



Christopher Ryan Smit

March 18, 1974 - January 4, 2023

Christopher Ryan Smit passed away on Wednesday, January 4 at the age of 48. He was preceded in death by his paternal grandparents, James and Anna Smit, maternal grandparents, Elmer and Marie Kadera, brother Randy Smit, service dog, Glen and his dogs Gus and Frances.

He is survived by his wife of 26 years, Elizabeth (Lisa) Van Arragon, son Moses Kadera Smit and dog, Jack, his parents, Richard and Judith (Kadera) Smit, brother, Bradley Smit, sister-in-law, Angela (McGee) Smit and their children, Gabriel James and Hannah Marie, sister-in-law, Jill (Westrate) Smit, his parents-in-law, Leo and Cathleen (Stroo) Van Arragon, his brothers and sisters-in-law, Benjamin and Melody (Gresik) Van Arragon, Dane and Christianne (VanArragon) Prins, and nieces and nephew, Isabelle and Charlotte Van Arragon, and Arie and Annika Prins.

When Chris entered the world in 1974 in Hinsdale, Illinois, as the third of Rich and Judi Smit's three boys, he immediately won hearts and demanded attention with his charming smile and loud voice. His mother referred to him as her "little ambassador" for the way he was fearless in approaching people and making new friends. Chris learned early in life that his sense of humor and outgoing nature could disarm people who were uncomfortable with his disability. He also learned that some would never be won over and that, when bias and prejudice excluded him or threatened to limit opportunities for himself and others, his fierce determination, force of will, way with words, and refusal to take no for an answer, could take him wherever he needed or wanted to go.

The Smit home was always filled with music, and Chris started his first band, a Christian rock band, Revelation, with his cousin and best friend in high school. Chris wrote music and played in bands the rest of his life, until his voice gave out in his forties. He met his muse, the woman who would become his partner in life and work, Lisa VanArragon, when he went to Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Chris and Lisa were nearly inseparable from the time they met. Lisa was a highly focused future art historian, headed to graduate school. Chris, previously intending to become a full-time rock musician after college, quickly shifted his goals and went to the University of Iowa with her to study film and popular culture. The couple earned their Ph.Ds., met remarkable people, and traveled across the country and abroad for new adventures.

Their home in Grand Rapids, Michigan was always open to friends and family, a family that grew by one with the birth of their son Moses. Becoming a father was the greatest joy of Chris's life. As the disabled father of a nondisabled son, Chris delighted in everything they could do together. Their family cultivated a deep appreciation for the diversity of human experiences, rooted in love and humor.

In the final chapter of his life, Chris's research and writing on the representation of disabled people merged with his lived experience and political ideals in the disability arts and culture organization he co-founded, DisArt. The disability, arts, and queer communities he encountered in his work fully embraced him and he, in return, brought the full weight of his considerable energy, creativity, humor, and love to bear in his cultural advocacy, writing, public speaking, programming, consulting, and mentoring. Chris was raised in the church and was a man of faith throughout his life, even though he struggled with the lack of acceptance and direct opposition he received from many Christians who did not believe in his ideals for the equality of disabled people. Chris found his courage and personal peace in the disability and queer communities that accepted and loved him, the unconditional love of his family and closest friends, and the sure knowledge

that perfect love casts out all fear.

A private memorial will be held in Chris' honor.

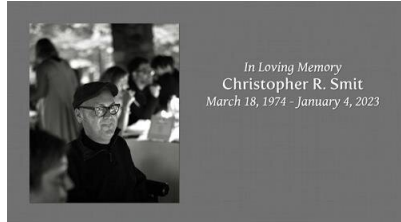
To honor Chris's memory all are encouraged to visit the website Letters to Chris, to read and share stories and pictures, and to support DisArt. In lieu of flowers, the Smit and VanArragon families ask that you make donations to DisArt.

<https://disartnow.org/mdfp/>

Tribute Wall



“ *Langeland-Sterenberg Yntema Funeral Homes created a Tribute Video in memory of Christopher Ryan Smit*



Langeland-Sterenberg Yntema Funeral Homes - January 11, 2023 at 09:29 AM

PM

How absolutely beautiful. I've known Judy and Rich since high school. Dear friends. Such a loss but such rich, beautiful memories they shared with Christopher and all their family. He is rocking those gates of Heaven for sure with Randy.

pat mccarthy - May 25, 2023 at 10:36 PM



“ *Rest in peace cousin Christopher* ❤️❤️



Skyler Cynthia - January 11, 2023 at 04:04 PM

AC

“ *I had Professor Smit for a course during my time at Calvin. I remember looking forward to the class, always, because of his wit, perspective and overall nature.* ❤️

Ashley Considine - January 11, 2023 at 12:49 PM

RF

“ *My sincerest sympathy to all the Smits, and especially Moses, on the passing of Chris.*

Robert Fortner - January 11, 2023 at 09:10 AM

KS

“ *Thank you for DisArt 2017 and showing me the first arts conference that was accessible for a multiple of variations of people, beyond building a ramp. Truly inspirational and well worth a trip across the atlantic. Just wrote a text on it for my christmas calender on insta: ht [tps://www.instagram.com/p/Ci0GA2jobSO/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Ci0GA2jobSO/)*

My condolences to family and loved ones.



Kjell Stjernholm - January 09, 2023 at 02:05 PM

AM

Wishing you all peace and strength during this difficult time. I'm thankful to have met Chris experience his wisdom and laughter. He will truly be missed. My condolences to his friends, family, and all whose lives he helped change.

Ashanti McGee - January 11, 2023 at 05:26 PM