

Eulogy for My Brother

For those of you who don't know me, I'm Ken's sister, Jeannie—number twelve of the Zaengle clan. For those of you who do, I'm his Bean. To me, he was always Kenner.

Trying to think of how to describe someone like him . . . that's been a true difficulty. How can I gather the words together to describe a brother who, as one of our old friends has said, was "a wonderful creature, one of those models too bizarre and brilliant for mass production?"

But, looking around me now, I see all of you. You're a mirror to me of some of the greatest moments in his life, and the things I've loved most about Kenner. I see all of your faces mixed in with his in this mirror, sharing his love for life and love for you.

I can't help but to realize that the true testament to Kenner was the one-of-a-kind impact that he had on most everyone he knew. I can't describe him without including all of you, because what made my brother who he was was his natural ability to easily invite everyone and anyone into his world and to make theirs better in the process, when he could. When Kenner came into your life, it was with a splash and spark that made you smile and realize what spontaneity means in an ordinary day.

I can talk about the time he decided to color his bangs blue just because he liked the color blue. But, describing Kenner by what he did, what he liked, or what he said, in this instance, or that, misses the point.

Kenner was all of you . . . his interactions with you. Your smiles, your questions, humor, and tears allowed him to be at his best and to give of himself in the way he needed to.

His preferred mode of giving was with no fanfare. I wasn't surprised when my college friends just happened to end up with his artwork hanging on their walls, even when they'd only met Kenner once, because he connected with the people he was meant to instantly, didn't hold back, and when the inspiration hit him to send surprises someone's way, he never thought twice.

Sometimes, it was a much deeper impact he had, as Kenner stood with people who were facing some of the most difficult times in their lives, cheering on the things that made them laugh, identifying with what it was that they were going through, ready with a funny phrase or recommended new band for discovery.

In some cases, he helped to create, define, encourage, and grow a whole person over decades—like me. I can't imagine what life would be like, had I not had him by my side.

You have all known Kenner in so many different ways. He was unique, loving, artistic, funny, and, above all, true to himself—the kind of person who would send you a text after a surgery saying, “I hope you’re swell and not swelling,” even when he wasn’t quite feeling super himself. He was someone who was capable of turning the worst day into something manageable, just by his ability to swoop in to take you on a hike, for a bike ride, or to a concert he’d just found out about—places you didn’t realize you needed to be. He was the kind of person who would buy a huge roll of paper, paint, a palette, and not brushes, but Marshmallow Peeps for his kids to paint with for Easter.

In whatever way you may think of Kenner yourselves, there’s no denying you’ve not met anyone quite like him or that he’s part of you. One thing I’m sure of, in my own experience having him as my “brother-half,” is there’s a reflection of Kenner in each and every one of you because you knew and loved him. Some part of him will always come through every time you listen to the band he turned you on to, wear the t-shirt he made for you, or remember the day he stood up for you and you do the same for someone else.

We mourn the fact that we won’t see him making his trademark goofy faces or hear his unique phrases, but as this whole mirror concept works, we’ll always carry his reflection clearly. We all shared in his life, we all share in his loss, but I don’t think any of us would want it any other way.
