

Patriotism brings  
justice



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Be an American, support America, believe in America, and justice will prevail.

I must admit, to me, those words would have had no meaning before September 11th and the war in Iraq. I have always appreciated everything that America provides for us, but I never truly showed my appreciation or even realized it. When the events of September 11th happened, I remember hearing over the announcements that a terrorist attack had occurred. That was the first time I had ever heard anything about terrorist attacks, and I had no idea what was going on and what the Twin Towers even were.

It wasn't until I got home and saw the footage on the news of the Twin Towers being hit that I realized what a tragedy it really was. Over the following few weeks I had heard so much about September 11th and everyone that had been helping families that were affected by the tragedy, I began to understand and learn of the importance of patriotism. But it wasn't until 2004, when I met the Barbret family, that I truly found appreciation for our country and its people. In 2003, Mark Barbret, the brother of my good friend Paul, joined the army and was transferred to Iraq shortly after the war started.

This was the first family I knew that was playing a large role in the war in Iraq. I wasn't sure what to feel at first, but I gave Mark Barbret and his family all the support I could give them. I didn't comprehend the bravery and courage the soldiers and their families must endure until one certain event happened. On the morning following October 14, 2004, I got a call from another close friend. They told me to read an article in the Macomb Daily News about a convoy that had been bombed. Paul's brother and two other soldiers were in the convoy when this happened; none of them survived.

The article read, " Barbret was killed near Ar Ramad, Iraq when an explosive device detonated near a convoy in which he rode. Two other soldiers died in the blast. " It was like time froze when I read those words; my heart dropped, my life was no longer the same. I couldn't imagine losing a loved one in such a terrible way. For the first time I had felt the intense feelings of pain and sadness that millions of people were feeling after losing loved ones on September 11, 2001. That event provoked me to become very passionate about the country I live in.

I became much more interested in what was going on in our world. I began following the news to keep up on what was going on in Iraq and prayed for the soldiers fighting for our country. My family was also very touched by this event and I will never forget what my dad, a former Navy Seal, told me. He said " Be an American, support America, believe in America, and justice will prevail". He taught me that patriotism is about supporting our country and the people in it, whether we are feeling pain or happiness. No matter what the situation our country is in, we still have love for the country we live in.

If everyone stands up for our country and has faith, everything will turn out to be okay. We will get justice for all the hurt we have been through as long as we believe in each other and stick together. It was one year after his death; I was at the annual memorial service for Mark Barbret, and it's an absolutely beautiful day, the sun is shining and the clouds are velvety and white. As I approach the building, I can see Marks family; his parents Kim and Angie, sister Stephanie and brother Paul, and Mark's now four-year-old son, Christian.

All of them stand greeting the guests heartbroken yet proud at the same time. The friends and family are reminiscing with one another about the times they had spent with Mark and rejoicing about his courage to fight for our country. We then start gathering inside to watch a very loving slideshow with pictures of Mark and his family and friends. Playing in the background along with the slideshow is the song " Wind Beneath my Wings" by Bette Midler in honor of what a hero Mark is to his family, friends, and America.

To this day whenever I hear that song, I picture the memorial and the slideshow in my mind. After the memorial service some close friends and I went to the cemetery with the Barbret family to spend some time at Mark's monument, we decide that this is going to be a tradition for every year that goes by. It is a tall, remarkable monument towards the back of the peaceful cemetery, with red and white flowers all around; his family is carrying some of Mark's favorite things, such as a Butterfingers bar and his favorite drink, Captain Morgan's rum, to lay them out by the monument to add a personal touch.

Afterward we spent the rest of the night together pouring out our thoughts over the past and appreciating the wonderful people in our lives, we also made this a tradition for every year that has gone by. The next day, October 15, 2005, Mark's name was added to the Shelby Township Veteran's Memorial alongside the nineteen other soldiers from Shelby that had died fighting for our country starting back in World War I. Channel 4 News captured the memorial service and also went to the Barbret household and did a documentary with the family, honoring the first person in Shelby Township to die for our country in the War in Iraq.

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I remember watching the documentary from the other room; Mark's father Kim had the biggest impact on me he was talking about his son and how he gets by each day. Kim is a bigger guy and always smiling and joking with everyone. I had never seen him so emotional before that moment and this brought tears to my eyes instantly. There were so many strong emotions coming from everyone: sadness, pride, appreciation, love, and togetherness. The most intense emotion I felt was inspiration.

The Barbret family has been so strong getting through life after such a tragic experience. They have inspired me so much and made me very proud of our country. Throughout the past few years many of my friends have also joined the military, most of which are going to Iraq. My friend Stew has been in Iraq for just over four months now. I talked to his mother the other day she said he is doing well, and she is so proud of her son for being so courageous. I also have a friend Eric, who has been in boot camp since October 30th.

I try to write them as often as possible to keep their spirits high and let them know friends and family are thinking of them. Every person that I know going into the military builds up my appreciation for America even more. I look up to them so much and appreciate all of the soldiers defending our country. The families and friends of these soldiers also need much support and consideration. Lets all stick together and show the world what America is all about!