

Zoe Huntington Davidson

2001-2026

How to tell the story of a young woman who was brilliant, compassionate, driven, funny, independent, athletic, and, above all else, loving?



From as soon as she could talk—perhaps even earlier—Zoe always had something to say. She loved dropping what her family called “Zoe bombs,” provocative statements that sparked vivid conversations. She could range freely, from books and politics to world history and family relationships.

And Zoe was always moving. She was a hiker who climbed the forty-eight 4,000-foot peaks of New Hampshire’s White Mountains, a marathon and half-marathon runner, and a fast walker who loved to dodge tourists as she hustled around the city.

Yet to be with Zoe was also to experience the

stillness of her laser-beam-like attention. She was a keen observer of human nature. This stillness came from deep within. Zoe combined profound intellectual curiosity about the human condition with extraordinary attention to the heart.

Zoe was born on February 3, 2001, in Washington, DC. When Zoe was three, her family moved to Boulder, where her parents took up teaching at Colorado Law School. When she was ten, her parents began teaching at Fordham, and Zoe became a Brooklynite.



Her first reaction was to wonder what her parents could possibly have been thinking, leaving the blue skies and mountain trails of Boulder for the concrete jungles of New York, but before long, she found that the city's pace, rhythms, and human complexity fit her perfectly. She became and remained a passionate New Yorker.

Zoe was a brilliant writer and historian. On her gap year, Zoe conducted an oral history with her grandmother Christina, ranged widely through arcane records, and produced two books of family history, one for the Davidson side and one, with her Great Uncle Frank, for the Huntington side.

At Columbia, she followed her passion for history. Zoe's thesis, "For God and Country Was the Cry': Jewish Soldiers, Antisemitism, and the U.S. Military in World War II," was inspired by her grandfather Bill's service in the war. It drew on an untapped archive of essays to bring the experiences of Jewish American soldiers to life. At Columbia and after graduation, she published history papers in leading publications, including "Cautious Crusaders: The United Hebrew Charities and German Jewish Response to Medical Antisemitism, 1875-1916" in *Synthesis*, Harvard's undergraduate history of science journal, and "Disease Response or Diseased Response: Spain's Smallpox Public Health Campaigns in the Americas, 1780 - 1806" in *Ezra's Archives*, Cornell's undergraduate history journal. And Zoe knew how to pass on her knowledge. She was Co-Editor-in-Chief of the Columbia Journal of History, managing a masthead of more than 40 editors to produce a biannual journal of student research papers.

Zoe had a wicked sense of humour and was consistently amused by our human follies. As a first-year student, she joined the Columbia Federalist, a satirical magazine, where she eventually served as Co-Editor-in-Chief.

Zoe loved improving systems and leading teams. One of her proudest achievements in college was her work with the Columbia Bartending Agency. She started out as a bartender, learning to mix drinks and hosting her own feminist cocktail evening, featuring the Frida Kahlo and the Virginia Woolf. She went on to run the CBA's training academy, the School of Mixology, enrolling hundreds of aspiring bartenders every year. And, in her last year at Columbia, she became the CBA's Executive Director, making her think that running businesses might be a path for her future. She led the nonprofit agency of approximately 150 student bartenders, managed an annual operating budget of \$220,000, headed the CBA's executive board, and remained an ex-officio member of the board of directors.



Zoe combined her capacity for leadership with her love of the outdoors during her five seasons with the Appalachian Mountain Club in New Hampshire. She spent two summers as a hutmaster, at Galehead and Greenleaf. There, she was in charge of a crew (or "cree," as they call themselves) of young people, providing food and shelter for mountain travellers.

Her day as a hutmaster might involve getting up before dawn to bake bread from scratch for fifty people, settling a dispute between two co-workers, packing a 75-lb load of supplies up a five-mile trail to the hut, picking up a stranded hiker or joining a mountain rescue, setting up a junior ranger ceremony for young travellers, writing a skit to perform in the evening,

squeezing in training for a marathon, and somehow juggling a second job helping a professor of chemistry revise his course.

Zoe's work in the huts embodied so many passions of the heart for her: leading during a crisis (no one had ever run a hut during a world-wide pandemic), figuring out systems and protocols that balanced safety with community, using her emotional intelligence to help others cope, and embracing her love of the mountains, along with the sheer physical joy of running the trails.



Zoe was driven and reveled in her drive to accomplish. And accomplish she did.

Zoe loved her time at The Dalton School for the many ways the community fostered her everything-bagel personality. Zoe graduated from Columbia summa cum laude in 2024 and was a Junior Phi Beta Kappa, a national acknowledgment of her academic achievements. In the spring of 2024, she was given a Principled Action Leadership and Excellence Award for "students who have demonstrated ethical decision-making and sound moral judgment, as well as fostering and encouraging similar actions from others".



She had been admitted to Harvard Law School to start next fall, and Zoe was excited to shift her intense curiosity and academic passion from history to the problems of today.

One theme that connected all of her different endeavours was complete commitment. Zoe knew how to throw herself into whatever she did with her whole heart.





Zoe was also a people person. She loved her family fiercely. She relished the nightly dinner-table Socratic dialogue, debating everything from crime and punishment to Say Yes to the Dress. She was a cutthroat competitor in endless rounds of Boggle. And she was an enthusiastic participant in outdoor family adventures, from trekking in Bhutan and rafting the Grand Canyon, to hiking, mountain biking, and kayaking in New Zealand.

Zoe treasured her relationship with her brother, Sam. They spent their early years in Colorado exploring mountains, streams, and sand dunes together. As they grew, they playfully competed, always supporting and tenderly looking after each other.





Zoe also loved her extended family, including her cousins on both sides, many aunts and uncles, and her beloved grandmothers.



Outside her family, Zoe was a loyal friend who took great pleasure in making and sustaining connections with others. She organized weekend trips to New Hampshire, hosted countless parties, planned outings around New York City, and, especially, listened to her friends confiding the ups and downs of life. Zoe tried learning American Sign Language in middle school. When she was asked why, she said "because I want to talk to more people."



In October 2024, Zoe met and fell in love with Samson Mostashari. Not everyone has the gift that the two of them gave each other—to be completely loved, fully seen, and deeply appreciated. Among many things, they shared a curiosity about the world, interest in people, and sense of mutual delight. Samson took this picture of Zoe during a trip to Hungary, Slovenia, and

Croatia in the summer of 2025, and it captures the beaming love he evoked in her.



During her illness, Samson was a steadfast source of support, bringing her light and happiness in the darkest times. He was with her the night before she died. In their time together, Samson became part of Zoe's family and was—and still is—deeply loved by them.

Zoe was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia at the beginning of October 2025. She was treated by the remarkable doctors, physicians assistants, nurses, and staff at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, where she came under the care of Dr. Eytan Stein, whose brilliance and compassion were evident every day. She also received superb care from Dr. Jae Park and Dr. Anna DeForest, who combined clinical and scientific excellence with deep humanity.

Zoe passed away on March 18, 2026.



When Zoe was in eighth grade, applying for high school, she was asked to describe her young self. She summed up who she was by naming three characteristics: “my deep compassion and love of other people,” “my burning passion for the outdoors,” and “my zest for life.” These qualities shaped her entire life and will remain her lasting legacy.