

As the daughter of a retired Army Officer, I am aware of the commitment and the sacrifices that our military men and women make. I am also aware of how the family is affected. I believe it was great growing up in the military, but I also remember holidays and events that my father could not attend because he was serving overseas. Sadly, this was in the time where your main source of communication was a hand-written letter...which my mother wrote every day.

As a mother of two military officers, a son and a daughter, I am also aware of the Mother's worry and concern that goes hand-in-hand with the Mother's pride for your child's chosen career path. There is no higher calling than to serve your country and to be willing to put the needs of the country as your first priority.

As a teacher, I strive each day to reach my students. To help them understand difficult material and be able to apply it to their lives. Certain students "pass through" your class and you wonder if you made a difference. Some students come into your class and somehow become a part of your life for a while. Finally, a few other students come into your class and somehow end up in your heart.

Justin Sisson, class of 2007 from Blue Valley West High School, was one of the few who ended up in my heart. Perhaps it was because he was one of my daughter's friends. Perhaps it was because I had him in class two years in a row (Pre-Calculus and AP Statistics). Perhaps it was because he was a wrestler and so was my son. Perhaps it was when he took the time as a senior to thank me for helping him learn math (even though he didn't like all of it). Perhaps it was the way he approached life—giving his best to every situation, using adversity to strengthen his resolve, showing compassion toward others, and finding the good and the humor in life. His smile will always be remembered.

I stayed in touch with Justin after high school. I knew when he deployed to Iraq and even asked him what the hurry was (since he was still in college). He told me "he needed to go...it was the right thing to do." Of course, he had to make arrangements for the care of his dog! I knew when he commissioned as an officer...three days after my daughter...and when he graduated from college. I celebrated his successful completion of Ranger School...knowing how exceedingly difficult that is. I knew when he was deployed to Afghanistan. I had sent a care package to Justin in late May 2013 and he sent me a note to thank me a few days before he was killed. Forgive me if I still keep that in my email inbox. In his message, he indicated that he was keeping the homemade cookies for himself and sharing the rest of the package with the men in his unit. I could see his smile as I read it.

Justin must be remembered. Any individual who makes the ultimate sacrifice for his/her country should be honored, respected, and acknowledged in a way befitting their commitment. A section of highway near his alma mater and where he once lived would be an appropriate action so we can see it regularly and be reminded. I pray for the men and women still in harm's way and pray for the families of those who made the sacrifice that Justin made.

We need to name this section of highway for Justin. In his words, "it is the right thing to do."

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl A. Kerns, NBCT
Mathematics Teacher

Senate Transportation Committee
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