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Lessons for an Educator: The Real Meaning of Sacrifice and Service

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LESSONS FOR AN EDUCATOR:
THE REAL MEANING OF SACRIFICE AND SERVICE

By

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THESIS

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LESSONS FOR AN EDUCATOR:

THE REAL MEANING OF SACRFICE AND SERVICE

This thesis by Courtney A. LeMire is recommended for approval by the student's Thesis Committee and Department Head in the Department of

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ABSTRACT

LESSONS FOR AN EDUCATOR:

THE REAL MEANING OF SACRIFICE AND SERVICE

By

Courtney A. LeMire

I knew at a young age that I would devote my professional life to being an educator. I was not prepared for the numerous setbacks that I would experience and, at times, I have questioned why I became a teacher. It is during these moments of hesitation and uncertainty that I find inspiration from three military family members: my maternal grandfather, Edwin, my paternal grandfather, Lloyd, and my husband, Joe. They dedicated their lives to serving others while not asking for anything in return. All three unselfishly sacrificed a part of who they were for the betterment of others. It is because of their commitment that I am reminded why I too chose to serve others in my own capacity, and why I will also be forever indebted to the lesson they bestowed on me.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Edwin T. Palomaki, Lloyd M. Pryor, and Ronald J. LeMire, Jr. Each has challenged and encouraged me over the years while demonstrating what it means to truly serve others.

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I would like to thank both Dr. Kia J. Richmond and Dr. Elizabeth Monske for urging me to tell a story where I was hesitant to write one. I am forever grateful for their guiding lessons and encouragement both in my professional and personal lives. Dr. Richmond and Dr. Monske have both challenged me through the years to think differently about not only my own education, but also how I approach my lessons and students in the classroom. Their dedication to their craft as well as to their students will forever resonate with me. I am thankful to have two such positive role models in my life who inspire me to be the best educator and professional that I can be.

This thesis follows the format prescribed by the *MLA Style Manual* and the Department of English.

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INTRODUCTION

My mother installed a large chalkboard in our basement when I was around nine or ten years old. At first it was used primarily for my childhood coloring and doodling. The next thing I knew, my younger brother Evan was at my side and suddenly I had my first student. We gathered books for our library (complete with sign-in and sign-out cards), made decorations for the walls, had a science lab in the bathroom, my bedroom was used as a makeshift choir room where we would practice for our spring and winter concerts, and I even created a book order for which my sweet brother paid me fifty cents to “order” a book from me. I remember overhearing my mother groaning as Evan politely asked her for 50 cents to buy a book from my book order. I patiently made him wait for the story entitled *Along the Rocky Shore* to be delivered, making it as realistic as possible even though the book was only a few feet away in my bedroom. My youngest brother Elliott eventually joined my roster of students, but he was my problem student. If my memory serves me right he was expelled. I giggle now over the elaborateness of what was deemed Faithorn Elementary (the name of the village my parents live in), but something magical happened in my parents’ basement over the course those few short years. I like to joke with Evan that I taught him everything he needed to know in those early years. Our relationship was formed over writing, storytelling, and books.

I was bitten by the teaching bug at an early age; however, little did I know that I chose a profession where the benefits and payoffs can at times be slow and hard to see.

Education is a fickle career. Committing time and energy for the betterment of complete strangers is daunting to say the least, and I often struggle with how to go about it. I've always felt that there is something within my own community that needs me- something that I have that will help in creating not only better individuals but also make me a better person as well. I've expressed to my students the importance of spreading their wings and exploring the bigger world that is around them, yet in recent years I have found great importance in being at home and establishing myself while giving back to my own small, sleepy community that has bestowed so much on me.

For as long as I can remember, I have always loved school; in fact, my mother enrolled me at the tender age of five in kindergarten because I was so eager to attend school. "I should have held you back so you would have graduated at eighteen, but you wanted to go," she will reminisce. The social aspect of school was never as fascinating to me as the learning process was. Intrigued at the elaborate lessons my teachers had prepared for me and my classmates, I appreciated my instructors own passion and excitement when delivering lessons to the class. As a little girl, teachers were magic. They created safe, fun learning environments and encouraged and pushed me to think big. In fact, I am still in contact with those who left such an impression on me, often seeking their advice and encouragement when I need it most.

Looking back, I now realize how exhausted my own instructors must have been while teaching, but I never saw an ounce of frustration or impatience in their delivery. Of course I had my own setbacks in my education. There were teachers I didn't particularly enjoy. Math still gives me a cold sweat. Chemistry and my brain are like Teflon on a frying pan- a concept can be taught but slips out like the morning breakfast from the pan.

I don't think I could ever dissect an animal without becoming queasy and nauseous as we did in anatomy. Even with the academic struggles I encountered, it wasn't enough to deter me from wanting to spread the infectious power education had over me. I wanted others to feel that same excitement. Optimistic and eager, I set out to pursue the only career I knew I was made for, unaware of the troubles, setbacks, and frustrations that I would encounter on my road to becoming an educator.

As I grew older and was exposed to different career paths in middle and high school, I wavered briefly on my future profession. I entertained the ideas of being a pediatrician or even a nurse. I loved children and being with people but hated seeing others in discomfort. The inner workings of the body also made me weak in the knees. Perhaps a career in writing would be a good fit. I loved to write and even composed many storybooks growing up. In fact, my version of *The Little Mermaid* even won a Caldecott Medal. My copy says so- I drew the medal on myself! Unfortunately, when an option like this was brought to my parents they were immediately concerned that I would struggle to make a living and support myself with such a career. Being an educator, I was reminded, afforded me the opportunity to combine both loves of writing and teaching into my daily life. I was confident and ready to face my future in education despite the obstacles that I was often forewarned about. I knew the salary was poor and the reputation of being a public educator was constantly under fire, yet I was compelled to do something that I knew I would love and enjoy despite the negativity that perpetually orbits the profession.

When I started my college education in 2001, there was a need for teachers as a shortage was predicted for the future. Perfect! Not only could I go into a career that was meaningful, but I would also be employable. My parents would be so happy with my

admirable vocation choice. If only I had known the struggles that would be ahead of me. The economy would flounder and the market would become flooded with educators making it almost impossible to find employment. While working towards my bachelor's in English and teaching certificate in secondary education at Northern Michigan University, however, I was undeterred and filled with excitement and creative possibility.

At the age of twenty-three, I was hopeful and confident my preparation and student teaching experience at Iron Mountain High School in the fall of 2003 would help set me up for my professional future. I saw other peers bound into the workforce after their own teacher preparation programs, so I was certain I would have a similar fate. I knew that the literal sweat (I can't even recall how many times I delivered a lesson in shaky voice and sweat drenched shirt) that I put into my lessons, grueling lunches I tolerated in the political teachers' lounge, the tip-toeing that was needed to navigate a room that wasn't my own, and the awkward parent/teacher conferences that I endured during my student teaching would be the experience I needed to set up my own future classroom. When graduation rolled around, I couldn't send out my resume fast enough as I was sure I would be hearing back from at least a few of the schools I had applied to. I was sure...so very sure.

Upon graduation I would hear a variety of rejections: *Dear Miss Pryor, Thank you for your application, but at this time we feel we need to select a candidate with more experience...Although you are a strong candidate, we've decided to take our interview in another direction (this line always confused me)...We'd like to offer the position to someone with more experience...Although the choice was hard, we decided to give the position to someone with more experience. More experience...more experience...the*

phrase would haunt me for years. I did what most new graduates of teaching would do: I was a substitute teacher. For almost seven years, I was a substitute teacher. Why didn't I give up and just get a regular nine-to-five? Many of my family members couldn't believe that I stuck with teaching as long as I had. Some of my friends would have almost five years or more of experience by the time I would get my full-time position. My experience started slowly. I nabbed every substitute teaching position that became available which eventually helped me to land a long-term sub position in 2010. In the winter of 2011, I was hired as a supplementary instructor at Bay College part-time. This was a fantastic opportunity as I had never thought of teaching at the college level before. Later, during the fall of 2011-12 school year, I was offered a part-time position teaching 7th and 10th grade English, but due to budget cuts, I was laid off from that position. I was offered a part-time position as a Title I aide at the same district I was laid off from, but I only lasted a semester. I simply couldn't live off of \$700 a month. Finally, in December of 2012 and after four years of trying to get a full-time teaching position, I had to step back and reevaluate what it was that I wanted to do. I was running myself ragged doing part-time jobs and had very little to show for my hard work. Still newly married, I needed something steady to contribute financially. At almost thirty years of age, I was embarrassed and frustrated that I couldn't get a job. "I don't know why you stick with it," my older brother Jeremy had said to me once. At that time, I didn't know why I did either. A local bank had a full-time opening for teller work in my hometown. For almost two years, I let my teaching ambitions simmer while I entertained other options.

I couldn't believe how exhausting and frustrating the process of getting a teaching job could be. Granted it was my choice to live in my hometown after college, which

involved its own complications and nepotism-like obstacles. I was stuck in my late twenties living at home with a disgrace of an income and student loans up to my eyeballs. I was caught in the catch twenty-two of I couldn't get hired because I didn't have enough experience (even though I was doing what I could), yet I couldn't get experience if no one would hire me. I went on countless interviews; unbelievably, I interviewed at some schools three times only to be rejected. "Interviews are good experience," I would hear. "Patience is a virtue," I was told. "Don't give up-" was the advice. "The right job is out there," I was encouraged. None of these words put money in my pocket or kept the student loan wolves from my door.

I did enjoy my experience of being a part-time employee, though. I was getting much needed experience while interacting with colleagues who taught me through their own lessons and examples the importance of education. Nevertheless, the uncertainty of being let go from my position always loomed. Cut backs in budgets were always threatened and the part-timers like me were always looked at first for the chopping block. Fed up and aggravated with my choice, I was beyond frustrated with teaching. I thought I was doing everything right by doing the small but still important jobs to show that I cared about a full-time position within the local school districts. I started to see former high school friends buying homes, getting married, and traveling to exotic locales while I was trying to make plans just to get out of my parents basement. I felt like a professional loser. I cast my resume net further applying to different districts in different states only to hear crickets.

