

## Melanie Marshall - HB 2507

My name is Melanie Marshall and I am the younger sister of Derek Scott Martin. Derek is a son, father, brother, uncle, and friend to many. As the younger sister, I always looked up to my big brother. Derek was a professional at everything he did in life. He strived to be the best and he was good at it all. Growing up he played baseball, basketball, and golf. So of course, I wanted to play baseball, basketball, and golf. Though, I quickly realized Derek was the one good at sports, and I was just the little sister that wanted to be just like him. Honestly, some of the best childhood memories I had with Derek involved these said sports. He taught me how to put, get a good swing in baseball, and to get the perfect swoosh in basketball. We spent a lot of time together outside, even if it was throwing a ball back to each other.

I can confidentially say Derek's love language is quality time and being a gift giver. All he wanted in life is to spend time with the people he cared about. If he met a new friend, he wanted to spend time getting to know them on a personal level. Derek didn't know any strangers. Derek's personality is inviting, warm, hilarious, and friendly. I think his humor alone is why people were so attracted to his character. There truly is no one like him because he was one of a kind. The thing I will miss the most about him is his presence because I knew at some point one of us would walk away in tears from all the laughter.

Derek knew at a young age he wanted to protect and serve. The events of 9/11 are why he chose to join the United States Air Force. After he graduated from High School, he deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan 3 times before his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. He loved his job in Security Forces training the Iraqi army, doing humanitarian jobs, and riding the tankers with his military brothers. Derek was honorably discharged in 2012 from a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). If Derek had it his way, he would have forever stayed in the USAF so he could continue doing what he loved the most: protect and serve.

Derek loved giving gifts. He would always light up when talking about the children over in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those children had very little. Derek made it a point in his day to ride over to where the children played outside to hand them soccer balls, snacks, and shoes. It became a routine for those children that every time they saw the American Soldiers, they would run towards them with their little hands up ready to catch a soccer ball or to see what goodies they could get out of them. Another wonderful memory I have of him is when he surprised me my senior year of high school while I was working the drive-thru at KFC in my hometown of Wellington, KS. I had no idea he was home on US soil, so seeing him at my work is a core memory I will never ever forget. He was always thinking about others! My boss told me to enjoy the day with my brother and let me go home. We then sneakily surprised my mom at her work! It was one of the best days of my life knowing he was home safe.

After leaving the Air Force, Derek's gifting was far from over. He started a non-profit organization called Rimpact Foundation with a fellow military brother he met in the Air Force. This non-profit helped wounded veterans (whether physically or mentally), to learn how to play golf. He absolutely loved helping others especially if it involved his passion! I believe this was extremely healing for him as well.

Derek is incredibly deserving of this dedication because he spent his whole life helping others and he served our country with great pride. He was so proud of all his accomplishments and I am proud to be the little sister of a hero who gave it all.

Losing a person and grief is often the toughest thing we can go through in our life. Things get left unsaid, emotions not shared, and no closure gained. I believe having this bridge dedicated in Derek's name will bring us a sense of peace that we have been longing for the past 4 years without him. Thank you for your time and reading my letter.

God Bless,

Melanie Marshall