

Rick Arkell – Transcript

Oh boy I love talking about my wife but where do I start? She was amazing. She was a firecracker. She was big personality. So when Ally entered the room, everybody knew it. She was a guy's gal, you know, a Tomboy. You know, could talk like a trucker but also be, you know, elegant when time called for and yeah, she loved to laugh. She was arguably the funniest person I knew. And I think that's what attracted me to her most. But she was just such a breath of fresh air when she when she came into the room, and young at heart, much younger than me. We were 14 years age difference. So when we met, she was 24. I was 38. And I thought it was 'Oh, this will be a fun little fling.' But I quickly found out that she was an old soul. And we had so much in common from, you know, music to pop culture to, you know, love for travel and zest for life and family. And so, yeah, I was pretty early smitten.

I think she told her friend who had introduced us after like three weeks that, I didn't find out till later, but she told her 'I'm gonna marry him.' So success! She was, she succeeded. She was a yoga instructor for many years. You know, part time and my business partner and one of my best friends, his girlfriend at the time used to take Ally's yoga class. And he played in an '80s cover band. And I used to go see them play all the time, and they were playing at Lula Lounge one night. And his girlfriend brought her yoga instructor after class to specifically meet me, unbeknownst to me, and so we kind of hit it off. But, I think I had a little too much to drink. We had this good banter and at the end of the night she was leaving and said, 'Aren't you gonna give me a hug?' So, I did and then I very over confidently said, 'Okay, now you're going to go up to the bar and get a napkin and write your name and your number and put it in my pocket.' And then she kind of left and then she did come back and gave me a hug. I didn't realize she stuffed it in my back pocket. The next day I found a receipt of her bar bill and on the back it said, "I couldn't find a napkin. Go F yourself" and then her name and her number. And then I had a laugh and called her immediately that next day and didn't let go. That was it. I was smitten right from then and there.

So we were up at our cottage, big family weekend that we, an annual weekend we do in January. And we had, there was probably 20-something of us, you know, cousins and little ones and everything and we're there for the weekend. And the one night she had she had been having some headaches and stuff. But you know, there was a lot going on. She was finishing her Master's. We had a two year-old, we were trying to have another baby, she was tired and we didn't really think much of it. She had gone to bed early one night. And in the middle of the night, I felt her kind of shaking. And I thought she was nudging me. She was having a grand mal seizure. I flipped the lights on and, you know, horrific, and, you know, Emmett was watching from his crib. You know, not sure what was going on. I didn't know what was going on. Turns out she had a large brain tumour, and had emergency surgery. And then even after that, they couldn't stop the seizures. And so she was in a coma for about a week and a half and then woke up one day and had no clue what was going on. And yeah, we thought we were going to lose her at the time. And we didn't. God bless her. And it was a rough go, obviously. And she had partial paralysis at the time but worked her ass off in rehab and, and got back to normal, so

to speak. But the pathology came back that she had incurable brain cancer. She had astrocytoma and so that was the new beginning of a new life for us. You know, trying to try to navigate forward from there.

You know, she just didn't stop living. It was incredible to watch how she, I almost felt like she became the older person, the wise one. I mean, she was always the wise one in our relationship, let's be frank, but she was so much more chill after that. So, you could see the personality difference for sure. But, it was kind of beautiful to see, you know how she was taking care of me still and she was going through this, and she lived another 20 months and we did some traveling and we just spent every day together and pretty magical, we're really lucky in that respect.

Yeah. I might start crying, so, let's... okay. I love talking about her. She was remarkable. She just, it was almost surreal that it didn't faze her. She was just like, "I just want people to know what I'm going through so I can help others. I want, you know, I want to document my journey and just share it with others as many as possible and just keep living life." Like, you know, she was, one day at a time and I just, it's not going to define me, I'm not somebody with brain cancer, I'm a wife, I'm a mom, I'm a daughter, a friend and she just kept on living. And it was, she was such an inspiration to everybody who she came in contact with, not just friends, but strangers that would find out. It was pretty incredible to see. She inspired so many people. And I would get emails from and text messages and social media, people reaching out that I didn't even know or, you know, I had known from before, but I've never met and even to this day, I still get people reaching out about how much she inspired them.

You know, we had her Celebration of Life a couple of months after she died in November 2019. Thankfully, before the pandemic, and, you know, it was at least 500 people came out and it was it was incredible. Like there was so many people that came and it was so full of love. And it was a party, there was a lot of laughs. It was a lot of stories, you know, both our dads are musicians. So they both they played. We had like a little band that jammed and it was a it was incredible night and it was like so Ally. So Ally, all the way to the crude jokes and lots of cocktails and lots of music and family, you know, kids and everybody running around. And it was you know, I see that and I see her in Emmett every single day. Like he's got her zany, comedic nature and it's amazing. Really amazing. He's six going on, like 19. He's starting to, 'Don't you know dad,' like, oh, yeah, he's very sarcastic with everything. He sounds exactly like her. It's unreal. He'll be seven in July. And what a remarkable kid. I mean, he's so funny. Just like Ally. Ally had gone to comedy school back in the day. And she was so funny. And he's got that sense of humour and just a wacky kid and very, very artistic and he loves drawing and, and thankfully, he's starting to get into sports like daddy. So he's made me proud because he's a good little hockey player now and he's just he's my whole world, right? Ally and he were my whole world and you know, she's always with us. So yeah, I'm blessed.

We were in the Dominican last week. I talked about family, our neighborhood is like our family. We had, there's a whole bunch of us that, since our kids were born, became really close in you know, in about a block and a half is about eight or nine families. And five families went to

Dominican last week and just had an incredible time. And we had hired a photographer to do some group photos and family photos and when it was Emmett's and my turn to get up on this platform and take our picture, suddenly a rainbow popped down behind us. Sorry, I'm gonna get a little a little teary, but I always look for signs since Ally passed, and stuff like that happens all the time, where, you know, family photos, there's mommy. Emmett said it too. When he saw the pictures, 'There's mommy.' She got in the photo, she photo bombed us. So it's, yeah, it's pretty, pretty remarkable. I knew about Princess Margaret, I used to buy the lottery tickets, but I didn't know a whole lot about them and now the fact that we have you know, world class hospital like that in the city we live in, is pretty remarkable.

I really appreciated all the help from the staff and the volunteers and now I want to give back. I believe in, you know, paying it forward and so I got involved when Ally first got sick in the in the Road Hockey to Conquer Cancer fundraiser, annual fundraiser for Princess Margaret and we've been doing it ever since. High school friends and my brother, the same team year after year comes back now, it's been, I think we're going on five years. I think we're at like, about \$110,000 raised in the last few years, just from begging other friends and, and family. So it's a constant battle, but I really hope that, you know, through research and stuff like this podcast and just the awareness, that people, you know, will help support and find a cure. Because, you know, people are talking about the pandemic and everything going on with Covid. But cancer is a killer that's been here for so long, and it's just getting worse. And there's so many people. Just since Ally, there's been a number of, you know, too large of a number of people that in my life that are that are actually, you know, dealing with cancer now and it's a little bit scary.

I always worry that people are going to forget, I don't want her memory to be forgotten. You know, you get you get into your lives and time passes. And I just, she was such an incredible spirit. And I know it lives on and in the people that that we know and love. I want people to remember how strong she was. I want people to remember what kind of mom she was, what kind of friend she was. And just remember her laugh. A lot of people don't remember her laugh. She had this infectious giggle Yeah, just zest for life. And she was unforgettable.