

Dear Jake,

Today we laid your earthly body to rest my boy. You made the best possible use of it. You reached its capacity. I understand that now. That your pain was not obvious to the naked eye made it that much more difficult for you to bear it. I understand that now.

You have taught me so much Jake. You taught me how to love unconditionally. You taught me to refine my qualities of simplicity, sweetness, innocence, sympathy and empathy. You displayed all of these qualities so consistently throughout your lifetime, that in the busyness of my day to day responsibilities, it was easy for me to lose sight of the qualities you were already a master of. These last few days of reflection have driven home these qualities for me. I can't thank you enough for that.

Many people tell me that your mom and I did you a favor by adopting you from that Ukrainian orphanage to give you a better life. I correct them Jake. The fact is that WE were the ones with something missing from our lives...a child to love and to help reach OUR goal of becoming a family. You did US the favor. You also brought us the luck we needed to add sibling playmates Derek and Zoe to complete our family.

The childhood pictures on display this weekend spoke thousands of words as to how much fun you made life for all of us. You stimulated Derek everyday with new and innovative ways to use hum drum household items to create magical kingdoms and pass the time in joyous splendor.

You kept Zoe in stitches laughing at all your antics, funny dances and spontaneous bursts of expression. Zoe is going to miss you terribly.

Your dog, Max, aka Little Hoss, is the purest soul of all. He can't pretend. He is authentically a dog and purely "Jake's best friend." He too knows something's up. You know how social he is, right? He has always slept beside a warm body, usually yours. Well, since last Monday Jake, he has been sleeping alone on your bed at my house...waiting for you to return. Oh he will adapt as time goes on, but your best friend is also mourning for now. I can speak for Max in saying his trips to any and all conservation areas with you were the best times of his life...and he too thanks you.

As for me Jake, the memories you leave are as thick as a swarm of black flies at uncle Ron's cottage. No matter how many are swatted away, there are always more. It would take me weeks to recount them all. They are hopefully enough to sustain me for a lifetime, especially after my sadness subsides even a little bit...because, as a selfish human being, I wanted more.

Watching you pitch at Wrigley Field in Chicago as the only Canadian amongst the best high school ballplayers in America, the cradle of baseball, will be one of my sweetest memories. The week we spent helping the Hamilton bantam team win the National Championship is another. You won their "do-or-die" game by going the distance. Derek and I watching you in Buffalo, as a 19 year old kid, pitching

another “do-or-die” game for your Detroit men’s team that sent them to the US National World Series in Louisville. You were a kid...they were all men...yet you mowed them down as if you were the man amongst boys.

The time in Ohio, on your comeback trail in 2010, when none other than Hall of Famer Pat Gillick told Dan “This boy is a strike thrower. He competes. It was a distinct pleasure watching this young man pitch.”

Or the time you connected English western Canada with French eastern Canada all in one week. Remember that, Jake? You pitched for and befriended the Langley team from B.C. while in Arizona...then flew to Florida to pitch for the ABC team from Quebec, and in the process bringing lots of attention to all those boys from big league talent scouts.

You made eleven trips with the Canadian Junior National Team Jake...taking you across this country, the US and Caribbean, meeting countless people including the Stall brothers now playing in the NHL playoffs...and tantalizing fans and scouts with your ability to throw the “pilota”.

I worried about how you, my innocent child, would handle your first radio interview with Mike Wilner on the Fan 590. I didn’t have to. You told a funny story about playing Dominican pros on fields that had chickens running around in the outfield...and then sympathizing that the people you encountered on the island seemed poor but that baseball gave them something to dream about. Again, your sensitive soul shone through.

You took “red eye” flights left and right accepting invitations to Major League stadiums to display your tantalizing talents for such a young kid.

You were at dugout level to witness teammate Brett Lawrie’s 5 home run day, something that may never happen again at that level of baseball. Do you also remember Brett walking onto your mound from third base to ask you “How does a skinny kid like you throw so hard?”

I can go on Jake, but suffice to say, that I pray you now know, from your restful repose, the profound impact and overall goodwill you created amongst all you came in contact with, my boy. I need to have faith that as you look down upon us now, you can see the bigger picture of how well you used your good nature...and can finally smile again. I mean REALLY smile!!

I’ve been using the following analogy to describing you to the many many people that have come to pay their respects to you this past weekend Jake: SHOOTING STAR-a visual meteor appearing as a temporary streak of light in the night sky. Your picture belongs beside this definition. As you would say of late in your diary notations “I’ve lived a life most kids would dream of on this beautiful earth.” I am so thankful you felt that way.

You packed a lifetime worth of experiences into one quarter of a typical lifespan. That’s hard to do, but you did it...and that was enough for you. Like Jimi Hendrix, Heath Leger and Jim Morrison...we will never know what you look like as an old guy. You will remain...FOREVER YOUNG.

Jake, on behalf of myself, your mother, brother, sister, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, acquaintances, and admirers near and far...I thank God for having sent you to us.

He may now have you back.

Your grateful dad,

Jim Eliopoulos

