacy (closest site) for Covid twice a week, before I could visit him in the nursing home. Sidney **hated** the first nursing home. Hated it. He hated the food, and they would only serve him pureed foods. I tried to sneak in foods he liked. They had to use a pulley to take him in and out of the bed. The doctor in the hospital had commended me on taking care of his ulcers/sores – they had been healing. Not so once he was in both hospital and nursing home. They worsened and he developed sores on his hips. Awful sores. You could see the hip bone. Sidney would be lucid one day, and not another. I was concerned with nursing home insurance costs which would be ending, and I was told to obtain Power of attorney for him. At the end of the day, it was not required. He was covered. It was very stressful but again thank goodness I love my job and keeping busy! After Sidney being transferred from hospital to nursing home at least 4 times, we were told that he needed to be in the Calvary Hospital for palliative care. So, that is where he went.

So, in between working every day, taking care of the house, visiting Sidney when I could, and taking care of paperwork and the barbecue for A.J. – early 2022 was a whirlwind! It kept me busy! (I know I am being so repetitive).

When I had been in Florida, by necessity I needed an associate to help me, and Helen Propersi was/is a godsend. A lovely hard-working associate and great friend (as is Rona). She was there to oversee an inspection, and no matter how you monetarily repay someone, it is still time out of their day when they could be working on something else. I promised Helen to share a listing with her in 2022 as a thank you, and that we did! It entered in March or so, and after the house was staged (I make it sound easy but it is work!), advertised, we received 11 bids and it sold for over asking. Yay! SO, in between some negativity, illness, daily chores, these little bursts of light get you through the day. People like Helen, Rona, my friend Robert, my manager Jane, Justin, Bonnie, James and Ricky, Kan and Wayne, my dear

sons, A.J.'s friends are all godsend. *Friends are important.* Mark was a great strength too after my husband passed away.

Promises Made

When I was in the hospital with A.J., I made him a promise. His car had been vandalized in Florida, and mold had infiltrated the vehicle. I promised him that I would get it taken care of while he was in hospital. It took longer than anticipated! I wanted to keep him looking to the future.

So, after he passed, I contacted the insurance company and this became a 3 – 5 months of paperwork, photos, phone calls. Every 2 weeks I would call to follow up, and it was as if for the first time. I was even told in late January that the Appraiser had just spoken with A.J. and he didn't want to pursue a claim! To that I had responded if I could I have A.J.'s phone number as I would love to also speak with my deceased son. (a little sarcasm - oops!) When a mom makes a promise, we keep those promises and I did not give up. Nate, as usual, was great as he took additional required photos for me to help in the process. In the end, the insurance company was great, the car was a write off, and I then arranged for it to be donated to a charity, and arranged for it to be taken from the parking lot. *Done.* It made me feel good (and I hope A.J. did too from heaven!).

After A.J. died, the apartment needed to be emptied out. Nina and Brett rented a car, and drove there to empty out the apartment, and they drove back stopping I along the way to clear their heads, and to try to alleviate their stress in this awful process. That must have been so hard for both of them. They were wonderful to undertake that. Love them both.

The Barbecue

The funeral happened so quickly. A.J. passed away on December 19th, he was buried on Wednesday, December 22nd. In the interim, I had to go and order the casket, sign the paperwork, pay for the funeral and since this was still in Covid times, there was to be no memorial service, only a gravesite service. My son., Mark, was a G-send. He loaned me the money for the funeral (\$25,000). It was a blur but you get through it. I have to mention

though that the day was very chilly. My two sons spoke beautifully but I could not speak at all. My thoughts were trapped within my heart. However, the sun came out during A.J.'s service, and everyone said that a plane hovered overhead directly after the service. It was as if A.J. was there.

Sidney had been moved to the first floor of the house as he had deteriorated greatly while I was in Florida and after I came back.



Bonnie, Rona and Helen!