Finally, in July of 2014, I received a call to interview at a rural school district in northern Wisconsin. I had interviewed at Florence County School District once in 2013

and thought I performed well enough to perhaps be given the position; however, when a couple days passed and I called the principal to inquire my question was left unanswered. I did not hear back. I actually heard from a friend's mother that I didn't get the job; I lost the position instead to a girl from my hometown. It was pretty much par for the course. So when the opportunity came to fill a vacant position at Florence High School the second time, I was hesitant to apply. Still smarting from the first interview, I decided to give it a whirl and submit my resume. What did I have to lose? Besides, the district was looking for someone to teach a transcribed college course to seniors, and since I have been teaching at Bay College since 2011, I knew I would have an advantage over other applicants. The interview went well but I was hesitant to keep my hopes up. At least this time the superintendent wasn't flipping through his smart phone acting uninterested about my work history. I did my best, was cheerful and eager, answered all questions and responded to how I would handle all of the demands of the job, and perspired profusely in the air conditioned comfort of the room all in the hopes of making more than \$18,000 a year.

When I was told that this time I had gotten the position, I was elated! Finally I would be a full-time teacher with my own classroom and be able to make my own decisions. A weight was also lifted as I would be able to help out financially in my marriage. It had taken eight long years of struggling to finally make more money than I had in student loan debt. My creative wheels immediately started spinning as I thought of unique and enthusiastic ways to deliver my lessons. I was going into a district where I knew no one, and I loved the feeling of being able to start out and make my own impression and meet new people. With my classroom meticulously decorated and with

my stacks of literature books piled high and ready to be passed out, I was eager to meet my students. I would be teaching 7th, 10th, and a college transcribed credit course for 12th graders for Northeast Wisconsin Technical College. I was ready, and I was sure my students would exude the same sort of enthusiasm as me. Little did I know the professional challenges that would await me in my new role.

At the small rural district in northern Wisconsin, I found the class sizes ideal, especially for a novice teacher new to the full-time stressors of teaching. Being able to focus my time on my preparation and delivery of my lessons was crucial as was having the ability and time to focus more on my students' work. If I was hired in a larger district for my first job, I knew I wouldn't be spoiled in this regard. Classes were ideal size which allowed me to get to know my students. I also loved exposing my classes to new writing and literature lessons that they didn't have with past instructors. Having worked at the local community college, I relished being able to work with senior students while teaching the transcribed credit course. With small class sizes, I was able to test and try new lessons while simultaneously getting feedback and input from my students-a dream for me as a new teacher. I wanted to see my students explore possibilities and go beyond the small confines and expectations of their hometown.

Teaching in one of the lowest income counties in the state of Wisconsin definitely had its challenges. I so wanted to start off with a \$40,000 a year job, but if I had done my research at the time I would have found that according to the National Education Association the average salary for a starting teacher was \$33,546 (nea.org). My salary of \$31,500 was close to that average. I had to remind myself that experience was more important. The salary would come, but I need to focus on the experience this job would

afford me. Realizing I would have to put in more time to get the financial payday, I also had to contend with other obstacles. The school facilities themselves were tired and dilapidated. It was not uncommon to have leaky ceilings in the fall and spring months or drafty and unpleasantly cold classrooms in the winter months. A portion of the building wasn't used due to asbestos and during my second year a stairwell in my hallway started to collapse due to its frail structure. Everything was patched, band-aided, or held together with super glue and duct tape. My own whiteboards were bubbling away from the wall, making it hard to write notes and even harder for some students to see depending on where they sat. It had been above 90 degrees in my room in the fall/spring still frost crept its icy fingers around my students and me due to the malfunctioning heater below my windows in the winter. Ironically, I had a Smartboard and a Chromebook cart filled with computers for each of my students. I was grateful to have up-to-date technology in my room despite the conditions of the school.

The building was as damaged as many of the students were in this low income population. A part of me is upset knowing they deserve an education in proper building facilities. Compounded with the structural issues, many of my former students came from broken homes with parents in and out of jail or a home where parents don't exist and someone else has stepped in as primary caregiver. Confrontational behaviors were common as were students saying things like, "You can't tell me what to do" or "Go ahead, call home! No one will answer anyways" to "You're just picking on me. I didn't do anything wrong!" My all-time favorite confrontation with a student involved plagiarism to which she retorted that, "It's not my fault I plagiarized. I don't have a computer at home. Besides I don't like the book we're reading in class!" Teachers need a

background in psychology to work in an educational setting. So much of what I do on a daily basis feels to have little to do with education and more to do with balancing the different behaviors and attitudes that walk through my door. It can be mentally exhausting when thinking of interesting approaches to lessons that students will find engaging only to overhear a student say, “This won’t matter in the long run”, or “I’m not going to read this. I’ll just look it up on SparkNotes.”

My frustration with behavioral issues was only exacerbated with a newly implemented rule for the 2015-16 school year which stated:

All students will have access to success.

Sounded good, as that is how it should be. However, it meant that there were no deadlines for students for their homework during an entire nine week period. My colleagues and I found ourselves feverishly grading work in week nine that was due during week one. When as a staff we approached our administrator about our concerns, he simply stated, “There are no deadlines in the real world.” This wasn’t the answer we were searching for. This rule led to entitlement issues for students and paved the way for comments like, “I’ll turn in that missing assignment when I get around to it.” My frustrations grew as I was also teaching a transcribed credit course for a technical college and had to adhere to its stated policy on late work. Suddenly students thought they didn’t have to turn work in as stated by the syllabus. I was trying to prepare them for the next educational step only to regress. At times the emotional toll left me shaking my head at my job choice

Not only were administrative policies creating anxiety for me, but I was restlessly jeered at 3 a.m. that I was not doing a good enough job. I felt I wasn't working hard enough to reach all of the students in my classroom. Insecurities like, am I smart enough? Am I incorporating enough technology? Am I doing what I can to be relative and informed for my teachings? What makes me qualified to speak to anything that I am teaching? I was unnerved by doubt, constantly setting new goals so as not to be complacent. For all of the days that I worried, there were the discreet reminders as to why I became a teacher. The quiet voice of a 7th grader who lingers after class to tell me she likes the book we are reading, and wonders if the author has written other books she can check out at the library. A 10th grade student who only gave me headaches says, "Oh, maaan!" when he finds out I won't be his 11th grade English teacher. A 12th grade senior thanked me for going over grammar rules with him when he found out he placed into a higher freshmen English class in the fall. Silently, he then passed me a wallet-sized senior picture on which he wrote: "Mrs. LeMire, Thank you for all that you did for me in senior English. I really learned a lot." It might be cliché, but it is the small moments of gratitude and excitement that keeps me going and believing that I am making a difference and doing the best I can each day.

It is imperative for me to deliver the educational experience that I found so enriching as a child and young adult. I want to instill in my students what past teachers gave to me- the euphoric excitement and possibilities an education can offer. It's hard when faced with obstacles like student apathy and entitled behavior mixed with a lack of respect from not just students but alarmingly parents and even administrators. Working in ramshackle facilities presented its own obstacles, but oddly I grew accustomed to these

daily building quirks almost as if they too were a disruptive student. It was hard when payday came and my check was just enough to cover the bills. Some days I want to leave for another glamorous position and say, “Hah! I showed you teaching!” However, I am incessantly pulled back to a profession that I hold so dear with the hopes that I am not only making myself a better person and educator, but hopefully I am pushing my students to be their best versions of themselves as well.

Surprisingly, my career would shift gears in the summer of 2016; I was granted a new opportunity to work at a bigger, more solvent school district only four blocks from my home. My former district was a forty-minute commute round trip and was constantly struggling with its own setbacks and financial woes. When I saw an ad for an English position at Kingsford High School, I applied but didn’t think I would have much of a chance at an interview. Kingsford is known for its sterling reputation, but I had just settled into a groove at Florence and the students and staff knew me well. My reputation was established. Did I really want to start from scratch again? I was eight months pregnant at the time and assumed they wouldn’t be interested in hiring someone who needed to go on maternity leave almost as soon as the school year started. I was surprised when I was told that not only were they impressed with my credentials but they most certainly wanted me for the job. Working at a bigger district afforded me better financial opportunity; moreover, I would be closer to my home and baby during the school year. Without hesitation I accepted their offer.

I only worked for three weeks before I gave birth, yet in that short time I had to make quite a few adjustments. Gone were the days of class sizes of 10-15 students. Now my classes are 25-30 students and that also means double the grading. Instead of having

sixty total students to account for and know, I now have over 150. Will the grass be greener? I hope so for the long-term aspect of my career, yet there is a part of me that feels guilty. I feel as if I abandoned my students at Florence. I wanted to show them their worth and to be their constant in an uncertain, ever-changing environment, yet I too left when I had the better opportunity dangling before me. I try to justify that it is a better move not just financially. I have to think of my own future and stability; still I ache for what I left behind.

I often reflect on why I chose teaching as a career. It has taken me a long time to establish myself as an educator and even longer to rebuild my bruised ego and confidence after having so many doors shut in my eager face. However, serving and helping others was deep-rooted in me at an early age. My family is made up of military men, doctors, nurses, and educators. Perhaps it was only natural to want to follow in footsteps of those who led by example. In my life there are three individuals that I hold dear and am thankful for. They were the teachers and I their student, though I didn't know it at the time. I suppose I was similar to the unruly and mouthy student that I encounter today. At times I didn't listen, and their advice was never needed. Yet without their teachings, I wouldn't be compelled to be an educator in my own community. All three are completely different, yet their stories are connected with a similar thread: serving others before themselves.

As a small child, my two grandfathers, Edwin and Lloyd, would instill in me some of the most important wisdom and lessons that I still carry with me today. Without their guidance, I know I wouldn't be the strong and resilient woman I am today. Another quiet force, my husband Joe, would come later in my life but is still a daily reminder to

me of the lessons instilled in me at a young age. When I've struggled in my own profession, I have to take a step back and think, "I wonder how my grandfathers and husband handled obstacles, disrespect, and discipline in the military? They didn't have parents to call and there certainly was no principal's office to send repeat offenders to in the middle of the Pacific Ocean or in Iraq and Afghanistan." I look at the young men they were when they decided to serve our nation-young naïve boys who were bit by adventure. Gradually this interest to see the world morphed into something deeper and these boys turned into respected gentlemen. All three joined the military initially for individual or professional gain; however, their commitment transformed into a pledge to help all while generously sacrificing parts of themselves for betterment of others.

