

Andre's remarks at Akka's memorial, May 1, 2017

Akka was one of my heroes. And she was my friend. The Chinese philosopher Mencius said: "Friends are the siblings God never gave us." This is not to knock my actual siblings. I love them and they have several good points. But Akka was a person I liked in her entirety, with whom I could always be myself and with whom I never ever had a dispute or exchanged a cross word.

A minor coincidence is that our birthdays are only two days apart. Somehow this made me feel particularly connected to her. Last June I texted her on her birthday. I wrote, "one year we've got to celebrate together..." because I don't think we ever had celebrated both birthdays at once. I never thought for an instant that that chance would not come again.

I met Akka in the early 1980's through my friend, Vladimir Lechky, aka "Wally", her future husband. It may have been after a Peter Tosh concert, where each of them had gone – separately – shortly after they'd met at work but before they had were together... but you could see what was happening. I mentioned this meeting to Akka ... I think it was the last time we saw each other. I told her that she was wearing a short brown leather jacket at that concert – but she did not recall the occasion. Yet I have such a vivid memory of her standing in the aisle of the theatre with her friend and roommate Kory. She was not only beautiful. She was unpretentious and I thought that if she would accept Wally, he was one lucky man.

Pretty soon they were an item and not too long after that I moved from Montreal to Toronto and I bought a condo in High Park. Akka and Vlad came over to "help" me do a thorough cleaning of the place. She did most of the serious scrubbing while Vlad and I sipped a beer or two and surveyed the work. I remember that occasion not just because of how generous she was with her help but also how efficient and cheerful a homemaker she was. Akka was a great worker, as anyone who has worked alongside her would attest. She always carried her own weight and more.

I was the best man at their wedding. It took place at a Ukrainian Catholic Church, St. Vladimir's. I recall that the priest may have enjoyed a little too much sacramental wine that day. As the crowd began to grow restless he rambled on at great length about the sanctity of marriage etc., until finally Vladimir could take no more and leaning in he whispered to the priest in a half question half command, "Father, would you marry us now?" Which the priest did. The reception was at the Royal York Hotel. Akka was the most elegant bride I've ever seen.

Not very long after they married they bought a house on Windermere Avenue in High Park. We were neighbours! Akka's energy and skills were immediately applied to their new home. I was always in awe of Akka's great taste; her sense of colour, balance and function; and her sense of order. Her Windermere home, like every home that she created including the one here in Perth was welcoming: visually delightful, supremely comfortable and intelligently organized. She was truly gifted that way.

The next few years were possibly amongst the most innocent and carefree in our adult lives, theirs, my wife, Nadine's and mine. We all liked each other so getting together was always fun. Being neighbours we saw a lot of each other, often spontaneously, and it was a joy to have such good friends nearby. We enjoyed many parties, bbqs and other meals in each other's homes and weekend visits to Red Bay. In keeping with her other homemaking skills, Akka was a really good cook, preparing meals that were usually quite simple yet always beautiful to look at and delicious to eat. One of my favourite dishes is her lima bean salad.

By 1990, they had two small boys, Alex and Stephan. Nadine's and my daughter was born that year. Those early child-rearing days were also a joy but already their marriage had begun to break apart. It took a little while but finally they split.

I said at the beginning of my recollections that Akka was my hero. She was my hero because of the courage, integrity and faith with which she lived her life. The decision to separate from her husband could not have been easy. But she felt that it was the right thing to do. Akka found an old house in the same neighbourhood on Winfield Avenue so the boys would not lose their friends and familiar places. I remember the day of the move because we rented a truck and I and another friend of Akka's, Anne's former boyfriend, Alvaro, were recruited to move the furniture. Naturally Akka turned that simple little house into a beautiful home for her and the boys. Quickly, economically and seemingly effortlessly. She worked hard to provide for her family and eventually converted her love of reading into a dream job at Harper Collins. I remember being so proud of her when she got that job.

Nadine and I had moved from High Park and we saw less of Akka. There were long periods of separation but the friendship was always strong and whenever we saw each other it was as though we had just been together the day before. There was always so much to catch up on, so many stories of her boys and our daughter growing up, the trials and tribulations of parenthood, her anger at, and at the same time, her empathy and concern for Wally. And always her curiosity about so many different things; her care for the people closest to her; and her search for meaning in her life. Being with Akka was spiritually and intellectually nourishing! She was humble and respectful; caring and considerate; tolerant and accepting; and, perhaps most of all, clear-sighted and real.

Eventually the job at Harper Collins ran its course. Akka had always had a green thumb and her aesthetic and other creative talents could be applied professionally in an entirely different industry. She left the company and created her own business as a landscaper/ gardener. This was another brave decision. And this is what she did until she moved to Perth in a quest for a simpler, more spiritual life, close to nature. The move to Perth was yet another bold stroke. Consistently Akka chose the road less travelled. How could I, or anyone, not admire,

respect and love this woman for the way she led her life?

I want to say to Mr. and Mrs. Janssen that you must be very proud of your daughter and that you must have done a lot of things right for her to be the person she was.

And to Nango, Geer and Anne, she loved each of you deeply and as individuals.

Anne and Andrew, all of us owe you a debt of gratitude for the love and amazing care you provided Akka.

Alex and Steph, the strength and grace your mother personified since she learned her diagnosis is her final lesson to us of living one's life with enlightenment and courage. We will all miss her but we are also emboldened by her example.