

## 2019 Veterans Day Essay Contest High School Honorable Mention: You Jin Lee

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Ironically, I was studying the Declaration of Independence around the flagpole on the day I first learned of Lance Corporal Nicholas C. Kirven. An old man, periodically swiping the sweat from his brow, greeted my AP Government class with a reference to the small memorial placed in the grass.

“He was a good kid. A brave man.”

With those words, he stood in front of the memorial for a few minutes, until either the heat or our curious stares sent him on his way. He did not stay long enough for us to ask who he was talking about, and I did not think much about the interaction until examining the memorial myself.

Lance Corporal Nicholas C. Kirven was a “good kid,” a “brave man,” and a hero whose inspirational powers transcend time. He taught us that heroes are not always born from violence but wrought from compassion and dedication. Always referred as “the peacemaker” (Patterson, 2005) by his family, Kirven preferred “the work of rebuilding the country” to “hunting down al Qaeda.” (McCrummen, 2005) He periodically asked his family to send him food and Beanie Babies to pass out to the Afghan children, reassuring his mother that it was “the children that need things” the most (Patterson, 2005). For Kirven, winning the war was not about the battles. The humanitarian work, the compassion he never lost amid the red sea of violence, was his form of victory. His devotion to Afghanistan and adoration of children did not die with him; Beth Belle, his mother, established the Nicholas Kirven Fund “to give back to young music students in the community” and aid children in Afghanistan (Kavner, 2011).

Not only did Kirven establish befriending the native people his mission, he was also dedicated to his fellow soldiers. His occasional visits back in Richmond were always accompanied with recruiting visits to the mall and Douglas S. Freeman, the high school he graduated, and I will soon graduate from. It was not just other high schoolers he encouraged to join the military, however, he also motivated his older stepbrother to continue his pilot training and join the Air Force. Kirven died in service protecting what he believed in, ambushed while assessing the situation for his squad’s protection. He had less than thirty days left until he came home, safely away from the violence and on his way to George Mason University.



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Despite knowing this, Lance Corporal Kirven remained dedicated to his duty and beliefs, an act of compassion that defines him as a hero today (Patterson, 2005).

Standing beneath the flag that day, I read a document about freedom without genuinely understanding it. For me, Lance Corporal Nicholas C. Kirven defined action of standing around flagpole, reading the Declaration of Independence. He is our identity as Americans, to have the courage to love your community and the freedom to protect it. The dedication and determination that defined him as a soldier, and the sympathy that esteemed him as a hero will continue to inspire generations beyond his time.



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