I come from a divorced family, but I was lucky that my parents always surrounded both me and my siblings with unconditional love and support. No divorce is ever easy, and perhaps I was too young to actually grasp the stickiness that came with the dissolve of my parents' marriage. However, I now realize that during my impressionable childhood I was distracted by my jovial and charismatic maternal grandfather, Edwin.

My Time with Papa Ed

Edwin Theodore Palomaki (or as I affectionately called him, “Papa Ed”) was born April 27, 1922, in the quiet town of North Lake, Michigan, to Finnish immigrants, Toivo and Anna Palomaki. His birth certificate actually reads “Theodore Palomaki”; I am told this is his legal name as the man who filled out his birth certificate was drunk. This small and maybe even humorous error would be one of the many bumps that my grandfather would face, yet would never complain about or contest. He was one of five brothers and grew up sharing space in a tight duplex. My mother will say, and I tend to agree, that he was downright handsome. “His brothers were attractive, but Ed was handsome,” she told me once. A young boy was even overheard saying Jack Kennedy was sitting in front of him at a school program. With his wavy dark hair and mischievous grin my grandpa could captivate anyone with his twinkling blue eyes, slow crooked grin, and infectious giggle. The stories he told of his life growing up were fantastic. For example, John Dillinger used to frequent North Lake usually because he was on the lam from the law and needed to lay low for a while. Not owning a radio or knowing the goings on of the news of the day, my grandfather never realized the notoriety of their sleepy town guest. Papa Ed even stated how he was a really nice guy.

Being first generation immigrants, my great-grandparents only spoke Finnish; however, one day out of curiosity Edwin decided to follow one of his brothers to school. He must have enjoyed his initial visit because he stayed and learned how to speak

English. With family members working in the nearby mines, Edwin made a decision that this profession would not be his calling. To avoid having to work in dark, cramped and dangerous conditions he chose a safer profession—the U.S. Navy. With World War II casting its long shadow, the enticement of seeing the world while serving his country was all too alluring. Edwin decided he would do what many underage man would do: lie about his age and enlist. He entered the Navy as an Apprentice Seaman on August 28, 1941, and was honorably discharged on November 16, 1945, with the ranks of Gunner's Mate 2nd Class. Papa Ed would tell me of beautiful far off locales (New Zealand being his favorite) and how he decided to get tattoos on his lower arms in New York City after having too much to drink. I often found myself staring at his faded and smudged tattoos with their odd blue/green coloring. Time had taken away their sharp lines and a faded wreath that had once said "Mom" now appeared to be melted squiggles that I could have drawn as a young child. I didn't care what they were because to me they were him. He would meet American military titans like Sargent Shriver making the humble comment of, "he was a good guy" while aboard the U.S.S. South Dakota and U.S.S. Purdy. Edwin would shoot down kamikaze fighter pilots in the Pacific Ocean all while having to bury his own friends at sea. While his battleship sat dead in the water, my grandfather would be the one to persevere under pressure and help get his ship running again taking little credit for his actions. I can't imagine how Papa Ed endured agonizing skin burns on his chest from where he held massive, searing guns or what he felt when he learned he inhaled the unknown asbestos in his living quarters on his ship. A complaint was never uttered. A negative word was never spoken. It was never mentioned that life was unfair. Instead on the rare occasions when Papa Ed would share a

snippet of a tale, I would see a faraway twinkle in his eye as he would reminisce. I know I was conversing with him but at the same time he felt distant and I could see his memories playing in his mind like his own personal movie reel.

During his tenure in the U.S. Navy, Edwin would also meet the love of his life, my grandmother Marion, after only meeting her once. They went to the movies and, as the story goes, my grandfather was so nervous that he sat on the floor eating his popcorn instead of sitting in the collapsible seated chairs movie theaters are known for. They kept in contact via the U.S. mail, and while my grandfather thought he was sending his paychecks back to Michigan to help build a nest egg for him and his future bride, my devious great-grandfather Toivo intercepted his money and drank it away. My grandfather wouldn't know of this until his return home after the war had ended. As a little girl, I never heard the details of my grandfather's impressive tales unless it came from my mother and her own recollections or my grandfather decided to let slip a detail in a passing conversation

My relationship with my grandfather really blossomed after an unfortunate circumstance landed in his life. My grandmother was diagnosed with multiple myeloma and would later succumb to the disease in 1985. I happened to come into my grandfather's life at just the right time. My own mother was going through a divorce and my grandpa, having just lost his soul mate, was looking for a happy distraction to channel his energies into-something to help distract him from his loss. Enter me and my two older siblings. We moved in with him shortly after my grandmother's passing, though I was young, I felt the adoration and warmth that I would grow to love and miss from Papa Ed. I can still smell the Wrigley's Spearmint gum that he always had on hand and see the

way he would carefully comb and part his thick, wavy white hair in the mirror. His blue eyes would always glimmer, yet there always seemed to be a sadness that pulled at their corners.

My mom worked as a nurse, and my two older siblings were of school age, so that meant that I had my grandfather's attention for a whole day almost every day. We always started the day off by making pancakes, and I had to stand on a chair to help him mix the batter together. He would always have a cup of coffee with heaps of sugar from the sugar jar. I remember the sweet trail on the countertop that lead from the jar to his coffee cup. My mother would always playfully scold him with an, "Oh, Daddy!" asking why he couldn't bring his cup to the jar, or why would he never clean up the sugar after he made the mess. I don't think he ever heeded her advice because the sugar trail was always on the countertop. After breakfast, we would hop into his familiar musty smelling 1982 Ford Bronco black with red and white pinstripes zooming down its sides. Oddly there was the tiniest rainbow sticker on the hood and in the cloud the name "Ed"; no one knew where it came from. Little did I know that at sixteen I would drive the Bronco as my own car when staying at my mom and stepdad's house. I needed a car to drive to and from work and school while staying with them, and my grandpa generously gifted me this sturdy tank of a vehicle which I would find hard to navigate (like adjusting the high beams on the floor with my foot), hit my first deer with (the first night I got my driver's license), as well as pull off the back bumper of a parked car with one aggressive reverse maneuver (don't ask). There was always the usual empty pop bottle on the floor that would skitter across my feet in the large tin can of a car. As this beast belched itself loudly to life, I would bounce along in the red passenger seat just happy to be with my

papa. After retiring as a postal worker, my grandpa worked cleaning a local bank. I often tagged along with him because sometimes when we were done I could sweetly coerce him into taking me to Shopko. I'll never forget when he bought me a My Little Pony, the most beautiful toy I had ever seen. Grabbing it from the bottom shelf of the Shopko store he said, "You want this one?" I eagerly nodded my head. It had silver tinsel streaking through its mane and had bejeweled hips. I remember my mother asking me if I had made my grandpa buy it for me. No, I hadn't *made* him buy it, just some gentle hinting.

When we would return back to his house, he often had mini frozen cherry cheesecakes in his freezer that we would heat up in the microwave. I know it sounds like a weird food to zap, but it was heaven. Graham cracker crust with a cream cheese and cherry topping was right up my young alley. We would eat our lunch while we played a riveting game of five-card stud at the kitchen table. We always played for pennies, and I'm sure he let me win. Our game was always followed by him letting me go through his junk mail where I would pretend I was running a very professional office filled with *Reader's Digest* and promotional offers. Often my grandpa would manage to slip into his recliner in the living room to watch a lively western to fill our quiet, drowsy afternoons. I remember specifically watching *The Alamo* and *Two Mules for Sister Sara* one afternoon. He would always recline in his chair the same way, pulling out the footrest while easing into his seat with his all black tennis shoes contentedly bobbing over the edge. His arms would find their way above his head and with his fingers would loosely interlock together. His belly would protrude from under his worn polo shirt, with his Detroit Tigers hat just resting on his head. He would give an over-the-top obnoxious

yawn as he settled in (I can still hear exactly how he would do it in my own head). Being young, I would lose interest in his afternoon movie, so I would sneak behind his chair trying to poke or grab at his hands. Blindly he would reach around the chair and clumsily attempt to grasp me, always making me giggle with excitement. It was these small moments of interaction that I think back on most fondly. There was a special period of time where all we had for the day was each other's company and despite the demons my grandfather may have been stifling in those moments, he created an atmosphere of pure joy for a little girl. He put all of his attention into me and expected very little in return. He spoiled me until the very end. I never thought it would go away or that there would come a day where he would no longer be in my life.

Eventually my mother, in her early thirties, decided it would be best for our small family to get a place of our own. Papa Ed pleaded with her not to leave, yet she knew we had outgrown his home. Wanting her own space, my mother found a small home on the other side of town for us to live in and this meant that the visits with Papa would become fewer and far between. I was getting older too and different interests started to occupy my time. The excitement of school and having friends was enthralling to me as a young girl. Of course, when he could, my grandpa would stop in from time to time to help my mother with babysitting needs or just to say hi, however it would never be like it was when we lived with him.

I knew my grandfather felt lost when we left his home. Even though we were only a couple of miles away, he apparently felt as if the distance was too great. Somehow we were the glue that was keeping him from falling apart. I never knew he was so upset until a few years ago when my mother told me. It is funny the things we find out as we

grow older. In hindsight I should have realized he was having a hard time holding everything together, especially after one distinct visit I made to see him with my mother. Enter his dimly lit home, she called out his name. As we approached his bedroom, I could just make out his body half lying on his bed in the shaded afternoon sunlight. He quickly sprang from his bed and staggered towards us in the narrow hallway. “Have you been drinking?” my mother asked sternly as she tried to shield me from him. “I’ve only had a pint,” he said as he made a rough estimate with his hands to show how much a pint is. “*Only* a pint?!” my mother retorted. He managed to give me a wink and then stuck his tongue out at me. I remember smiling uncomfortably at the situation. “Stop it, Daddy. You’ll scare her,” my mother warned. It was hard to watch him in pain and how unbearable and all-consuming the loneliness was for him. Drinking became a way for him to tolerate his loneliness. As I grew older it bothered me more and more that he found temporary solace in a bottle. Where my mother found frustration in his behavior as an alcoholic I would eternally see my grandfather through rose colored glasses. “My mother was the only one who kept him from drinking, but after she died he was just a lost soul,” my mother will still say.

