

# 'We all got ripped off', says father of windstorm victim

*Plater remembered for his intelligence, athleticism and big heart*

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As the giant 'Z' balloon ascends the night sky, Lex Plater can't help but smile.

It's an unexpected moment of solace in a weekend filled with anguish — for his family, and countless others.

"They'd gotten this giant Z balloon for Zach, but the Z was going up crooked. Knowing Zach, we all said he would have been beside himself (to see that)," recalled the still grieving father, of the memorial evening friends and family put together at Brookville Public School to honour his beloved 18-year-old son, killed during the May 4 windstorm.

"It was the first time

we were able to laugh. The whole community came (to memorial). It was really beautiful."

Known for his intelligence, athleticism and big heart, Zach was just four days into his new job with Miller Tree when he and co-worker Adam Sura, of Orangeville were struck and killed by a fallen tree.

The former Milton District High School Athlete of the Year had just completed his first year at the University of Guelph and — due to an exceptional start to his post-secondary studies — had been accepted into the medical sciences program.

Aspirations of a future in medicine were already firmly entrenched, with thoughts of being a veterinarian in the mix for the huge dog lover.

"He was always a big guy with a big heart," said Plater, whose son had earned multiple scholarships.

"He'd give everything to a goal and then go out and set new ones. We all got ripped off (with his passing). It's such a tragedy."

Among the places Zach made an especially meaningful impact was

Fighting Griffin Martial Arts, where he earned his black belt and spent about a decade training before going off to university.

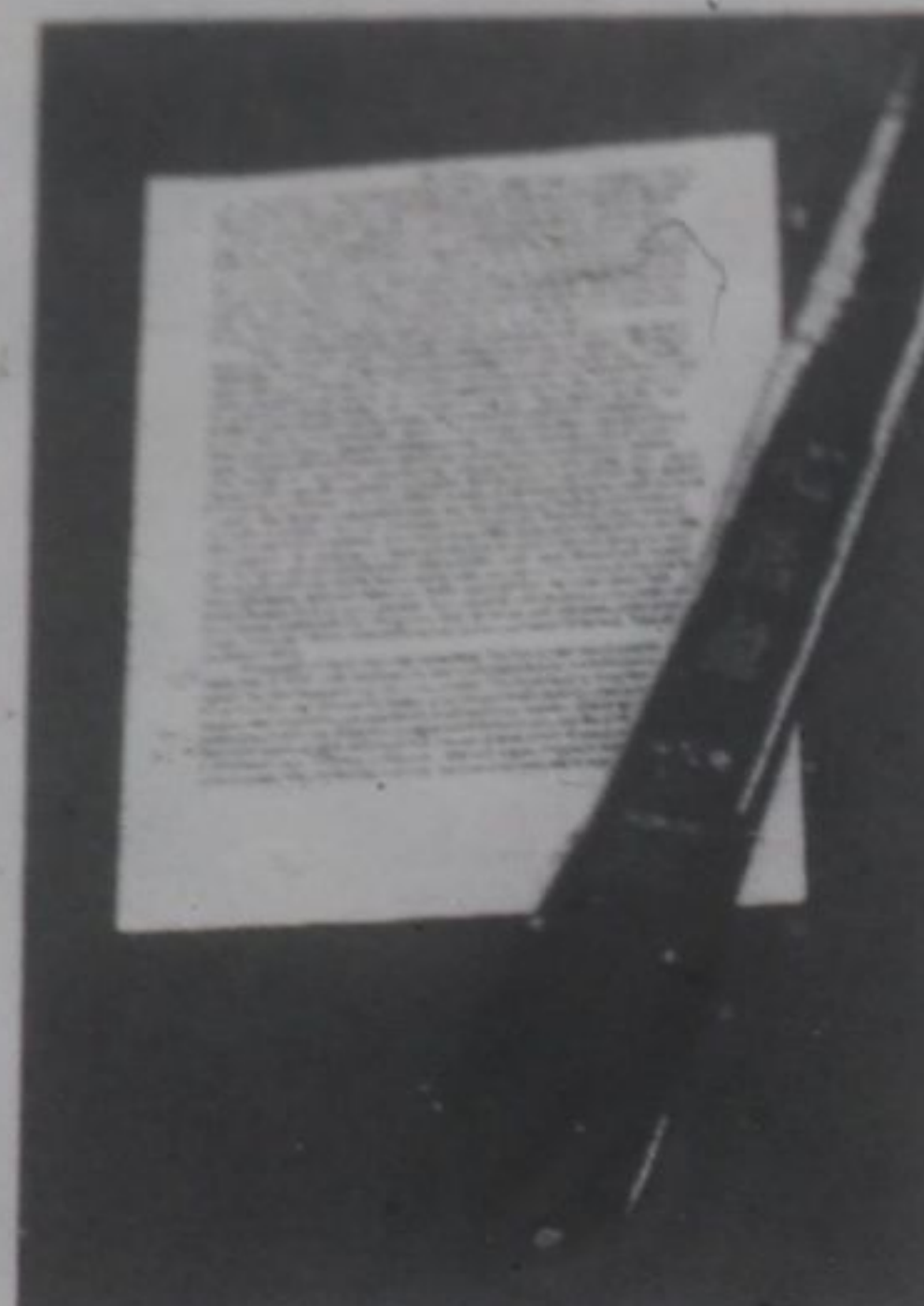
His commitment and respect for

karate ran so deep that Hanshi Scott Hogarth felt completely confident including him on a trip to Okinawa when he was barely in his teens — an opportunity rarely given to someone so young.