He would take off his diaper overnight, and I would find it soaked by the door, and he would be either naked and/or all of the sheets would be off the bed and always soaked. I was first able to see the extent of his foot ulcers, and Nina had some great medicine which I then purchased too and used after she left. Nina was great, as Sidney so dirtied himself the night before A.J.'s burial

that we just felt so overwhelmed, but it was Nina who nonplussed proceeded to clean him up. She was fantastic. It took well over an hour.



Jessie, James and Christian



*Kyle, Jane *my manager and Ryan!*

We had so many wonderful friends visit after the funeral, and send over meals, etc. Their caring was lovely, and we were so thankful. However, it all happened so quickly that many of A.J.'s friends were unable to make it. I had wanted to invite them to a dinner in a restaurant around A.J.'s Birth date in April to commemorate his passing, but Mark, my oldest son had a better idea. That was to have a barbecue around A.J.'s Birthday, and so that was what we planned.



Brett drove with me to Glen Island so we could decide on which Pavilion to rent, and so it was arranged. A great water view and a covered Pavilion. April 23rd, and we published the event on Facebook inviting all of



Ricky and James

his friends to attend the barbecue from noon to dusk! Brett sent out invites also on Facebook. We wanted anyone who wanted to be there, to come! I did not get involved in that, just composing the post and preparing for the barbecue.

I decided to make hamburgers (of course), hot dogs, grilled salmon, salad, the usual accompaniments such as potato chips, cheese for the hamburgers, pickles, etc. but also individual hummus cups, brownies, cheesecake (A.J. loved cheesecake), cases and cases of beer, lots of wine, sodas, water. I would buy the meat, make the patties, and then freeze them so they would be ready to place onto the grill the day of. It was all good and something else to keep my mind occupied at night! I ordered planet friendly degradable plates, and cutlery!



It turned out to be an entire weekend event with A.J.'s friends arriving from Canada, friends came in from England (I wish they had told me beforehand so they could have stayed the entire time with us) but Georgie and Ray from England did stay two nights which was great. Nina was here, and Nate came up from Florida and stayed with us. Mark made the playlist, provided the speaker, and A.J.'s dear friend, Gore was the D.J.! I had smoked a pork shoulder the day before the barbecue, and we had a nice meal (I hope it was!) with drinks, and the works! I ended up renting a truck

Nina! The ring fit!

as there was so much to take down, and it would have taken 12 trips by car! Nate went with me to pick up the

to take everything
down to the Pavilion
rental truck and to



Georgie and Andy from England

deliver it back on Sunday. He is and will always be family! They all went down to Korea Town on Saturday night (the evening after the barbecue) and continued the celebration of A.J.'s life.



The ring fit!

Nina had been with A.J. for nearly 5 years, and I wanted her to know how much he had loved her. I bought her an engagement ring and gave it to her at the barbecue stating if it didn't fit it fit me quite nicely!. Ha!

Another dear friend, Nancy, had made a beautiful blanket with A.J. on a luge sled (from a photo), and we took a nice photo with some of his friends holding the blanket. We must have had between 80-100 people come and go throughout the day. It was just so lovely. Old

friends came, my office associates visited. It was a special day. I sincerely thank The New Rochelle Review for posting an article about it also.



Brett, Miguel and Miguel's wife!

I don't think my sons and friends went to bed that night. They went into the city quite late, and I seem to recall ordering



Mark and friends!

pizzas for them before they went! I was exhausted and went to bed. Go figure! (Even though my friends did most of the barbecuing! Helen, Karen, James and Sam).

The day had been rather chilly but A.J.'s forever friends from New Rochelle, Gore and Nodi, Mark and Brett's friends, my friends and associates, A.J.'s Olympic friends from Great Britain, Canada, his friends from Florida, U.S. luge friends from Connecticut all made the day a memorable one. So lovely.

