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Unlike Taylor . . . Ed and Laurel didn't ask me to speak today, but I'm going to do it anyway.

Before I get to the official part of my remembrance, I'd like to state the following:

Everyone here today spoke about how special and amazing Owen was, but I'm going to give a different perspective. I know the truth . . .

I'm going to tell you a story about one of the last things he ever said to me.

Stacia, Leda and I are in Owen's hospital room, and we're talking about Harry Potter. I still haven't gotten through the first book at this point, so I'm a little behind. Stacia, being the loving and caring girlfriend that she is tells Owen, *My love obviously belonged in Gryffindor. He's so brave, loyal, chivalrous, courageous* blah blah blah... I get it, Owen's awesome, let's not inflate his ego. Leda interrupts, *Owen what house do you think Sasha would have been in?* At this point he wasn't speaking very well, or uttering many words at all, but as soon as Leda asked him that question, I saw that instantaneous grin. I was like don't you even, you . . . NURSE!!!, NURSE!!! PLEASE, GET IN HERE!!! After a long pause, he said it, **Slytherin**.

Can you imagine, your best friend, literally on his deathbed, told you, that you belong in Slytherin. He couldn't put me in Hufflepuff?!? I don't even like snakes. I got the subtle message. Owen, much like you did for me that day, I want to see you be the best possible version of yourself. You have a lot of things to work on before you get up there, and I don't want anyone taking advantage of you. So, a couple of things for you to keep in mind.

First, lets start with financial planning . . .

Financial Planning.

I now realize why you never had your allowance back in middle school. By the way you owe me for like 47 bacon, egg, and cheeses.

You can't always give your allowance away to people that need it, you can't always support every single person in need, every cause, every charity. I think by age 16 Owen was a VIP among the fake monk community in New York.

Not everyone needs your financial love and support. Owen, I don't want to hear about you donating to save the dolphin spirits or polar bear souls up there. None of that.

We got financial planning down, now let's talk about how you dress . . .

Owen's Wardrobe.

I think Owen singlehandedly kept New Balance relevant among New York millennials. Also, I don't understand how a single pair of sneakers can last 17 years, and be worn in every single occasion of your life.

Then there was the shorts fiasco. If you haven't heard, it was my birthday maybe 6 years ago. It was a dinner, mind you it wasn't outside, and it wasn't a BBQ, it was a nice dinner in New York and Owen . . . shows up in shorts. We had our typical lover's quarrel - how could you, on my birthday, wear shorts!?! Baby it's 90 degrees outside. I don't want to hear it. Owen to make up for it, for the next three years proceeded to show up to my birthday in a Durst power suit with a tie. Not exactly what I had in mind, but I'll take it. That was Owen.

We got financial planning done, you're dressed well, what about your friends? OH BOY! So . . . Owen's a poor judge of character.

Friends.

The fact that you asked me to be your best friend in second grade, and we're still friends, tells me everything that I need to know. And some of the other people in this room, Woofff, I don't even want to get into that. Taylor might be your only saving grace.

Advice? I don't really have any . . .

Don't be so naïve.

You can't always see the good in people. You can't always be so caring and supportive. You can't always be willing to sacrifice everything you have for other people. And you have to stop letting me cheat at video games. Yes, I always gave you the bad controller! Let's get it together, I don't want anyone taking advantage of you up there.

Family.

Family! There's really nothing I need to say, you have a wonderful, caring, loving, special family, but honestly . . . that's at no effort of our own, you got lucky! I guess you need to get lucky at some point in your life.

Now, talking about women . . . I'm actually going to save this one for the official portion of my "toast." (Owen, I hope you know I'm going to continue giving you toasts every year.)

Women.

Owen you remember that 47 year-old Czech girl from Prague that you dated . . .? I thought your Mom was going to have a heart attack. Respect. Chest pump.

Official Part of the Toast

Owen, there's an endless amount of things I wanted to say today, but you have places to be, and don't let our grief hold your bright soul down.

I know I'm reading the next part of my "toast", not "toast" but remembrance. (Eulogy was the word I was looking for. Where was Owen, my grammar guru, when I needed him.) That was a big thing between me and Owen - we always tried to speak from the heart; I might get a little emotional but that's only because it's dusty in here.

Our stories were weaved together from childhood, you left before high school, and we both moved away for college, but we didn't need a constant dialogue to remind each other of our mutual respect and our love for one another. We would just pick up where we left off. We realized early on that true friendship meant that we could grow separately, have different passions, worldly views, friend groups, but that regardless of the times or the situation we would never grow apart. Our relationship was cemented in second grade, never changed, and it never will.

