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Former Teammate Remembers Hae Min Lee

Kate Arrildt played lacrosse at Woodlawn (Md.) High, graduating in 2001. She shared memories of her former teammate, Hae Min Lee, in an email to Lacrosse Magazine. Lee was murdered in 1999, the subject of a popular NPR podcast, "Serial."

Originally, I'd decided that I didn't want to talk to [LM writer Matt White] at all — or anyone really. I felt there was nothing to be gained. I'd already lost everything of value from this "story" a long, long time ago and had little energy for the cat fight of who and how and why. Even the vainglorious truth and the other side of the coin, justice, had nothing in them to tempt me. To be completely honest, I still haven't had the heart to listen to "Serial" yet. Besides, [Lee] was so much to me and (no offense) nothing at all to these strangers and reporters in this decade since her death. Or when she was alive. Why should I share the little I have left, my precious memory, for some short-lived spectacle?

Maybe it was the other voices of our team members, our coach, or assistant coach (who was also my mother), all urging us to share. Mostly, I think, it was that this is such a spectacle and I thought maybe she deserved, at least, a little depth, and Matt White had a venue in which to do that. He said that he wanted to fill out her flattened image by sharing this part of her life, as a lacrosse player.

And, god, she was beautiful on the field.

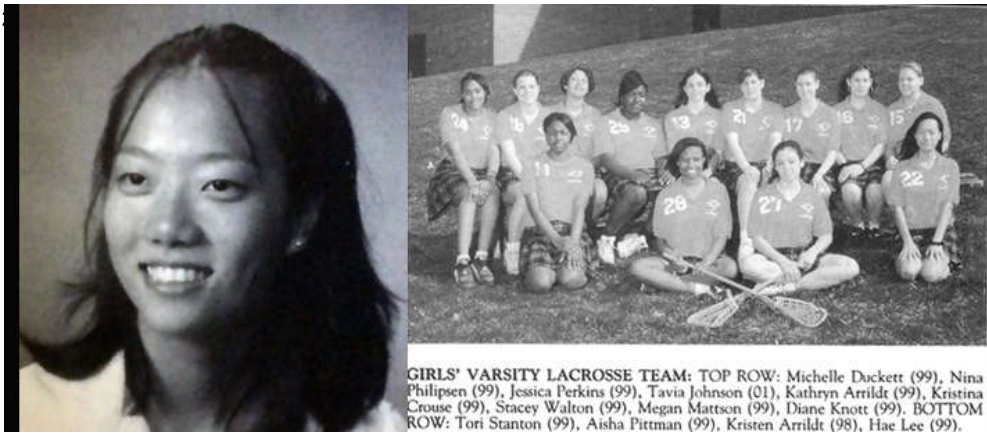
She was just beautiful. Watching her flit between defenders was watching a pure expression of grace and speed. We all bobbed and weaved, but she danced. She made every play look like it was choreographed — like the defenders knew just when to make a dangerous lunge, but let her squeak by with a perfect little twist leaving her free and clear and making her skirt (yes, in those days we wore the traditional uniform which was complete with a pleated skirt) flair out in model-like fashion. She made those awful things look good. She even had a signature move, one that was nearly indefensible, or so she made it seem.

She would drive at the crease straight in at full speed and let the defender push her just around to the outside. Then she would continue full tilt around the back of the arc on that curving tightrope, with each foot grazing the painted line until she came around on the other side, where a defender would, invariably, be waiting for her. She would continue her plunge right up to her new and waiting defender until they were almost nose-to-nose and then turn her shoulders with a casual flick, so small and fast a motion that it was almost too quick to watch. It looked like she was throwing out a little faking motion with that coquettish little twist, hips one way and shoulders another, until you saw the ripple in the top corner of the net and realized she had scored. Again.

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GIRLS' VARSITY LACROSSE TEAM: TOP ROW: Michelle Duckett (99), Nina Philipsen (99), Jessica Perkins (99), Tavia Johnson (01), Kathryn Arrildt (99), Kristina Crouse (99), Stacey Walton (99), Megan Mattson (99), Diane Knott (99). BOTTOM ROW: Tori Stanton (99), Aisha Pittman (99), Kristen Arrildt (98), Hae Lee (99).

I would say that she loved lacrosse, but it would be just as true to say she loved everything. She loved life and explored everything with the same verve. And she was hell-bent on bringing you along for the ride. I can't really even remember what she looks like without a huge grin on her face. She even wore it after she decided that she needed to wear a sparkling pair of painfully vertical six-inch heels to junior prom and that, to be fully prepared for a night of dancing and fun, she had to break them in. So she wore the awful things to school every single day for two weeks. I remember standing outside on a particularly frigid early spring morning while waiting to be let into the school and laughing as she looked up into that same grin — only it was elevated about six inches.

There were different grins. There was the come-on-this-is-going-to-be-fun grin, the just-scored-a-goal grin, the I-have-a-new-and-probably-inadvisable-plan grin, and on and on. They all generated a heat that you could feel in your bones, because they all carried the full force of her joy, her energy, her love and (sometimes) her mischief — all of which were considerable. I don't think she could have muted it even if such a thing would have occurred to her.

This enforced engagement and wide-open welcome helped a shy, struggling, little nerd (who shall remain nameless) find warmth and safety in a hard and dangerous Baltimore school. And maybe that is something the world should know.

But it would have been infinitely better if you'd been given the chance to actually meet her.

Kathryn Twigg Arrildt
Woodlawn (Md.) High
Class of 2001

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