

Brotherly Love

Take a moment and look closely at this picture.

This is me on my first day in Iraq standing next to my best friend, Ross McGinnis. We were both 19 then. Ross was the youngest man in our battalion. He was a goofy kid with a great sense of humor. He was so skinny you could almost count his ribs under his shirt. He hated PT as much as anyone. Not your typical "American Sniper" type hero.

But despite his non-heroic appearance, I'll wager you won't find a more heroic person.



Nine years ago today, he sacrificed himself by lying on top of a hand grenade thrown into his vehicle, absorbing the blast and saving the other four soldiers inside his Humvee. Ross was killed instantly and was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, our nation's highest award.

For years, this day brought me grief, but now I take something else away from it: Love. Ross loved his country so much that he put aside personal liberties to join the Army during wartime at 18 years old. Ross loved his job so much that he did it without complaint every day through the worst of conditions. Ross loved his brothers so much that he literally died for them.

I still grieve his death and think about him daily (his picture is hanging on my office wall to remind me of his selfless sacrifice every day). But my love for him is greater than my grief. I appreciate what he did more every day. His single act of selflessness not only saved those four men, also my Brothers, but many of those men have since had children, who will one day have children of their own. It's impossible to predict just how many lives Ross's sacrifice will ultimately impact--how many lives he saved.

It saddens me to see where our country's priorities lie. Ross's heroic sacrifice is largely unknown by the American people. Many hail sports stars or movie actors as heroes. But not me. For I have had the honor to know a true hero--to serve in a company of men cut from that same cloth. I will continue to carry on Ross's legacy throughout all of my days. I will tell my children about him, and my grandchildren. I'll share his story with neighbors and co-workers and family and friends. Because his story deserves to be known. His sacrifice deserves to be shared. And his Love deserves to be recognized and replicated.

We can all take something away from Ross's story:

Selflessness. Duty. Honor. Camaraderie. Love.

What if that were the American standard? How great would our country be! For me, that is the standard!

I love you, Ross. Thank you for your service and sacrifice. Thank you for your friendship. And thank you for your heroic example!

I can't wait to see you again in Heaven one day, Brother.

R.I.P. Specialist Ross Andrew McGinnis

June 14, 1987 - December 4, 2006

Brennan Beck