As I'm sure many of you know, I've been searching for the words to describe, define, and give meaning to Owen's passing. It was definitely a week of heightened self-awareness, a week of questions - why? In that journey, I realized Owen's impact on my life isn't over. In fact, it has only magnified my feelings and excitement about our relationship.

I realized this is a period of transition, we had an enduring friendship that has evolved now and this is just the beginning of the next phase which is no different from going away to college, and we won't grow apart. It has been and will always be the same between us. It's a little annoying that you're literally everywhere now. I know you're going to come back and scare the shit out of me as a ghost.

I'd like to think we changed each other's lives. I definitely know you changed mine, even though I'd never admit it to you. Your remarkable presence has meant the world to me and to the people around you. Your ability to forgive and look past the superficial made our friendship unbreakable.

I will constantly try to do my best to live up to your expectations. I joked that Owen was naïve. I realize it was I who was naïve - special people do exist, and his other-worldly, subtly guiding force, showed (not dictated) how we can all be better people. He lived through a lens of moral idealism that he never pushed upon any of us. He was for lack of a better phrase a saint in a normal Upper West Side kid's body. The string bean. I mean, yes, he had a great jaw line, and that maybe explains why he wore the same shoes for 17 years like a monk.

Owen's physical presence is no longer here to act as a stabilizing anchor to our actions and feelings. That's terrifying, but I'm excited and look forward with a smile, because I'm going to have a lot of "oh shit Owen would have handled that differently" moments.

Case in point:

Actually, this happened right before my mom and I walked in today. My mom being the Russian lady that she is, freaked out that we weren't bringing flowers. I said I'm not sure if people are. As we were walking here today, we overheard that it was a little girl's birthday. We both stopped and said Owen would want us to give these flowers to the little girl. We told her it was Owen's birthday.

His passing will leave me with a mark forever but not an empty void because he will continue to inspire all of us to be better, to be kinder, to be gentler, to support and forgive each other.

Owen's wide-eyed view of the world allowed him to form special bonds with anyone that crossed his path. I think people are inherently selfish but want to do the right thing. Owen was inherently selfless. It sounds easy and simple, but he was one of the few people that actually cared about your answer to "how's it going?" His pleasantries were honest and earnest. He was a saint and a symbol for all of us.

Owen was the friend I called when I was tired of my other friends, my family, my work, and life. I feel you only really have one of those. We never deeply delved into our personal issues or problems, we just acknowledged each other, we could literally do nothing and I always knew Owen would be there when I needed him. I'll always be there for you, in this life or the next. I'm not equipped to brawl with other worldly creatures, but I got your back.

As kids, Owen was a big Winnie the Pooh fan. I always made fun of him for it, but Owen I have to say, you were on to something. It's as if I hear him reading this short excerpt right now. "If there ever comes a day where we can't be together, keep me in your heart. I'll stay there forever." Don't worry homie, you're not going anywhere.

It's tough, but there's no time for regret. Owen wouldn't want it that way. He passed as he lived, unselfishly, worrying about the people around him.

As I said when I started this speech, I was going to come back to the ladies section.

This entire week off, I've been praising Stacia. You were with him through the most trying of times, and for that I will be forever grateful. You took special care of my friend over these past several years - you gave him the strength and courage that he needed to fight and constant hope.

As I'm talking about Stacia with different people, I kept fumbling to find the right words to describe her, saying things like she was a warrior, a beast and no sacrifice was too big for her. I could have been describing a scene from Gladiator, but one of my friends interrupts me and says, "yeah you donkey, she loved him." In a weird way, it hit me like a brick: so simple, so complex - special. It was slightly unexplainable, I guess as true love should be. Whether you're 30 or 90 no one can ever take that away from either of you. You found true love, an unshakable bond, in the craziest of times, and your love was a peaceful escape for Owen within the chaos - like a rose in a battle field - it was tranquil and beautiful.

I don't think I can do your relationship any justice, so I'm going to ask Stacia to come up here with me because no one can pass on the connection you had with Owen.

Stacia gracefully walks on stage.

But before I officially pass it on . . .

1. I made a promise to Owen in 8th grade, and Leda I hope I fulfill my commitment for longer than 1 day this time and do a better job looking after you.
2. You better start working on our dance moves for Mambo Number 6 - we still have a talent show to win.