

Andrew Baker is with Raphael Sassi.

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This along with two other beautiful mugs was a gift to Sarah and me from Raph when Nate was born, made by Raph's father Doug Sassi. Sarah was saying the other day that the homemade baby food book Raph gave her at the shower was easily the most useful gift she received from anybody. It lasted us through three babies and 12 years.

One of my favorite little memories of Raph from those terrifying few months of first becoming a father was from a morning, maybe after a brunch in Greenpoint, a number of us (many of the usual suspects) took infant Nate for a stroll around McCarren Park. Nate couldn't have been more than a couple months old and he was gripping and releasing some little, crackly toy he had, which he eventually dropped out of the stroller. I picked up the toy and turned it over, and on the tag was the name Sassy. "A name you can trust!" Raph said through a smirk. He was being ironic and self-effacing. But he was right in ways that probably none of us, least of all him, fully appreciated at the time. How do you appreciate those moments in the moment, especially when you know that there's nearly an infinite number of moments to come?

It's been a struggle for me, as it has for a lot of people, finding some way to process this horrifying news. I knew Raph through some of the greatest moments of my life—and I believe some of the greatest of his. And I was his friend, or I tried to be, as he coped with some of the more painful and recurring struggles of anyone I've ever known. I wasn't always a good friend to him. And he wasn't always a good friend to me. But we were always the dearest of friends. And there's nothing fair or sensical about how that connection has been severed. And it's not fair that the last 10 years unfolded for him in a way that have left so many of my most recent and most vivid memories of him so fraught.

It's not fair how many wonderful memories of him I have lost and may never retrieve. But it's not all gone. Much of it is just dormant. And it's not at all fair to me or to him that these are the circumstances that those memories have begun to germinate. A bike ride. A drive out to the beach. A rooftop party. An early morning music video shoot on the West side followed by Bloody Marys back in Greenpoint. Him heckling Camper Van Beethoven, whom he'd never heard of, after their opening set for Built to Spill went for like an hour and a half. A table at a bar. A table at so many bars. The Pencil Factory. Federalis at Clem's. Margaritas from the Hat in paper Coca-Cola cups in jacket breast pockets, while we cycled across the Williamsburg Bridge, back to Brooklyn. Back home. The backyard at Judge Street, then a gelato and a ride afterward. Raphael Sassi, Jean-Pierre Roy, Ryan Scully and me. We got around, the four of us, and I've felt the pain of the loss of those days and nights so often over the last 10 years. But never more than right now. Now they're really gone. And they're not coming back. But the memories are. And that's wonderful and terrible. I love you guys. I love you, Raph. I'm so sorry that I was here and not there when you needed me. I'm sorry I left at exactly the moment things began to fall apart. And I'm sorry that too many of the times we talked in the years since were just a reminder of how far apart we had become.

And I'm sorry I ever for a moment forgot how good a friend you could be. How generous, and decent and kind. And you're right: You never deserved any of this. Love always, Baker.

