

January 28, 2024

Dear Committee,

I am Laura Roman, older sister to Derek Martin. We grew up really close with all of my friends considering him like their little brother and I considered his buddies to be like my little brothers. As kids, Derek was always intrigued by our dad's Army career and said he wanted to grow up to do the same thing. He was that little boy with a Daniel Boone hat and bottle cap gun running around outside. He was Superman with his hands outstretched and running through the screen door. He was also that guy hiding in plain site in a gully suit outside. While in high school during 9/11, I knew there was no turning back and that Derek was destined to join the military. He was that kid that felt purpose, a desire to help others, a strong sense of pride, and had adrenaline running through his veins. It was in high school with the horror of 9/11 that sealed his desire to be Security Forces in the United States Air Force.

Derek was that kid who could give little effort but have huge results. He could drain three-pointers at the buzzer, golf well below par, and get a high grade on an exam without studying. I knew he was destined for greatness, and coupled with his outgoing and goofy personality, he knew no strangers. At my wedding, he'd be in the pools chatting with senior citizens and exchanging phone numbers. While on patrol at MacDill, he'd laugh as he told stories about pulling cute girls over for 2mph "speeding" just so he could talk to them. He made friendship bracelets with Iraqi prisoners so they'd talk to him and aid their mission.

I have too many precious stories to recount for just one day, but I'll highlight a few favorites. In my first year of teaching in Wichita, Derek was deployed to Iraq. He asked if he could be pen pals with my 3rd graders. He handwrote a letter back and forth with all students. He also sent video slideshows to highlight his experiences as well as mailed things he thought kids would like. Derek had such a love for kids, and especially seeing kids of war that knew nothing else. He noticed they didn't have toys which is when the soccer ball drive was born. I got my school to mail deflated balls overseas, and this even got the attention of his favorite band, Metallica, who sent stickers to Derek in which he adhered to the balls he passed out to the children.

As a father, Derek was a regular volunteer at his kids' elementary school as well as a coach for all their sporting events. In his true silly fashion, he would do dishes at the sink in his Joker mask as well as ride tricycles in a mask while playing with neighborhood kids in the cul-de-sac. He'd regularly give popsicles to the kids and then make jerky for his neighbors, just because he liked making others happy. Derek's love language was giving to others. I never understood it at the time, but this was the way he showed love. He'd mail gadgets to our sister and me because he thought "you might need this some day."

Derek loved being outside, cooking, and cheering for his Kansas City Chiefs. It was common for him to jog, be at the golf course, or working with his rescue German Shepard, Liberty, who he

named after Camp Liberty in Baghdad, Iraq. Derek taught free golf lessons to veterans and invested a lot of personal time with his Rimpact Foundation and speaking in front of a full room of people at Wounded Warrior events. He was a ball of energy, and it all went to making the world a better place. I can't help but wonder what a waste it is with him not here because he did so much in his short life. He made it a point to call mothers of his fallen military brothers and sisters each year on Memorial Day. Derek was such an inspiration that after he died, I took it upon myself to work with the Army and help Soldiers combat their own mental health struggles. Derek's life was very meaningful. He was my hero not only as an Airman, but just how he lived his life to make others smile. He taught me to celebrate the small things and find beauty and laughter.

The memorial bridge will provide comfort for all who love and miss him every day. Derek's life "bridged" comedy and love with selfless service. Thank you for making this dream become our reality as we love and remember Derek Martin.

Warmly,

Laura Roman