

# Christopher Aring-Sharkovitz

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Christopher Jaret Aring-Sharkovitz died on Jan. 18, 2024, due to complications from a combined heart-liver transplant. He was 26 years old.

A steadfastly kind, happy, and generous person, Chris dreamed big, lived life without hesitation, and never gave in to negativity. He had a wide, bright smile that lit up a room, and he impressed everyone he met with his humor and optimism. They were characteristics that might have seemed at odds with someone facing a lifetime of serious medical issues, but were instead strengthened by those circumstances. Chris, after all, never knew any other way.

He was born on Oct. 9, 1997, in Vermilion, Ohio, to Cynthia Aring and Daniel Sharkovitz. Hours later, he was diagnosed with hypoplastic left heart syndrome, a congenital disorder that afflicts just 0.02 percent of Americans. Children with this condition typically have a less than 1 percent chance of living past their first year. Although he endured three open-heart surgeries in the first three years of his life, and knew that he would eventually require a transplant, Chris went on to enjoy a normal, healthy childhood and adolescence. He never took his good fortune for granted.

As a young child growing up on Martha's Vineyard, Chris wowed everyone at the West Tisbury School with his cuteness and cheer. He defied his doctors' expectations by playing Little League; engaging in countless backyard wiffle ball games with his oldest friend and neighbor, Andrew Wiley; and enjoying hair-raising rides on an innertube attached to his dad's car. He exceeded everyone's expectations when, as a precocious 9- and 10-year-old, he taught summer Lego robotics clinics on the Island.

By the time Chris entered Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, he had begun amassing friends, interests, and accolades at the pace of someone who knew that life was a gift. He became a dedicated participant in the Martha's Vineyard Youth Leadership Initiative and the Stone Soup Leadership Institute; a member of the high school theater department's tech crew; and a staff member of the newspaper, where he jumped at the opportunity to spend more time with his dad, a longtime English teacher at the school. During his junior year, he built an augmented reality sand table that earned first place in the regional science fair, and a spot at the prestigious International Science and Engineering Fair. In addition to obtaining the right to file a patent, he was honored by the State House with the Secretary's Award for Excellence in Energy and Environmental Education.

Thanks to MVYouth, he received a full scholarship to attend Olin College of Engineering, where he studied electrical and computer engineering. During his time there, he also student-taught at a local high school, and was awarded a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition for outstanding and invaluable service to the community.

All the while, Chris never let his pursuit of academic and professional accomplishments get in the way of his truest passions: spending time with his loved ones and having fun. That included frequent trips to Ohio to visit his loving mom and grandma, the latter to whom he once lost a bet and had to pierce his ear, as well as spontaneous flights across the country. In 2022 he and his friend Connor Downing embarked on a weeklong camping and road trip. Even with half a functioning heart, he hiked his way from Martha's Vineyard to Montana.

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Those closest to Chris have joked that he excelled at everything he tried, whether it was snowboarding, painting, producing music, gaming, or whatever new hobby caught his interest. He was a sucker for a good beach bonfire, custard, and cat meme; his real-life cat, Katniss; cookouts, game nights, and holidays with his siblings, with whom he was extraordinarily bonded; and all things related to the Vineyard. He had a strange fondness for burning his hands while badly cooking meat, and excellently toasting marshmallows, as well as a confounding ability to eat his weight in tacos. He loved to laugh and make people laugh. He lived by a simple creed: Be happy.

He was the sort of exceedingly rare individual who was filled not just with potential but promise. And though he was able to accomplish so much in a short time, he had so much more life ahead of him, and goals that he wanted to achieve. Chief among them was his desire to become a doctor. It was a dream he turned to somewhat unexpectedly in the past few years, following the death of his beloved dad to cancer in 2020. The acute loss made Chris reflect on the role that doctors had played in his own life. It also led him to believe that he could do more to help others facing circumstances similar to his own.

Chris pursued this dream with all the passion and dedication to which his loved ones had become accustomed. After graduating in the early days of the pandemic, he took a job working in health technology for Ginkgo Bioworks, where he was promoted several times. He continued to hold down that job while paying his own way through a pre-med post-baccalaureate program.

He was happy, inspired, and building a life and future with his devoted girlfriend, Ava Lakmazaheri, when in early 2023 a routine scan revealed that he had liver cancer. Doctors told him he would need to undergo a combined heart-liver transplant. He was admitted to Massachusetts General Hospital, where he waited for the transplant for 224 days.

If Chris was afraid of what the future held, he never showed it, nor did he complain. Instead, he made the most of his situation, and viewed it as an opportunity to begin his medical training. He befriended countless nurses and doctors, and attended daily teaching conferences with residents. The staff at MGH talked excitedly about the day when he would be their colleague rather than their patient. Chris, too, couldn't wait.

In a video taken six weeks into his hospital stay, he reflected on his recent life changes and his goals for the future — notably, his desire to become a cardiologist in the Boston area. “Your journey will change, your life will change, the world will change,” he said. “Take time to think about what makes you happy, what you really think you might want to do. Don’t just do something because you started on it, or because people tell you that you should.”

It is one of many lessons that Chris’s family and friends will carry with them as they navigate this heartbreaking loss. Another comes from a song that he often listened to while admitted to the hospital. The lyrics speak to his priorities and perseverance: “Make time to be with the ones that you love; let nothing stand in your way. We don’t know what waits ’round the corner. We never know what lies ahead. So, if just for a moment, forget all your troubles and count all your blessings instead.”

Chris is survived by his mother, Cynthia Aring, and grandmother, JoAnne Pishura, of Avon Lake, Ohio; his three siblings, Kristen Sharkovitz and her partner Andrew McCourt of Boston, Matthew Sharkovitz and his wife Vanessa Czarnecki of West Tisbury, and Marina Sharkovitz of West Tisbury; his girlfriend, Ava Lakmazaheri of McLean, Va.; aunt Missy and uncle David Doggett of Avon Lake, Ohio; and numerous relatives in the Medway area.

He will be privately interred at St. Joseph’s Cemetery in Medway, alongside his father, Daniel Sharkovitz, and grandmother, Sophie Sharkovitz. Celebrations of life will take place on Saturday, Feb. 3, from 12 to 3 pm at La Brasa in Somerville, as well as on Saturday, March 16, at 2 pm at the Agricultural Hall in West Tisbury.

His family intends to establish a scholarship in his name to send students from the Island to medical school. For information, or to leave a message of condolence, go to [memorialsources.com/memorial/christopher-aring-sharkovitz](https://memorialsources.com/memorial/christopher-aring-sharkovitz).