

As of purpose and passion were celebrated by

[Business](#), [Career](#)



As Matt was being lowered into the ground, officers were solemnly playing taps, followed by the abrupt, staccato sound of a twenty-one gun salute.

I was only twelve years old as I watched this honorable farewell, not fully understanding the magnitude of his death. But I can now trace my personal journey towards living purposefully back to that sorrowful moment. My belief that all people should have the opportunity to pursue their true passions began when I met Matt, and was cemented when I said goodbye to him. Matt was my best friend's older brother, and he became like my own. I admired Matt for so many reasons: he possessed quiet strength, was very intellectual, naturally athletic, and was universally empathetic. Matt lived honestly, which should not be unique, but I came to realize that it must be a path purposefully chosen. When I finished fifth grade, Matt graduated high school.

He excelled at science, and everyone declared engineering to be his perfect career. Matt's hard work and academic commitment yielded many amazing college choices, including acceptance to Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Although this seemed to define success for most prospective college students, Matt confidently chose to forgo traditional educational routes and walk a more personally meaningful path.

After declining many impressive college offers, he fulfilled his own dream by enlisting to become a Navy SEAL. Matt's personal convictions and commitment to pursuing his true passions were even more impressive because the community in which he was raised regarded a seamless march from high school to university as inevitable. In 2012, Matt was deployed to Afghanistan, fulfilling his dream of serving his country as a SEAL. Merely two

weeks later, after completing a humanitarian mission to aid local citizens, Matt's team came under heavy gunfire from insurgents. Without fear or hesitation, Matt moved to the front of the ambush to protect his team. In doing so, he saved the lives of his military brothers, but gave his own.

But Matt was true to form in his last moments — ever the gallant and noble warrior whom I had grown up admiring. On November 1st, 2012, Matt's final acts of purpose and passion were celebrated by a silver star for heroism, a Purple Heart, and many other accolades. Yet Matt's pursuit of his own dreams and beliefs were reflected by far more than these tangible commendations. Before Matt was lowered into the ground, one by one, his team took off their SEAL emblems, pinned them to his coffin, and saluted Matt. When I touched his coffin, I knew in that moment that the success of one's life is not measured by its length.

Matt lived a very happy, meaningful life regardless of his early passing. His honest way of living taught me to be honest to myself, and to pursue my passions, despite obstacles, challenges, and societal pressures. I have learned to look deep within myself and choose what is right for me regardless of what is popular. As a teen, I am constantly being challenged by social pressures, fueled by ubiquitous social media. Despite this barrage, bolstered by the example set by Matt's dedication to his personal beliefs, I choose to stay home on a Friday night to do homework to better myself as a student, instead of going to parties.

I choose to volunteer to create a homeless shelter through my church, and solicit food donations to ensure that food insecure families have a proper

Thanksgiving. I am motivated to lead and to serve my community so I can make a difference in the world. Working to ensure that others have the opportunities that I am grateful for is essential to my own pursuit of happiness. This is what I believe. And, honoring Matt, I live those beliefs on a daily basis and will choose to follow these convictions while developing opportunities to impact a wider community at college.