

2019 Veterans Day Essay Contest Middle School Winner: Brooke Eubanks

Inspiration to a Nation

Inspiration comes in many shapes and sizes. Every day members of our military get out of bed and stand up for something many of us may take for granted: our freedoms. They are willing to risk their lives for people they don't even know and that is nothing less than remarkable. But one military member truly inspires me on a personal level, and that military member is my uncle, Sergeant First Class Eddie O. Johnson. His character and love of our country have taught me three life lessons I believe we can all learn from.

Lesson One: Being courageous carries responsibility. My uncle knew when he was 16 years old he wanted to join the military. He first thought about becoming a police officer but the Constitution of the United States had such a strong effect on him that he chose a career with the Army as a mechanic [Johnson Interview, 2019]. Eddie felt a need to “defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic” [5 U.S.C. 3331]. In fact, the day after Eddie graduated from high school in 1988, a recruiter drove him to basic combat training in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Eddie could have chosen to go on vacation or parties like his friends, but he knew he had made a choice to be loyal to our country and that loyalty was his priority [Johnson Interview, 2019].

Lesson Two: Never forget your effect on people. On June 25, 1996, the Khobar Towers bombing happened in Saudi Arabia where over 300 American military personnel were injured [Shenon, 1996]. SFC Johnson was asleep in that building when it happened. He said he was awoken by a loud explosion and shaking of the building when part of it fell. SFC Johnson did not concern himself with his own well-being but rather rushed to help other people in the rubble. He wanted to save lives. He said he would never have been able to live with himself if one person died in that building because he did not try and help them in their time of need [Johnson Interview, 2019]. I wonder what kind of world we would be living in today if we all embraced the effect we have on other people and worked to help one another, in both good times and bad.



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Lesson Three: Freedom creates discipline. SFC Johnson went to Iraq for two tours. His first tour was in 2003 as part of the invasion of Iraq. The United States invaded Iraq because we wanted to make sure Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction [Hinnebusch, 2007]. In reading emails from SFC Johnson, it was 125 degrees there and his unit did not have any water for a shower or hot food for over two months. Yet, he wrote in his email that “we are all happy we made it this far and that the support was overwhelming!!” [Johnson email, April 2003]. I cannot imagine what that must have been like. But for Americans to be able to continue the freedoms we all enjoy, that freedom creates discipline in our military to continue in such situations.

SFC Johnson’s military service ended in 2009. He was in Iraq trying to help a child in the road reach his destination safely. Unfortunately, SFC Johnson did not know the child was wearing a bomb, and, knowing Eddie, that would not have mattered. The bomb exploded causing SFC Johnson to become injured. He was rushed to a hospital in Germany and then Texas. He was diagnosed with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

Today, Eddie is retired from the military and lives in Lumberton, New Jersey. He volunteers with local schools to help middle schoolers and high schoolers learn how to read food labels and make sound decisions for themselves. He also coaches a soccer team for the less fortunate and pays fees and uniform costs for his players. He believes all people, young and old, should have the freedom to enjoy the good things in life and he continues to make sure that happens even though he is no longer in the military.

I am very proud of my uncle. He has shown me to work hard and never give up even in tough situations. What we can all take from his legacy is to try our best and believe in what we stand for. My uncle did all of these things, and so can we.



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