

## Rachel Bartlett Rosado

Friday, December 8, 2023 at 7:26 a

Dear Matías,

Today is your 22nd birthday, on a Friday no less! It should be your senior year at Chapel Hill and you'd just be finishing up winter exams. There would have been lots to celebrate. This picture was from freshman year after we moved you in. What a milestone for all of your hard work up til then. Lots of hope and happiness in our smiles (we have the same smile!) and we couldn't be more proud. I still imagine you would look very similar today as you turn 22. But we won't know and I missed another year of watching you grow and succeed, all of your family and friends missed out too. I know your friends struggle with your loss. They want their new friends in college to know about you. They speak of you and wear tattoos and tell funny stories. You won't be forgotten in their eyes. I hope they live and love more deeply because of you.

I love and hate writing your birthday letter. It's a time I can barely catch my breath from crying (this one seems much harder for me this year, I am a mess) but I also get to feel close to you, like I can imagine you sitting next to me peering over my shoulder as I write. Excited for the next words, excited for our brief time together. You came to me in a dream a couple of months ago. We were sitting shoulder to shoulder looking straight ahead and you said in an anguished whisper, "I think I made a mistake". Your shoulders slumped forward, you were silently crying. I put my arm around the back of your big shoulders and my other arm around the front of your big shoulders and hugged you tight, and I told you 'it's ok'. It was simply devastating to hear those words in my dream, but I still wanted to take away your sadness and pain, as any mother would. I didn't tell your dad of this dream because it would have hurt him like it hurt me. But at the same time, I got to hug you and it was pretty special. Thanks for visiting.

Last month, we hosted our first benefit gala in your name to raise funds for HopeWay's new adolescent facility that can help other teenagers in need. I think you would have been proud of us. You certainly would have been in awe of the many many people who came out to support our cause. You also would have thought the "It's Ok to Not Be Ok" beer that was developed for the foundation in your name was pretty special (but probably still preferred your Bud Light 😊). Miia flew in from California to be there for us. Not sure you would be thrilled with how close we all are now, but it's ok, you are the one connection that brought us all together and we cherish that. And don't worry, Miia is the star you looked up in the sky at night and knew she would be. You can rest easy knowing she is ok and so loved. We are so happy you brought her into our lives.

Mason is in the middle of hockey season and couldn't attend or be here with us today, but it's really something to watch your brother prosper in college. He loves Babson and his new hockey family. He now has 26 "big brothers". They have him, they will take of him for you. Don't worry, he carries you with him in all that he does. His first win was for you, and there will be many more. He's even become a Bruins fan for you, he goes to games with his

roommates and even has Bruins gear. Mason thinks you would have been pretty bummed and a little nostalgic over Bergeron's retirement, I know we all are as it feels like something is missing.

As for me and your dad, we are doing ok. The pain and hurt always lurks under the surface, but we are able to get through our days. We both got tattoos in your honor, which I think makes us feel connected to you (you would have been quite shocked since you know I am anti tattoos!) Your dad remains my rockstar. He takes care of me like you knew he would. Sleep is still a luxury I may never be able to afford, but I am not hit as hard with my new reality every time I wake. I now sometimes wake already knowing and remembering you aren't here. To be honest, it's a little easier waking up knowing, it used to hit me so hard in the beginning that it crushed my soul, literally. When sadness does set in, I usually try to focus on memories of young Matías running around playing Star Wars and smiling with big beautiful blue eyes. So loving, a great big brother, friend, teammate, student. Ultimately, I feel robbed of possibilities, I feel sorry and sad. And that just takes me back to how you felt, robbed of possibilities, robbed of hope, robbed of happiness. Life will never feel fair to us, but I am compelled to smile and show kindness to others around me. It's your legacy that I carry forward.

Since we are home in Charlotte this year, your dad and I will go to Firebirds, your birthday dinner spot and try to celebrate for you. It's hard to end this letter as I want to keep it going, so I will close your letter that way I did last year: We love you, we cherish your memories and we hope you are at peace. We miss you every second of everyday. We want you to know today and always that you are celebrated. Happy 22nd Birthday, sweet Matías. Please toast to Matías today and share a smile and a memory. He is with us all and I think it's easy to hear his laugh if you listen for it. It's thankfully familiar to my ears. We appreciate your support and friendship. Hug your loved ones and keep making beautiful memories.