

Hello and thank you all for coming to support our family today and to honor the memory of our son, Michael Ferrara.

Mike has not lived in Acton for more than two decades, so many of you did not know him. His story is complicated – and deeply affected by mental illness.

For a family living with a mentally ill child or sibling, life is bewildering and sometimes terrifying. But it is definitely much more so for the person with mental illness. Like for Mike.

There were some signs for concern early on, though we did not fully recognize and understand them. Even before his teens, Mike said his brain was not wired correctly.

Yet he was a good athlete, and played hockey through high school, even playing in Canadian tournament as a youngster. At school, he was good math student. He even managed to become a Bar Mitzvah in this synagogue

So he was trying and had some successes, but they could not be sustained. The mental illness was gradually – and later dramatically – taking over his life.

We loved him, but that was not enough.

Mike's life in his twenties and early thirties was chaotic. Somehow, he endured. These years were marked by institutionalizations, hospitalizations, and incarcerations. And during this time, his schizophrenia developed - as it typically does - to paranoid schizophrenia. As he said, "every day of my life is a war".

In 2007, thanks to the state of Minnesota, which has an outstanding mental health care system, Mike moved to a much more stable and protected situation. The organization "Focus on Living" provides residential settings in Duluth, Minnesota, with 24/7 staff care and a series of regular activities for residents.

If not happy, Mike was much more mellow and seem to enjoy my occasional visits. We would take day trips around Minnesota, many of them. He still had a capacity for some empathy and concern for others.

In 2018, Mike moved to slightly less structured group home, Grandma's Place in Minneapolis. Last Monday, though we will never exactly how, he died peacefully. There is no war now.

We hope that in the future those afflicted with mental illness will be able to benefit from research being done now and from the support from communities like ours. So they may live lives of quality and maybe even joy.

Liz, Deena, and I want to say how deeply and forever grateful we are for all the love and support we have received from all of you. Thank you so much.