

Mark and I met during college. At nineteen, I found Mark intriguing because he shared my passion for art and music that others around us often didn't. We eagerly brought these shared interests into a friendship. When hosting gatherings, we added details that made them unique. For example, we were living through weeks of rain, and we arranged what we termed an umbrella party. Based on the number of umbrellas left behind at his place, Mark made a sign that read, "So you've been to an umbrella party?" Mark's enthusiasm and curiosity about life and the world drew people in to see things differently, sometimes even if they didn't always realize it.

After college, Mark and I lost touch for several years. We reconnected when we were both raising children. Mark now had a son named Emmett. That enthusiasm, creativity, and curiosity about our world that I saw Mark bring to his relationships in college would now shape his bond with Emmett. Once, while driving to an event, I listened as Mark spoke with Emmett on the phone. Their conversation was so engaged and caring that I took it as a model for how I interact with my own children.

That phone call in November of 2013 between Mark and Emmett was part of and during an agreed-upon coparenting calling schedule, a situation that was working well - I never heard otherwise. Then, in 2014, the bond between Mark and his son was severed against Mark's will. Our conversations over the years, in and around Mark's efforts to just have access and be a caring father to Emmett, have been somber. As a father, when I place myself in Mark's shoes, all of this is horrifying and deeply sad. He's had wins that should have benefited both himself and Emmett long-term, a Final Custody Order in 2017, and then steps with reunification therapy, but then, against Mark's will and to his extreme dismay, the steps taken have been interrupted all as the clock ticked towards Emmett being a young adult. Mark has invested his time, financial resources, his well-being, and his soul into the desire to be a loving dad. I pray that someday Mark and Emmett will become, to each other, truly father and son, in a relationship sharing their time on earth together as it was meant to be. On Mark's end, I know how deep his love for his son is, even if it must be sadly affirmed online for Emmett until they rightfully reunite. Mark says poetically, "You're the Su/on in my sky."