By the time I was eleven-years-old, our visits to my grandfather’s home were less frequent. Certain noticeable changes took place not only in him, but in his home as well. He still managed to decorate with the artificial Christmas tree that he used with my grandmother that he neatly displayed and decorated in the living room window -a sign that he was attempting normalcy during the holidays. Oddly placed throw rugs appeared over his already carpeted floors, and it was hard to tell where one ended and a new one started. Though he was a janitor of a bank, my brother and I found a perfectly preserved

mouse skeleton under his rocking chair in the living room. We carefully put it on a drink coaster and showed my mom one day. Her response was an exasperated sigh followed by, “Oh, geez Daddy!” Sometimes my family and I would stop by, and he simply wouldn’t be at home. We’d leave a note expressing how we were sad that we missed him but would stop again soon.

And then, in 1991, my grandpa slipped from my grasp altogether thanks in part to Steve Martin and a woman. I remember vividly when my mom told me he went on a date to see *Father of the Bride* at the old Braumart movie theater. My papa didn’t go to the movies. He watched gritty John Wayne and Clint Eastwood movies. This was just a phase. Soon he’d be back to watching movies like *Kelly’s Heroes* and not these fluffy romantic comedies. In my eight-year-old mind I was confused and outraged. Next I heard from my uncle that he was buying premade pumpkin pies and cleaning for when she stopped by. Barb: four simple letters that would alter my relationship with him until his passing. I know she was good for him in many ways. She made him more active by urging him to exercise; gradually he had a healthier social life because of her. It was good that he had her, but it was also different. The dynamics between my grandfather and I slowly began to change. Eventually they would move in together; however, I remember driving past their shared home and seeing her family was visiting. I was hesitant to stop in to see him, dreading the awkward conversations that would ensue if I did. Suddenly I didn’t feel as if I could “pop in” and see him whenever I wanted. Having to share my grandpa now became a hard concept for me to grasp. Through my young eyes and heart I knew him best, and I felt threatened that our relationship was being replaced by people who didn’t really know or value him.

Sadly, I never felt as close to my grandfather after his relationship with Barb. In many ways I am thankful for all she did for him. On the other hand, it was hard to see someone who was never married to my grandfather dictate so much of his everyday schedule. My mother will recall how she wanted to have him over for his birthday, but Barb announced they would be going out for fish instead. “Really?” my mom said in surprise. “I can’t have my own father over for his birthday?” I, too, felt her pain. Instead of making a big deal over what are small situations of a larger picture, time and space silently filled the gulf between my grandfather and me. I would say to myself, *Today I’ll go visit him.* Then, today would turn into tomorrow and then the next day and the next. I have often tried to analyze what changed. It wasn’t him. He couldn’t have changed. Suddenly, it became a chore to go and visit someone I loved and had grown up with.

I don’t think he actually started telling me memories until I had to interview him for a paper in 2005. His then almost eighty-three-year old mind retrieved facts and details quicker than I could get the questions out of my mouth. I had grown up in the loving arms of a modern day superhero, yet it wasn’t until my early twenties that I decided to finally ask him about his life. He knew my story; still, it wasn’t until I needed him that I finally asked the harder questions. In my teenage years I was too busy and self-absorbed, but as I grew older the thought that he might now always be with us started to weigh on me.

Eventually, I had to go and visit him on a cold winter afternoon for an undergraduate class I was taking on Finnish immigrant life in the United States. My final grade for the class required that I interview someone of Finnish descent; naturally my

grandfather was my best choice. My final interview with him was the most candidly I ever heard him talk. Papa Ed spoke openly about being a child during the Depression while explaining how he stood in line for a pair of boots only to have his father make him return them. Being proud, my great-grandfather wasn't going to let his son accept handouts. Edwin moved seamlessly from childhood into his young adult years in World War II. Speaking quietly he recalled laying on his stomach on the deck of his battleship as fighter planes flew dangerously close shooting at anything that moved, and of how the trauma of his experiences still haunted him after all the years that had passed.

Papa ended the interview explaining how as he got older he had no desire to travel having seen most of the world during his war years. I was a sponge. Edwin didn't go into explicit details of his life; I could tell he would hold back at certain points. What he did give me, however, was something that I will be eternally grateful for: he gave me a piece of himself that he rarely shared with others. I was humbled. The mundane grievances that I had the audacity to complain about were embarrassing. My grandfather experienced more upset and setbacks in his life than I would ever know, and he carried his baggage with what seemed like ease, grace, and a smile. What still pulls at my heart the most about the interview and his recollections is the fact that he still had nightmares and often cried when thinking back upon his service in the war, and how after all the years he still ached for my grandmother's presence and couldn't wait to be reunited with her someday.

Recently, I wanted to know how veterans of World War II coped with their own post-traumatic stress and if there were services provided for veterans like him. I seemed to encounter only dead ends in my search. An article published by The National Center

for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder entitled “PTSD and Combat-Related Psychiatric Symptoms in Older Veterans” echoes my concerns by stating, “a significant limitation of the current literature is the absence of information about the assessment and treatment of PTSD in older veterans” (Schnurr, 2). Even the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website gives general definitions about the “battle fatigue” soldiers during World War II experienced. A section discussing how nightmares and PTSD are related, although informative, offers little insight as to how veterans of this era were treated if at all. Instead the information focuses on semi-current traumatic events such as Vietnam and even Hurricane Katrina and what coping mechanisms are available to help those struggling with dreams. Since my grandpa belonged to the *Greatest Generation* did society think he was stronger or immune to the aftermath of war? Or did doctors who treated veterans in the time following World War II simply not know what to do with the men and women who struggled with the then unknown PTSD?

My grandfather, at the age of eighty-five would eventually be moved into an assisted living center where he could receive around-the-clock attention. He had already survived a stroke and a heart attack and had managed to recover remarkably. It was a cold, cloudy day on April 12, 2008. I stopped in the nursing home for a visit with Papa Ed. He told me how I had just missed my mom and uncle. I was glad that I had the room to myself with him. We chatted like we normally would on any one of our visits, talking about nothing in particular. As our visit came to a close, I stood to leave leaning in to give him a kiss on the cheek. My final words to him were, “I love you, Papa. I’ll see you tomorrow.” I remember saying it sure that I would. He died later that night in the company of my mother and uncle. I’ve always been comforted by my final interaction

with my grandfather. Somehow the phrase *I'll see you tomorrow* gives me closure because even though he is gone, I know I will see him again someday.

There was a mad dash to collect whatever belongings my grandfather had in the moments after his death. Since he shared a house with someone he wasn't married to, the panic to gather his things was palpable. My uncle made a call asking if he could collect what was my grandfather's, and, upon arriving at the trailer that he shared with Barb, he found black garbage bags sitting on the back stoop with my grandfather's contents carelessly stuffed inside. I remember sitting on my uncle's living room floor and quietly sifting through those large bags that contained the fragments of my grandfather with the rustling of those plastic bags the only audible noise. Tangible items that still held his smell were passed among my family members that had gathered. Quietly we all fumed about the cold way that Barb had sloppily stuffed his possessions into the bags. It was as if he needed to be forgotten like the garbage the bags were meant to carry.

There was one item that I kept picking up and setting down. I wanted it for myself, but knew it was a sensitive time to ask if I could have anything. After turning a service ribbon pin over and over in my hands and admiring the decorative colors, I asked my family if anyone had any interest in the item. Not really knowing if it had special meaning, I tucked it in my pocket. To me this ribbon has his young spirit- it whispers of a rambunctious seventeen-year-old sailor with an infectious grin who would be known for his contagious laugh and humble, giving heart. I come across it from time to time in a cabinet at home, but I always have a hard time looking at it. Part of it reminds me of the stories I didn't hear and the complex veteran that I didn't get to know. The other part of me beams with pride at the thought of a man who served others so selflessly.

There are few days that pass where I don't feel his influence or think fondly about him. His quiet nature and gentle way made him one of a kind. I didn't realize it at the time, but what my grandfather was doing for me at this time of my life was teaching me the importance of selflessness and generosity. Whatever he had he shared it with me. Whether it was the roof over my head or the endless amounts of hours we spent together, everything from him was a gift. He was concerned when I least knew it. My poor Sesame Street blanket lost its satin edging because he was afraid it would wrap around my neck in the middle of the night and strangle me. I can still see him as he walked to the garbage can, winding the satin around his hand as I stared in disbelief that my blanket had been marred by so tender a man. I remember vividly on a hot summer night when he let me sleep in his bedroom because he had an air conditioning unit in the window. Instead of having me be uncomfortable, he would let me sleep in controlled comfort while he snuck down to the basement (and his was a basement in every sense of the word) and slept on an old hospital bed in a darkened corner. My mother would later tell me that the bed he used was the same bed my grandma slept in while sick with cancer. It was always the small gestures that made the largest impact for me with my grandfather. Whether it was the grand gesture of serving his country or serving my grandmother in her final moments, I will forever be struck by his quiet dignity. Wanting no recognition or accolades for his deeds, Papa Ed always did everything because it was necessary-because it was what he had to do.

Papa “Spark” and Me

My other grandfather, Papa Spark, has thin, salt-and-peppered colored hair that is always slicked to the side with the same right-sided part and his silver framed glasses always showcase his bright, twinkling eyes. With a heavy breath, he always leans to his left supported by the countertop as he has one leg that is longer than the other and is extremely bow-legged. He is the most handsome eighty-eight-year old I know. His personality is quiet and warm, but he also believes in a strict daily routine to which he credits his longevity. He has high expectations and a stringent work ethic. He is the heartbeat of our family- the perfect balance of silliness and respect. If it's three o'clock I am just in time for coffee. He will “put the pot on” as he will say and brew me the best cup every time. As he pours, his hand wobbles shakily back and forth but miraculously never spills a drip.

