

I don't really know how to do this. It's not the first time I've been asked to speak about Lauren and our friendship. To celebrate her. Six years ago, I told a story at her wedding about an American girl kissing frogs until she met her prince, and I wished her happiness.

It's easier to speak of joy and love when the promise of tomorrow seems so fresh and sweet, and it's almost impossible to choose the right words when the cruelty of the world visits and reminds you that people rarely get what they truly deserve, and that the promise of more time is never guaranteed.

Over the last week, it's been a struggle not to dwell on the fact I'm standing up here, having reached the age of thirty-eight and know that Lauren never will. There's almost a comfort in the anger, in the rage that statement brings me. In the regret of calls not made, texts not sent. There should have been more time.

But I can't stay angry forever. And none of us should. Because I know that the people gathered here today feel the way I do about Lauren. She walked into my life with little warning, changed it forever, and then, once again without warning, she's gone, leaving so many of us to look for understanding where there is no comprehension.

I'm trying to focus on the love and the joy again because Lauren brought so much of it to my life. I can't stand up here and describe our best moments, our favorite events, our inside jokes. Some of them aren't appropriate, some of them would only make sense to us, and we would be here for hours because there was so much laughter. How do you choose just one or two?

Crying over reading *The Phantom of the Opera* in French, waiting at 8th and Market for the late trains, barreling down I-95 in a minivan, heading for Disney World, packed to the brim with people and luggage and torturing Kevin with the Spice Girls – causing international incidents in Budapest – dominating at pub trivia and making friends with all our quiz hosts and servers—making Lauren stay on the phone with me because she was the only one who understood how to fill out the visa application for London.

There was so much laughter, warmth, kindness, and love in those years we spent together. Every picture, every video brings more memories. We met at Rutgers and spent nearly every day for four years on campus – in the café, in the library, in class. When we graduated, it was bittersweet. We were so eager to move on, to tackle the next adventure, but we knew that it would never quite be the same. There would be no more long days with two tables pushed together and hogging

all the outlets, procrastinating on papers, laughing over a million different things. That was home for a little while, and leaving home is always hard.

Lauren was my home for a while. The friend group we created—the family—was my touchstone. And today, once again, I have to say goodbye. I have to turn the page on those memories, on the possibility of more time. That thought paralyzes me as I write this. The grief returns, and it threatens to swallow me whole. I want nothing more than to go home again. To open my phone to a text from our group chat, to a post about Parker, to the possibility of more time because we deserved it. Lauren deserved the world, and I shouldn't be standing here.

And when that happens, when I feel that relentless wave crashing over me again, I stop. I reach for a memory. I reach for the laughter again.

I find the joy. I find the love. And I can breathe again.

When this loss overwhelms you, when it hits you as it will in the days, weeks, months, and years to come, I hope you all remember to stop. To think of the best moment, the funniest, the sweetest. And that it will bring the love and joy Lauren brought to us while we were able to have her. And that holding on to that, not the tragedy that brings us here, will help you remember how to breathe again.