

## Robert J. Hansen

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Arnold Joseff  
4397 Stoney River  
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Dear Mr. Joseff,

This letter is long overdue, and for that I'm sorry. It should have come months ago, to coincide with Shelel's Yahrzeit, but the whims of fate decided I ought have a winter filled with crisis. Now that the needs of the living are tended to, I'm circling back to give my friend what she's owed — what you are owed.

My name is Robert Hansen. I'd be surprised if Shelel made much mention of me. She was a good friend of mine for many years, going back to the spring of 2003. Twelve years was not enough time to know her. I very much wanted to know her many more. We had a mutual friend in Raven Alder, and when Shelel learned I regularly visited family in Detroit she insisted that we get together to share a meal. So for twelve years I'd visit Detroit a few times each year to see my cousin, and during these visits Shelel and I would make time for a good meal, a glass of wine, and conversation.

She usually did most of the conversing, which was okay by me. By nature I'm a quiet fellow, and she was ... I don't have the words: exuberant to the point of brashness, so filled with ideas and emotions she wanted to get out that sometimes she'd wind up trying to catch up to herself in conversation. That sounds strange, I know, but I don't have a better way to express it: words would be flowing like a river and then she'd abruptly stop for a moment, because despite how fast as she'd been talking her mind had gotten too far ahead and she needed to sync her mind with her mouth again. It always made me smile to see that. I've been surprised over the last year and a half how much I've missed it.

I wish I could tell you we had someplace special to us, but we really didn't. She saw it as her mission in life to show me the culture of the area, so each visit there was a new restaurant. I think the only restaurant we visited more than once was the Pegasus in downtown Detroit, because I love Greek cuisine and she insisted there wasn't a better, more authentic Greek place around.

I don't want to give the impression we were more than friends. That was not in the cards for a variety of reasons. We discussed it on a few occasions over the years, but each time

we agreed that right then was not a good time — “but maybe we should talk about it again when things are different.”

It’s odd: when we wait for life to be different, we often have no idea just how different it will be. Her absence is keenly felt, and that is a difference I am having trouble adjusting to, even more than a year later.

Early in our friendship I told her about my childhood on a farm, and how I could look out my window at night and see the whole of Creation spread out in a river of light through the darkness of night. I learned constellations and how to navigate by them, and I knew that during a full moon the world is silvery-blue, lit up bright enough to read a book, with shadows darker than ink. As a city girl she was fascinated by these tales. She loved the stars but had few chances to see them herself.

When I went to Australia a few years ago she insisted that I find some way to get out of Sydney and its lights so that I could see an entirely new set of constellations, a new corner of Creation I’d not seen before. I hopped on a nighttime dinner cruise and spent the whole of it on the topdeck, foregoing the lovely meal in favor of the Southern Cross. It was a deeply moving thing for me, and I was grateful she insisted I do it.

Apropos of nothing, there’s a high school astronomy class in Florida that found itself the recipient of new, up-to-date textbooks written by the illustrious astronomer Dr. Ethan Siegel, as well as Dr. Siegel’s personal attention and involvement in their class. From what I’m led to believe the anonymous patron has committed to supporting this class for five years, at a funding level that will ensure at the end of the period the class will have everything it needs to sustain its educational mission for the indefinite future.

The donor wishes to remain unknown. May all merit be on the donor’s deceased friend, of loving memory.

Respectfully yours,

Robert J. Hansen