“Courtneeee!” The greeting is always the same when I come through the back door of the house. My grandfather always exaggerates the “-ney” part of my name and I smile when I hear the familiar voice. Since I could reach the doorknobs, I have always walked in my grandparents' house unannounced and always through the back door. If the door is locked, I know exactly where to find the inconspicuously hidden key. “What's new?” my grandfather will always continue. I always respond, “Not much,” or “Nuthin,” to which he will say, “I know that much.” His dark eyes beam and his grin brims with mischief. If it is the weekend, he has on what he calls his “nice jeans” with a

button down shirt. If it's a weekday, I will catch him in a nice pair of what my grandmother refers to as "slacks." If he is not in his dressy casual clothing he will hear the wrath of my grandmother, Carol, and how he looks "bummy." I compare my grandparents to Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip of England. My grandmother, the Queen, has rigid rules and expectations of her family and holds dearly to tradition. My grandfather, the love of her life and always two steps behind her, tends to her every need and want. He lets her command their tightly run household, then again he is the reason it has run effortlessly for sixty-six years without so much as a hiccup.

My grandfather was born Lloyd Melvin Pryor on May 6, 1928, in Kingsford, Michigan, to Elsie and Henry Pryor. He is one of four children and has always lived at 200 Sheridan Street. The house he has lived in his entire life was built by the Ford Motor Company in 1924 in what is still called Ford Addition. My great-grandparents purchased the home and my great-grandfather worked for the Ford Motor Company only a few blocks away. Thankfully, his childhood home also became the childhood home for his children and now his grandchildren. The home is a snug but cozy two stories and is extremely manicured and well-maintained, and my grandfather has the bragging right of being the oldest and only original resident of Ford Addition to this day. In fact, a few years ago, a local television station interviewed him as to what it was like growing up in this quaint neighborhood with Henry Ford only living a block away. "Henry Ford was always friendly," my grandpa would recall. "You could walk past his home and see him outside and he'd always say 'hello'. He always wore a straw hat and had a pocket watch that hung from his waistband."

It was also during his childhood that my grandpa or “Papa” as I only call him would give himself his own nickname that would stick: Spark. While walking past a local pool hall my grandfather noticed a plethora of advertisements plastered to the side of the building. One of the ads was for *Spark Plug* chewing tobacco and this particular ad caught his eye. Cutting it carefully from the side of the building, he stole the section that read “Spark” and quickly made his way to school. Once there, he used a thumbtack to attach the sign to the front of his wooden desk and the rest is history. “I think you’re the only person I know who ever gave himself his own nickname that stuck,” I would tell him. Of course Spark has morphed into Sparky over the years, and I rarely hear anyone call him by his first name Lloyd.

Growing up during the Depression money was tight. But as my grandfather recalls those stressful times, he fondly remembers the era with pride. “We didn’t know we were poor,” he would recall with tears in his eyes and a strain in his voice (as he has gotten older my grandpa will get weepy over the smallest of topics to major life events.) Even though his family didn’t have a lot, I have heard both my grandparents reminisce of how my great-grandmother Elsie would scrimp together whatever food was available and feed the passing hobos on her back stoop. An “X” would be put on the front sidewalk and drifters would know that they could get a good meal at the Pryor household. “It was hard to feed anyone back then, so you can imagine how hard it must have been to give to others when your own family needed food,” my grandmother Carol has said. “Elsie was a good cook, so you knew you were getting a good meal if you stopped at her house,” she remembers. A gentle knock on the backdoor would be heard and a meal would be brought out. “No one was allowed to eat inside, but they could sit and eat outside,” my

grandfather recollects. Perhaps it is this same generosity and kindness that my grandfather inherited from his mother and father that he bestowed on me as a child and still well into my adult years.

While in high school my grandfather would excel in academics graduating tenth in a class of 142 students; unfortunately, he would never attend college after high school even though my grandmother looked into getting him a scholarship to attend Michigan Technological University. Instead he would work for the Wisconsin/Michigan Power Company until his retirement on July 1, 1988. He navigated the ranks of the company starting out as a temporary ground man while still in high school in 1944 and moving to meter reader, relay tester, supervisor of maintenance, and finally substation maintenance. My father recalls many times when he was a little boy how my grandfather would often leave dinner to help someone who was having issues with their electrical service. My grandmother would protest saying he put in his hours that day, and he should be spending his evening with his family eating dinner. Spark would never pass up the opportunity to make sure someone else was comfortable if it meant an inconvenience on his end. It was also while working for the power company that he would find his true passion for service while becoming an officer in the Michigan National Guard.

In 1946, Lloyd joined the National Guard. He had missed the draft for World War II by only two months when the government decided to stop drafting up to March 18th of the same year. He felt that if another war broke out from there on, he would be the one they would call. Not long after, the Korean War broke out, and he was certain he would be sent overseas but never received the orders. Since he was in the guard, he wasn't sure where he fit in in regards to the draft. He was informed to call main offices in

Lansing to help clarify his concern. He was told that he would be left in his unit, and if it was decided he was to be deployed, his whole unit would be drafted.

Serving in the National Guard in Kingsford, Michigan my grandfather reflected on how the reserves were constantly being reorganized. He started out in an Anti-aircraft unit also known as the 300 AAA Gun Battalion on November 1, 1949. The unit's primary responsibility was to protect the Soo Locks from enemy aircraft. He recalls how as new artillery was invented, his unit had to keep up with it. It wasn't long after the artillery unit would be changed to the 182nd missile battalion. Just like his job at the power company, my grandfather worked his way up the ranks during his tenure in the guard. On December 7th, 1952, he became an officer holding the rank of 2nd lieutenant (I am so impressed with my grandfather's memory while talking with him). Some of the coursework he was able to do through correspondence and two weeks of training, which he remembers being convenient; however, he had to make the journey to various bases in Virginia, Texas, and Minnesota to attend command and general staff school. He recalls how he kept being promoted and eventually earned the rank of lieutenant colonel. He spent most of his time in Kingsford as an engineer, but would later travel to Ishpeming which he also enjoyed. When all was said and done, he would retire after thirty-one years and three months of service. Once a lieutenant colonel, always a lieutenant colonel and my papa's military career will still seep into his everyday life even now. He is infamous for ending his voicemail messages with the simple, "Over" before hanging up. Papa Spark reflects fondly on the years he spent in the National Guard; however, my grandmother remembers the strain it also put on their marriage. Carol, who also worked full-time, was left to raise three young boys while Spark was often gone for long stretches

to complete schooling or attend lengthy trainings. “Somehow we managed,” Papa says with a wink. “Ugh! You think it’s easy, Court?” she responds while laughing.

Papa Spark attended school with my grandmother, but it wouldn’t be until 1945 during their senior year at Kingsford High School that they would begin dating. They married on October 28, 1950 and have been inseparable ever since. My grandma likes to reminisce about how on their wedding day she had “Spark and Carol” printed on the napkins, much to my grandfather’s family’s chagrin. Apparently no one in his family approved of his nickname. My grandparents would go on to have three boys: my father, Jon, the oldest, and my two uncles Steve and Todd. I should also mention that whenever I visit my grandparents (and especially while gathering information for this paper) my grandmother is right next to my grandfather. In fact, she had to keep my grandfather on track while he reminisced about his time in the military.

At times, I was confused as to what he was saying as I’m not always familiar with the terms he uses. My grandma finally interrupted saying, “Oh, Spark! You get so caught up in the minutia of it. Tell it to her so it’s easy to understand.” “What?” he responded, “I don’t have my hearing aids in,” he says while looking at me with an infectious grin. “Oh, Lloyd!” my grandma scoffed (she affectionately refers to him as Lloyd from time to time although I’m not sure of the proper spelling). This is her go-to line whenever he gives her a hard time. An outsider might think my grandmother’s treatment of my grandfather is harsh, but I have never witnessed a greater love story. My favorite picture of my Papa Spark is of him and my grandmother sitting in a diner as teenagers. She is immaculately dressed, her hair curled and pinned just so. He is in a suit with his dark hair combed gently to the side enhancing his striking widow’s peak and highlighting the

sparkle in his eyes. Their hands are just inches from each other as if the photographer was interrupting a private moment. This photo exudes the love that they still have for one another today. This same devotion has been an inspiration for my own marriage today.

My close relationship with my grandpa (or “Bullhead” as I often call him) because he is extremely stubborn started at a young age. Like my grandpa Edwin, my Papa Spark and I spent a lot of time together. My parents had joint custody after their divorce, and while my older siblings were in school full-time, it meant that I would need someone to watch over me while visiting my dad and he was away at work. Like my mother and her living situation with my grandpa Ed, my dad also lived with his parents after his divorce from my mother. I don’t want to say that I’m happy my parents separated; however, I know I wouldn’t have had the relationship that I did with my grandparents if they hadn’t.

