

Worthy of Their Sacrifices

by

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I had been incarcerated for almost seven years. I coasted through the system, took a large amount of classes just for show, and tried to avoid the everyday drama of prison yard politics. I continued to blame my victim (my wife Renee) for the crime I am responsible for, took no accountability, and just didn't "get it." I only wanted to falsely fill the empty voids in my life and get out of prison as soon as possible. Then, on February 17, 2018, I was called to the property room and my life was forever changed.

I knew I hadn't ordered any items and really didn't want to depart my weekend TV shows. I reluctantly got dressed and went to property where I had to wait in a line, outside, during winter in the Midwest. I made it to the window, signed the yellow property receipt, and received a book with some papers attached. The book looked cool with the face of a soldier on the front and was titled Stories of Faith and Courage from the War in Iraq and Afghanistan. I read the letter of support that was heartfelt and filled with compassion, knowledge, and direction. It was from Gold Star Mom Debbie Lee. Her son, Marc Lee, was the first Navy SEAL killed in Iraq: August 2, 2006 – Battle for Ramadi. I remembered Marc's death due to the fact I was attending combat medic school and preparing for war that year.

As I started to turn the pages of my new found treasure, I noticed a handwritten message on the dedication page. I studied those monumental words, written in red ink, and it felt like a prize fighter had punched me in my solar plexus. My breathing paused, I felt my pulse bounding, eyes glossed over, and my pupils narrowed as I experienced a visual osmosis of the message. Several deceased soldiers, my friends, flashed before my eyes. I saw it, and by God, I felt it. The message:

“Shon, live your life worthy of their sacrifices.”
—Debbie Lee

My emotions and thoughts went into a thousand directions as if a hand grenade went off inside my head. My past dishonesty, lack of moral courage and integrity, those I harmed, my suicide attempts, and chaos I created needs to be addressed. I wanted to save the world right now—at this moment. I needed to make things right for my family, community, veterans, and God.

Accompanying the book and letter from Mrs. Lee was a copy of Marc’s last letter home—before his death. Marc’s Glory Letter emphasizes “purity, morals, and kindness.” I realized I first needed to bring closure to my crime—if there ever can be—by telling the truth, exposing my faults, and hoping that others can start to heal.

The first step was to admit all of my offenses, to the best of my memory, since alcohol was a contributor. I started by writing down the turmoil I put my family through. I compiled those events into a ten page essay titled Demobilization. I needed to tell the story and bring my wife back to life. Not only was she a teacher at a college of nursing,

she worked in an emergency room on weekends. I'm a numbers guy. With Renee's untimely death, caused by me, there is a ripple effect in the universe. I have to account for every nurse she may have taught in her classes that would have gone on to save lives. Not only that, but also those she would have directly affected by working in the ER. Those are some big numbers. Her passion was helping others. I have to carry on her life's purpose. I can't work in the medical field due to the felony conviction, but I will share the story in hopes of preventing other families from pain and destruction. So I called up a television station and agreed to admit to what I did on the air. I had previously told many lies about my wife in an attempt to justify my crime. I needed to start being a man and "worthy of their sacrifices" for our country.

As my passion and zeal shot out of the gate like a bull, I'm still a work in progress. I reconstruct my personal identity by showing love through service to others. I have to reorient my identity significantly with the limitations of being a felon. That message, in my heart, came from a multitude of sources—Debbie Lee, Marc Lee, Renee, and God.

I now have a purpose,

a mission, and

a lot of work to do.