A.J. now has a tree in his name in Turkey. He was named an athlete of the year in Great Britain, there were so many lovely stories and tributes written about him and for him that were beautiful, I was so thankful. Unfortunately, my husband was then at the Calvary Hospital in the Bronx, and was unable to attend. He passed away a month later on May 27th. However, Nancy had brought the blanket to the hospital to show to him, so he saw it then, and we showed hi photos after the event.

EN finale!

On coping. As mentioned, we all cope differently, and I think in order for our mental well



Bonnie and Gay

being, we must do something positive each and every day. *Pat yourself on the back.* It is okay! A friend and neighbor, Larry, had suggested we read various Psalms from the Bible while AJ was ill, and it helped. I never thought it would. So, should it be the bible, then read the bible. In my case, I joined a gym (after my husband passed) , work hard(still am), and started going out with my single girlfriends (Bonnie, Marcia and Debbie). I love watching K-

Dramas, I go to concerts. I go out with my friends James and Ricky, and my adopted sons! *Do I still cry?* Oh yes! Not embarrassed to admit that. Memories and thoughts will return to you at the strangest times, and you tear up. It is natural.

After A.J. had been diagnosed, the very next day I had to meet an agent at a listing with his clients. My car had gone to the mechanic for repairs, and I opted to walk to the house/listing in question. It was over 2 miles away but I needed to walk there by myself. I didn't even think about taking a Uber. It took over 30 minutes to walk there, and there I was, joking with the agent and acting as if nothing had happened. I was dying inside.

A year later, I was on my way to meet Kan and Wayne at a listing, and drove by that same road I had trekked exactly a year earlier. I sobbed, but by the time I met Kan and Wayne (they were late!), the tears had stopped and I was smiling (or perhaps they just made me smile!).

It is okay to cry, to grieve. But also think of your health, and do something positive for you too. That was a continuing message from the healthcare givers at the hospital to all family members as we were visiting our loved ones who were ill, and directly afterwards.

Many years ago when I was having trouble becoming pregnant, and this was before the birth of my sons, I started to volunteer on a Monday night (after my day job) at the Foundling Hospital in Manhattan. I became pregnant 3 months later! I think that if you help others, it takes your mind off yourself. It staves off being depressed or sad, and work is so important. Keeping busy. Another repetitive mantra.

Humor is important also! If you do not have friends, then volunteer somewhere and make friends. My sons and I would deliver meals on wheels for 7 years when they were all younger. It was just every other Sunday so no great effort but it enabled my sons to see how the



Gay and Marcia December 2023

elderly were incapacitated, were living, and it helped them to have empathy for others as we would learn about their life stories (many humorous) and their struggles.

As I would drive A.J. to Lake Placid for quite a few years for his luge training, we would listen to audio books. We would listen to Lance Armstrong's book "It's not About the Bike" and it was inspirational. Yes, before he was caught having taken drugs but regardless, his life story and how



Celebrating A.J.'s Birthday n 2023

he beat cancer was simply inspirational. We also listened to two books by Elie Wiesel "Night" and "Dawn". I am not a maudlin person, but at the time A.J. was being considered for the Olympics, and he had worked so hard with his dyslexia (he first learned to read the time at the age of 14), that I wanted him to know that great people had also endured along the way. Getting off track here but I also enjoyed listening with AJ. **Shades of Gray** by Carolyn Reeder. It basically informed us that things are not always what they seem. There are shades of grey. It was insightful. Off track but that is me! I

think my point is that I always tried my best to have my sons love everyone, and not judge anyone? After A.J. passed, I heard stories on how he stood up against racism on behalf of his friends in bars, etc. A.J. was so laid back and gentle. Hard to imagine him getting worked up about anything but it was a nice story and so proud of him.

So, this all brings me back to what Jackie Chan had recounted. No matter how badly you think you have it or what you are going through, there is someone else who has it worse. I am so blessed to have 2 wonderful sons, Mark and Brett, 2 adopted sons ,wonderful friends. A great job. **I am blessed.**