When visiting my grandparents, my grandpa was the ideal babysitter as he was newly retired and my grandmother still worked. We had all sorts of fun before he would drive me to afternoon kindergarten at Norway Elementary. The one vivid memory I have is lying on my stomach in his pink carpeted living room coloring in my giant-sized Wild Puff-a-Lump themed coloring book while watching *The Price is Right* on television. I would yell at the TV for contestants to bid \$1 on the items that the audience oohed and ahed over. I remember plain cake doughnuts being on hand and directing my grandpa to warm in slightly in the microwave. Kicking my feet behind me, I slowly sipped a small glass of cool milk while eating the greasy deliciousness of the doughnut. Of course, I left my doughnut on the coloring book and a grease ring slowly seeped through the pages. He spoiled me with his attentiveness and still does! Not long after I finished my mid-

morning snack we would shuffle out to his 1971 Chevy Chevette and head to school. The Chevette reminded me of a brown turtle chugging slowly down the street. When I was forced to sit in the backseat by my demanding older sister, I innocently carved the ABC's in the hard plastic behind the passenger seat door with my finger (my grandpa never scolded me for my artwork, only now tears up when he reminisces about what I was quietly doing in the backseat). The best part about driving to school with Papa is that he would let me shift! He would steer and work the pedals while directing me how. I would giggle with amazement while listening to his commands, excited he was giving me such a responsibility. He would smirk under his brown feathered fedora as I obediently executed his command. As I grew older and, his car changed to a Ford Pony Escort with zero features-no power steering, leaking sunroof, manual windows with zero air conditioning, and the trunk was held open by an old ski pole. It was a low maintenance car just like Spark. As he would say, "It gets you from point A to point B." I should note that just as I had my Papa Ed's Ford Bronco at my mom's house, I had the help of the Escort to cruise my high school years when visiting my dad for the weekend as my papa always let me borrow it on the weekends. Whether he was driving the Chevette or the Escort, Papa would do everything: from pick me up at school, bring me to an orthodontic appointment, attend almost every basketball game I played in high school (or should I say sat the bench at)- his face was always being among the crowd. From the little moments to the grand, it was the devotion and time he set aside for me that will always be a long-lasting memory.

My grandfather spent countless hours each Wednesday afternoon helping me memorize Bible verses for my weekly Awana meetings at our local church. So many

verses are ingrained in my memory thanks to him sitting with me patiently each week and hearing me stammer and stumble over the words. Off he would whisk me for my 6 o'clock meetings each Wednesday night. I with my purple apple bag with my picture Bible and course book tucked inside, and he with his frayed and worn soft black leather bound Bible with the name Lloyd M Pryor stamped in gold letters on the lower right hand side. Each age group was given a name and, ironically, I was in a group called *Sparks*. I looked at Wednesday church nights as an extension of school, fun and engaging with the chance to socialize with others my own age, yet it was another lesson he was teaching me on the importance of religion in my life and the guiding role it would play for me. Studying all of those Bible verses at the kitchen table with him would pay off, and I would win the coveted *Sparky* award for excellence in Awana where I was given a plaque and a pin. I was also given a pink plastic drinking cup that has two children etched on it with their heads bowed; written on the cup are the words "Father We Thank Thee." My grandpa has the cup in his cupboard to this day and uses it each morning as a juice glass. Once in a while he'll ask me if I remember how I got it. He can't seem to part with it. I still have the pin that was awarded to me that says "Sparky" now in faded letters, and like the cup it means too much to ever let it go!

I have numerous childhood memories of me and my papa spending quality time together over the years. Whether it was helping him count the church offering or spending a quiet Saturday evening putting together puzzles or playing board games like Memory and Candy Land, he has always made time for me and has given me his undivided attention while we visit. Even into my adulthood and he at the age of eighty-eight, he will still listen to my homeowner gripes and help me navigate through the

precarious situations that I often find myself in. He lives three blocks away from me (I think I subconsciously picked my home just because it is by him). When I have questions, especially about electricity, it isn't unlike him to say, "Let me take a skip up," and before I know it he is at my front door. That's just how he is though. Never one to complain, he has always unselfishly put others before himself and will always do whatever is asked or needed in a humble and quiet manner. I am always amazed by his devotion to my grandmother, family, and his religion. He handles all of life's difficulties with a quiet determination that I haven't seen in anyone else. When I feel my problems are insurmountable or am uneasy about my future, he will often tell me two things: I am praying for you and patience is a virtue. When I was younger, the latter always made me cringe and roll my eyes; however, as I've gotten older I find his cliché words ringing true each day.

Some of his lessons are everyday practical. For example, Papa Spark has ingrained in me to never buy Viva paper towel at a six count for under a dollar a roll. He complains how the manufacturer messed up the size of the sheets recently and how the paper towel has become smaller in sheet size, which doesn't agree with him. I should also note he keeps a square of paper towel in his back pocket everyday just in case of emergency cleanups. No matter the damage, the paper towel is always returned to his back pocket. Toilet paper is another comical purchase at my grandparents' house. He only purchases his brand of choice when it is 17 cents a roll, but he hasn't seen prices like that in four or five months. At my last visit, there were 288 rolls of toilet paper in my grandpa's cellar in the basement. That's a lot for two people and, according to him, it's getting low! As odd as I find their stock pile I notice that I have quite the cache of TP in

my own home. Routine is essential for longevity. At ten o'clock each morning there is a coffee break followed by lunch promptly served at noon. There is the all-important three o'clock (decaffeinated) coffee break, and at five you will find him and my grandmother sitting down to dinner. There is also a ten p.m. snack so as to not to go to bed hungry. I know that by the clock I can predict what he is doing. Grocery shopping is done every Wednesday no matter what starting at 10 a.m. and on Saturday there is a house to clean.

My grandpa is a man who is proud of his stringent daily routines, and he made sure that while growing up that my siblings and I followed the same rules and principles. Some of the most important lessons my grandpa has instilled in me revolve around serving others around him. Most importantly he has taught me to have a firm faith in God, to put family first, to be kind and thankful for everything, and to work hard and take pride in my work. He takes pride in recreating painstaking traditions for my family each year like preparing and serving lutefisk, head cheese, and potato sausage for Christmas- trust me lutefisk and head cheese are not as intimidating to eat as they seem. He makes pasties from scratch (not a quick process) and devotes countless Saturday and Sunday mornings to scrambling eggs and preparing perfectly cooked bacon for people like me who like to pop in at a moment's notice. His claim to fame is that he has, "never had a bum meal yet" and if you are lucky enough to eat at his home you never will either! He has spoiled me rotten over the years, but if he only knew how much of an impact he leaves on me each and every time I visit.

I don't think I could account for every lesson he has taught me, but I can recall the most important lessons he has given me. Papa Spark is my inspiration for my own marriage and has taught me to work hard at my own relationship. He has taught me the

value of education and has encouraged me to pursue my master's degree. "No one can take an education away from you," he will always remind me. As I have often sat at his kitchen table lamenting over life's woes, he has shown me the value of being an exceptional listener, to not jump to conclusions but to rather sit and reflect on a problem before making a hasty decision and to be patient. I know that he has always known the best job was out there for me. My grandpa got where he is because of hard work and an honorable reputation. When I would complain about not being recognized for a position or wonder when I would get a break, he would simply listen. He would never say, "You're right," or "You got robbed on that last interview." I think it was his way of telling me that I needed to work harder or do something differently; complaining about something would get me nowhere.

His silence was often all I needed to hear. Being married for sixty-six years isn't an easy feat. Papa Spark has encountered many setbacks in his own life. His health hasn't always been the best. In fact there were a few instances where our family believed infections and illness would take him from us. He's been no stranger to a hospital bed or a nursing home. He always recovered, however. In recent years my grandmother has had her own physical ailments that have required his time and attention. In August she fell breaking multiple bones, and it was Spark who stepped up and played the role of nurse. He did everything for her from helping her maneuver out of chairs to assisting her in the most private of moments. His nurturing love and care has helped her to, "get back in their routine." At eighty-eight their routine is everything. I try to remember this same love and patience when I think of my own marriage. When I encountered my own obstacles of being married to a man in the military, I often found that I didn't know how to engage

with my husband and his changing personality. Where I saw frustration and a desire to give up, my grandfather encouraged me to be compassionate and loving. Through conversation grandpa showed me the importance of being kind to someone who puts up roadblocks and to not give up on someone just because he may be challenging. After all if anyone knows my grandmother, he or she knows the challenge Spark has loved unconditionally!

Papa Spark is the best teacher: kind, firm while commanding respect, encouraging, inspirational, and above all extremely lovable. In September of this year, my husband and I welcomed our first baby boy named Soren. We struggled with names at first, but my husband was adamant that he have the middle name of Lloyd. "I think it will be a nice way to honor your grandfather while he is still alive," Joe had said. The afternoon that our son was born, I called to tell my grandparents the news. Together they both got on the phone, and when I told Papa Spark his great-grandson had the middle name Lloyd he responded by saying, "You should change it to Bullhead instead." The waver in his voice let me know that he was happy with the honor. The next day, I heard a shy knock on my hospital room door and knew immediately it was my grandpa. When I called "Come in," I saw his profile shadowed on the wall from the harsh hallway light. I smiled as I heard the familiar shuffle come from around the privacy curtain partially dividing the room. In his hand he carried a single red rose and a smile that I will never forget. Having my own son carry on the name of a man I so love and respect was the best choice. I hope that Soren will know how he is named after a man who gives so much of himself to others while never asking for anything in return.

My Life with Joe

Ronald Joseph LeMire, Jr. was born January 28, 1980, in Grand Haven, Michigan. He is the youngest of seven children and goes by his middle of Joe. “I always thought parents named their first-born son after the father. I’m not sure why I’m the junior,” he will tell me. It should be noted that all of his siblings have French names like Jacques and Yvonne, and Joe has always disliked that he wasn’t bestowed with a similar name. He asked his father why he didn’t get a fun name like his siblings before him; his dad jokingly responded that by the time Joe was born, they had run out of names. Joe’s family is big, loud, and fun-loving with a lot of personalities to compete with at family gatherings. My Joe, however, is quiet, shy, and observant yet incredibly funny. “I never had to talk because all of my siblings talked for me,” he will say. Of course he exaggerates, but while others are talking and wanting to be heard Joe is listening.

After graduating from Norway High School in 1998, Joe attended Northern Michigan University. Having no way of paying for the hefty cost of tuition, he decided to enlist in the National Guard. He was attached to the unit in Ishpeming, Michigan until he decided to move temporarily to Baton Rouge, Louisiana at the request of a close childhood friend. It wouldn’t be too long until the “armpit” like weather as he has described it would push him to move back to the Upper Peninsula. I had always known who Joe was. He was three years older than me in high school and he and I actually shared friends. His best friend Jay and my best friend Toni are brother and sister. I often

passed Joe while visiting my girlfriend at her home, but always thought he was too cute to talk to. My husband has thick brown hair and honey colored eyes complimented by eyelashes that can sweep the floor. An athletic man, he'll never pass up the opportunity to play a sport or stop at a golf course. Each day with Joe is easygoing and his kindness exudes in everything he does. He wakes up every morning positive and upbeat, even when his alarm rousts him at 3:30 a.m. for work.

