

June 1, 2015

Dear Ms. LeBlanc,

“This is what makes Will special,” Mr. Shields told our trigonometry class, referencing the series of theorems, postulates, and diagrams your son had just scrawled across the chalk board. It was a Monday, and while the rest of us had spent the preceding weekend goofing off in whatever ways Needham 17-year-olds circa 1994 were causing trouble, Will had chosen to spend his free time attempting to derive pi from scratch. While he may not have found 3.14 etc. exactly, he did correctly find the leading three, which is one more digit than any of the rest of us would have probably gotten if we embarked upon the same attempt.

Will was special, indeed, but mainly for reasons that extended far beyond academia. We met and became friends in middle school, a challenging time in which so many of us attempted to deal with our adolescent awkwardness by homogenizing, setting aside what made us unique in favor of, or at least in hopes of, fitting in with the pack.

But Will was different. Unconcerned with his level of popularity, or lack thereof, and despite enduring bullying that would never be tolerated by today’s administrations, Will maintained a level of self-awareness and a confidence to stay true to who he was that is rare among adults, let alone tweens and teens.

Over time, my classmates seemed to grow to recognize and respect Will for his courage to be himself. Other students can tell you stories of when he brought flowers into school and handed them out just to brighten the days of others. Imagine that: At a time when so many of his male peers were essentially wetting their pants at the mere idea of calling up girls, Will was walking right up and giving them flowers.

My favorite memory of Will is from our junior harbor cruise. Anybody who has ever seen me, umm, “dance” can tell you that I am one of the least coordinated people to ever walk the earth, and to be candid your son was not much better, but that did not stop him from going straight into the middle of the dance floor and having a great time. Peers that had given him such difficulty a short time earlier at Pollard now literally cheered for him. Years later, a mutual friend informed me that Will had pursued a career in political science, a decision that initially surprised me, as I expected he was destined for something more technical, but then I realized this path made perfect sense: Nobody could win hearts and minds quite like Will.

Mr. Shields was absolutely correct in his assessment of Will, and I will always remember your son for the important lessons he taught us about how to treat both others and ourselves. My condolences to you and the rest of Will’s family and friends.

Sincerely,

Jonah Soolman
Needham High School class of ‘95