"I knew I would have

**"He was such a joy to be around. He was a special young man."**

— Hanshi Scott Hogarth



absolutely no problems with Zach. He was more mature than the 18 year olds," said Hogarth, whose club will hold a celebration of life evening for his much-loved student on June 4.

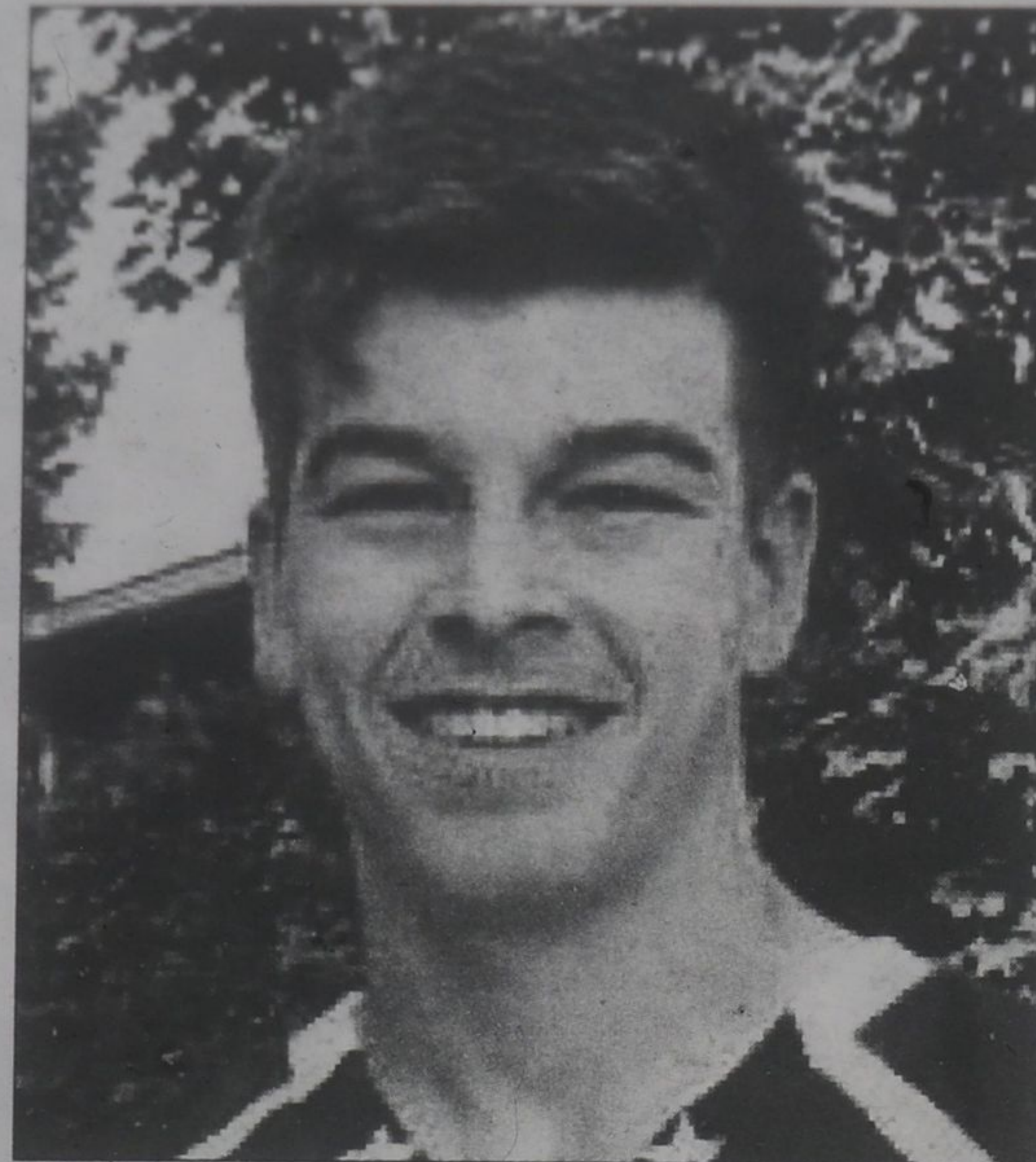
"He gave it (martial arts) everything and there was never any complaining. He was such a joy to be around. He was a special young man."

Zach's black belt essay was a comprehensive reflection on all that the practice had given him, including how to more effectively manage his juvenile diabetes.

Exerts from the essay include:

"When I first started karate, I thought it was all about learning how to fight. Now I know it is way more than that."

"The people that I do karate with are some of the greatest people in my life. There is a bond there that I believe will never be broken.



Steve LeBlanc / Metroland

Zach Plater was known for his intelligence, big heart and athleticism. Above left, his black belt and an essay he wrote about karate.

"They are like my second family."

"Karate has taught me so many things that I use in my everyday life. The first thing is respect. It has taught me that respect for others is essential, and everyone deserves it until proven otherwise."

As driven in the classroom as he was on the playing field — where he excelled in football and basketball as well as karate — Zach earned the Halton District School Board's Student of Excellence Award at Brook-

ville Public School, and had one of Ontario's top-50 scores in a university math test when he was only in Grade 8.

More important than his numerous achievements was an unbridled enthusiasm and desire to take full advantage of life's many opportunities.

"I've had people in their 90s come up and say Zach did more in his 18 years than they did," said Plater. "He did live."

"He was just so awesome. We're so proud of him."

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