In late December 2003, I was twenty and Joe not quite twenty-four. Still home for Christmas break, my older brother Jeremy asked me if I wanted to get some food at a local bar. Not having much else to do, I agreed. When we arrived, a birthday party was in full swing. Neither my brother nor I knew the party members, yet my brother spotted Joe sitting at the bar and they quickly caught up. Jeremy moseyed around the room making chit-chat and left me by myself. It was then that Joe started to talk to me. Thinking he was ever-so-handsome, I garnered the courage to sit next to him. He asked me to hang out with him on New Year's Eve and we've been together now over twelve and a half years. We complement each other in ways that are good for one another. As my brother Jeremy has said and to steal a quote Forrest Gump, "Courtney and Joe go together like peas and carrots." We can often finish each other's sentences and one of us is always making the other laugh. We also genuinely enjoy being together; perhaps that has been the key to our long-lasting relationship. He's the no-stress to my anxiety, the relaxed to my worried, and the positive push when I'm hesitant. The Joe that I fell in love with temporarily slipped away for a few years when he was called to serve in Afghanistan and Iraq. I would often receive compliments about Joe and wonder where the man they were talking about had vanished to. Things like, "Your husband is a wonderful man," or, "Joe

is the ultimate professional. I was happy to serve with him.” My heart always beamed with pride, but I wanted to experience this same side of Joe that so many had admired. It would take quite a few years, conversations, and unfortunately many arguments until glimmers of that former Joe would start to reappear.

In early 2005, Joe prepared for his first deployment in Afghanistan. He was twenty-five and I just twenty-two. He would return home in April of 2006 and if he was different the changes were subtle, plus there was the honeymoon period of being reunited with him after being separated for so long. Joe would comment that he didn't want to be around large groups of people, so we stayed in more. He became irritable if anyone brought up his experience overseas, so we changed the conversation. It became worrisome when he began sleeping more and became uninterested in finding a job. He would joke about his PTSD, an acronym I hadn't heard until he used it, and I as well as others would laugh at what we thought was just Joe being funny. There was an opportunity to go to Iraq in mid-May of 2007, and Joe expressed interest in going. Being preoccupied with student teaching and finding full-time employment, I didn't find his wanting to go overseas again too worrisome. Also, while on a brief leave during the 2007 deployment, Joe proposed so I had a joyous distraction to think of.

“You'll never understand the rush of being deployed,” my husband said to me via text during the winter of 2011. During his third deployment I saw the most change in him; maybe I was less preoccupied. This time I was quite annoyed with his decision to re-up for a third deployment. I thought two tours were plenty, yet there was the allure of him being promoted to sergeant which ultimately was his deciding factor. He mentioned once that the unit from Gladstone, Michigan was deploying and I voiced my concerns of

him leaving again. When I returned home one evening I asked him if he was still thinking about going with the Gladstone unit. When he told him that he gave him his word that he would earlier in the day I was shocked and hurt. We were living in Marquette, Michigan, during this time while he was going to school, and I was working as a long-term substitute teacher in Norway almost two hours away. I was commuting and living with my parents during the week and that alone was not ideal for a still newlywed couple. Where was I going to live while he was away? What was I going to do without him for another 12-15 months? Our lease on our apartment would soon be up, and our bank account was dwindling. My head was reeling too fast to process his decision. While enlisted deployments are always a possibility, I wanted to be supportive because I knew that I signed up just as much as he did; however, I knew that I would need help as well.

His changes were subtle at first and then became more worrisome for me. First was the withdrawn behavior. He spent most of the winter of 2010 sitting on the couch watching TV, and happily oblivious to the world around him. His always jovial hazel eyes were stormy and distant. When I would ask him if he wanted to do anything he always declined. My requests were simple, but I could never get him to agree. Joe didn't want to go out to eat, he didn't want to visit with friends, he didn't want to see a movie, he didn't even want to rent a movie. I got a sense that he was mentally preparing to go back to Afghanistan. Next, Joe started taking extremely long naps throughout the day. He would simply walk up the stairs of our apartment and quietly shut the bedroom door. It would be hours before he would reemerge. I remember vividly on the day of our second wedding anniversary of how I couldn't persuade him to come and have lunch with

me to celebrate our special day. Wounded, I ended up having lunch with a friend instead of my husband.

It wasn't uncommon for Joe to have to spend time training in Grayling, Michigan, before being sent overseas. When he told me he would be spending two weeks at Camp Grayling preparing for deployment I wasn't surprised. However a few weeks after his return, we received a medical bill for an alarmingly high amount. "This must be a mistake," I remember saying aloud after opening the mail. "What?" Joe responded from the living room. "We got bill in the mail from some place I've never heard of before. You're not sick. Could it be a mix-up with your dad? Did he recently receive care?" My last two questions were a possibility in my mind. Joe and his father shared the same first name and was a native of Lower Michigan. He was often in poor health, so to me this was his bill. "Let me look at it. I can take care of it. It's no big deal," was Joe's response. I knew we didn't have this kind of money and we certainly couldn't afford to pay his father's medical bills if this was the case. Joe assured me it would be fine, but I was still concerned.

The worrier in me kept pestering Joe to get to the bottom of the bill. Weeks passed and I feared the worst financially. The billing department for the medical office kept alerting us of the past due amount. When I confronted Joe for the final time about the bill, he finally revealed that he had been the cause. While at Camp Grayling he had a panic attack but actually thought he was having a heart attack. An ambulance was called, and the bill was for the ride to the hospital and the care he received. I was saddened that he couldn't tell me this in the first place. How could he mentally go back to Afghanistan if he was having panic attacks? The more I questioned and pushed, the more he shut

down and wouldn't answer me. In hindsight, I am embarrassed by my approach. I thought that if I raised my voice and slammed a few doors my questions would be answered, but they weren't.

To avoid further discussions of Joe and the impending deployment, I went into planning mode. I found a place to rent in my hometown of Norway and spent my summer moving and cleaning. I tried to focus on myself. I sent out job applications for full-time teaching positions in the area and put my name back on the substitute teacher list as a fallback. Joe was distant, opting rather to spend his time at the local golf course. I think while he prepared mentally, I did also. I focused on what I was going to do for the next year and avoided the questions of others, especially those of my parents, to try and get through. When October of 2010 came, I was a different person.

I generally consider myself to be a tender and nurturing individual and am compelled to make those around me feel at home and more comfortable. However, after my husband's third deployment, I just could not be compassionate anymore. The first two mandatory deployments were hard enough, and I saw small but not alarming changes in his warm and affectionate personality. Deployments are emotionally exhausting for all parties involved and being newly married this was an unnecessary move in my mind. I was and always will be proud of Joe, yet something told me that this time I wouldn't have the tools to cope with his behavior or help him in the way that he needed.

In October of 2010, I said my goodbyes for the third time at the Gladstone Armory without a tear as he headed for Afghanistan. I had known since January that he would be leaving and I guess the nine months prior had afforded me the ability to become

numb to the situation. The night before the armory paid for us to stay in a hotel to accommodate the early morning departure from the armory. Joe chose to go to bed at 7 p.m., and I was angry that he didn't want to spend the last few precious hours together doing something worthwhile but sleeping is what he chose to do. Pathetically, I left the hotel room later that evening and grabbed a chicken sandwich from Burger King only to find him still sleeping when I returned. I thought he would have heard me leave and at least inquire as to where I went. The next morning was an awkward breakfast at the armory, and while he gathered his belongings from my car I couldn't wait to get out of there! I remember getting in the driver's seat while my car idled on that chilly fall day staring straight ahead while Joe slipped into the passenger seat. We said nothing. Finally he announced that he should go, and with a quick hug he swooped out of the car and back into the warmth of armory. That was our goodbye. The final sendoff would take place at Gladstone High School, but I was going home. Part of me couldn't bear to watch small children and other husbands and wives quiver as they hugged and kissed their beloved. The other part of me didn't want to see Joe get on another chartered bus headed for another fort preparing for another war front.

Dropping him off in October, I expected to hear of his safe arrival at some point during the coming weeks especially since many units are stateside training before they are finally deployed overseas; however, I had to wait until February to actually hear from him. At that point I was hurt and confused. I had heard of other husbands and significant others reaching out to loved ones back home, yet it shocked others to hear that I had yet to hear from my husband. The whole romantic notion of the wife waiting for her beloved soldier had worn off in my mind. In fact, I was embarrassed to admit that I hadn't even

received so much as an email. My parents tried to remind me that in previous war situations, like the ones my grandparents had endured, loved ones were lucky to receive snail mail letters every so often back on the home front. I was impatient. I kept seeing bank debits come through our bank account, so I knew my husband was okay, or maybe someone else was using his debit card. Why wasn't he contacting home or contacting anyone at home for that matter? During the first two deployments, I was spoiled hearing from him at least once a week, so I tried to remind myself of the situation and how difficult this all was. This situation wasn't all about just me and my feelings or need.

When I finally did hear from my husband, he gave a simple, "I've been busy." I understood immediately that of course he was; however, the tone in which he delivered these words was not in the happy-go-lucky tone that I was used to. He had an edge and was hardened. In August during his leave, I wasn't prepared for the beast that I would soon encounter. I was alarmed first by the amount of alcohol that he was able to consume in one sitting. I tried to justify it by thinking he is on leave and it's been a while since he was allowed to drink. I was nervous as he sat watching TV and sweated profusely (he explained he had been prescribed an anti-anxiety medication called citalopram hydrobromide used to treat depression. A few of the side effects I observed were dry mouth, drowsiness, fatigue and sweating. This alarmed me, especially when he would mix with alcohol). "It's just my crazy pills," he would say. I hated that phrase. "You're not crazy!" I would always say with an edge in my voice. I was concerned when he had no real motivation to visit with other family members that were waiting anxiously for his visit. I was scared when he told me he thought about killing himself.

Killing himself? How could this be? I always thought Joe had such a zest for life. Why was he contemplating taking his own life? Who in the military did not detect his unhealthy behavior? I even asked him how his behavior went undetected and he responded with the chilling phrase of, "I've become really good at lying." I was suddenly angry that he could think of leaving me and bewildered that he was allowed to fight for our country. He told me I would never understand. When I pleaded with him to explain so that I could understand, I was met with the cutting words of, "You've done nothing to help me!" I was angered that someone who obviously needed help could be considered fit in a battle zone. When I questioned him on this, he stated that he was a good liar and was able to answer the questions that were needed to be redeployed with a passing competence. I was reeling from this scary information. Knowing no one he was deployed with, I was uncertain where to turn.

It was so painful to watch someone I loved and not know how to help. I had no other friends that could relate when I tried to explain my panic. Some even softly mentioned maybe I should get a divorce. How could I even think of leaving someone in such a dire and fragile state? I mentioned to his parents my concern. I remember vividly his mother responding by saying he seemed the same to her. His father even stated he was still making the family laugh with his humor. I tried to explain what it was like when it was just the two of us alone. I couldn't have his threats go unknown, but no one seemed to take my words seriously because he was not acting the way I was explaining when he was in front of others.

One night, out of frustration, I pleaded with Joe as to how I could help him. He responded by saying there was nothing I could do. I was miffed. I wasn't getting

anywhere with him emotionally, and his family and close friends seemed to think it was a phase that would pass. Ultimately, I just said the words I've come to regret. "Whatever it is that's bothering you, you're just going to have to get over it!" The look on his face said it all. I knew those words that flowed so light and easy from my lips weighed immensely in his ears. I was his constant and emotional stability, and when I threw up my arms that evening I saw the pain in his eyes. Did I mean what I said? At the time I did. I was strained from trying to understand a situation and emotions I knew I would never be able to experience myself. A part of me felt abandoned and somewhat emotionally abused. I was tired. I thought Joe would be pleased that I was willing to do whatever it took to make him feel safe and loved; nevertheless my help and comfort was met with an icy disdain. Could Joe ever get over whatever "it" was? I know there was a part of him that wanted me to hear and understand his struggle, yet ironically he refused to be vulnerable. Our relationship was at an impasse. I believed being a broken record and asking what was wrong on a regular basis would heal his troubles. He believed his silent screaming said it all and was enough for me to understand. We needed to relearn how to communicate with one another.

When Joe left to fulfill the remainder of his deployment, I was determined to "fix" the situation. I wanted to understand his behavior and to know that I wasn't alone. Surely everyone with a deployed loved one was going through the same situation? I was positive that someone would be able to relate. I went to counseling alone. Maybe I was the problem. Maybe I wasn't supportive enough, didn't care enough, didn't say "I love you" enough. The support contact in his unit only seemed relieved when I told her he was finally contacting me abroad. I had to laugh when I contacted the U.S. Department

of Veterans Affairs to see if I could speak with someone to shed light on his behavior. First, they told me that since he was a patient that they could not give me any information on him. Of course, I understood the confidentiality involved, I tried to explain. I wasn't asking necessarily about him, I wanted to know how to handle him and his behavior. I wanted to know what I could do. I was told that some reading materials could be forwarded to me at my home address that would be helpful. I excitedly awaited their deposit into my mailbox. Unfortunately, when I tore into the manila envelope I had pamphlets that dated back to the early 1990's and Operation Desert Storm. The information was somewhat relevant albeit dated, but I wanted readings on the obstacles that veterans were facing now! I wanted to scream.

I never received answers to my many questions. For a few years I prodded and questioned my husband, but I only saw that he become emotional and verbally aggressive. Gradually I stopped asking questions and became quiet to the situation, and I'm not sure that was the best option either. There are moments I still grapple with how to relate to him to this day. I know that when he does talk about his deployments I try to absorb as much of what he is saying as possible. I find that our relationship is still in its healing phase and we're still trying to acclimate to a life with one another. I have prayed that by just being there, and not giving up was a good decision. There are days when I have to dig my heels in a little harder and deeper to make it work and be understanding to a situation I know very little about. I am proud of Joe and his accomplishments and I am extremely fortunate and grateful to have my loved one returned to me physically healthy. The excitement is so momentary after the parades and welcome home parties. Not long after the real work begins and I was left unprepared.

I regret saying many words throughout that deployment because it wasn't who I wanted to be. I don't give up, and I didn't want my husband to feel as if the small support system he had was breaking; however, part of me wanted to throw my hands up and walk away. It's amazing how hard it can be to communicate with someone you love. Those on the outside probably roll their eyes and think Joe and I are terrible communicators and it's an easy fix. It is funny how friends and family recoiled when I talked about the Joe that I witnessed and how they didn't want to believe how he was acting, especially when I mentioned the word suicide. I tried to (maybe unsuccessfully at times) to be as proud and supportive as I could be but want it to be understood that there is a dark side of these proud times.

One of the harder things to watch was when Joe would come home and find that he had no direction. He didn't have a stable job waiting for him when he returned, and so the only possibly solution seemed to be for him to collect unemployment until the next deployment was ready. From 2005 until 2011, I watched as he found no purpose in home life stateside, but found his real identity when called to serve. I was surprised then that at the age of thirty-two my husband did not have a resume. He struggled to find challenging, meaningful work in 2012, and I was all too enthusiastic to help him put together a resume that highlighted his skills. I could see he was both appreciative and maybe even somewhat embarrassed that he was struggling to create his resume and also search for jobs. Fortunately, I was experienced in creating and submitting my own resume while using multiple job databases to search for work. I think we both bonded over trying to find full-time employment that we enjoyed while commiserating over the daily grind until we found what we were looking for.

In 2014, Joe found success working at Verso a paper mill not far from our home. This particular corporation is keen on hiring veterans, and also manages to pay well. Eventually I saw his self-esteem return as he found worth in his daily work. He has since been promoted twice and the meaning and purpose, I sense, has gradually returned.

Living Through Sacrifice and Service

It has taken quite a few years since Joe's return in 2011 for our relationship to become stable. I still worry in the back of my mind that Joe could regress and is only stifling a beast. Was he always like this behaviorally, and I never knew it? Or did the deployments bring this out of him? These are questions that still linger in my mind. I've learned slowly to let go of my anger and that by being a broken record and hounding him to speak when he's not ready isn't healthy. It can be so easy to focus on the negative behaviors but recently Joe said, "Why don't we focus on what makes us happy instead of dwelling on the negative?" As soon as he spoke those words I was propelled back to the early years of life with Joe- those carefree moments of two kids who just enjoyed being with one another. It is a moment like this that I am glad I didn't heed the advice to leave my husband because our marriage became turbulent. I look at the examples of enduring love in my own life and am encouraged by the unwavering strength of my grandparents who persevered when faced with the obstacles that military life often presents. I am moved and encouraged by the way my grandfathers and Joe volunteered to help others without hesitation even if it meant sacrificing a piece of who they are for a greater good.

I am appreciative for the adventures that we have shared and endured, and I wouldn't have wanted to share my life with anyone else. Soon we both learned of our greatest journey to date. On January 10, 2016, Joe and I were elated to learn we would be parents. To say Joe was excited to learn he would have a son is an understatement; furthermore, it was beyond exciting to watch him develop into his new role as a father. Finally, after forty-one long weeks, on September 23, 2016, we welcomed Soren Lloyd LeMire into our world. It was exciting to watch Joe and his emotional response throughout the entire pregnancy, yet words can't describe his initial reaction when he was handed his baby boy. When Soren took first breath, it was then that I saw Joe's duty and a new kind of service return. I found him smiling in the kitchen not long after Soren was born. Noticing his euphoria, I asked him what he was doing. "Nothing," was his response, "I just think I found my calling being a papa is all." I've seen this look before. Joe is wonderful at giving everything he has without question to others. The commitment he promises affords other will be taken care of, even if it means he might have to sacrifice the best parts of himself. With Soren it will be a different commitment that Joe will give him as his father, yet I can't help but think of the commitment he has given to those who he will never meet or know personally. I never had the opportunity to know the Joe who served overseas. Every now and then, however, I get a glimpse of who Joe was overseas. One of Joe's army buddies will say, "Your husband is a wonderful man," or, "Joe is the ultimate professional. I was happy to serve with him." My heart always beams with pride because I know exactly the Joe they are talking about.

For each of my grandfathers I was a daily duty. For one of them, I temporarily filled an aching void left in my grandmother's absence and for the other, a workaholic

lieutenant colonel I gave him a purpose to help fill his retirement days. I was too young to notice and understand any of the invisible burdens that each might have carried, yet I was always aware that there was something so much more and complex to each of them than just being a grandfather. They were continuously followed by their shadow of service and have left an impressionable legacy on so more people than I will ever know.

My husband Joe and I have had a different experience. Unlike my relationship with my grandfathers that was full of love and carefree play, I was forced to face a different and uneasy side of serving head on. I often wonder if my grandmother Marion had the same experiences with my grandpa Ed when he came home from World War II. With Joe, we have had to deal with his service abroad and its emotional aftermath, yet we have also had to serve one another by being loving and supportive even when we didn't think we had anything left to give to each other. Serving others is exhausting because it can be hard to be there for someone when he or she is at his or her ugliest, but the three men in my life have selflessly shown me that it is important to stick to something or someone, no matter how challenging because in the end there is purpose in it that work.

I look at each of my grandfathers and Joe and see so many similar qualities, yet all three are so different. Edwin, Lloyd, and Joe served during different demanding periods in our nation's history, and I often wonder why my grandpa Ed and Joe were so hesitant to ask for help and to appear vulnerable in front of the family who love both men so much. I sense their lessons bleeding into my own work as an educator. For example, my grandfathers both prepared me to be compassionate and to be observant and listen for those who may need help. Joe has shown me the importance of being patient and kindhearted towards those who may be struggling. Professionally I have been forced to

interact with many individuals who have made me uncomfortable over the years, but in return have also allowed me to grow. I am humbled and proud to have known men like my grandfathers and Joe. They are a constant reminder of how to selflessly give while being a true testament of what it means to serve others.

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