

Committee: Transportation and Public Safety  
Proponent Testimony: HB 473  
Name: Mariann Lannon

First and foremost, I would like to say thank you for even considering this deeply touching request. It is very meaningful to me, even after all of these years.

I am Kevin's only sister and youngest sibling. He was the second of 4- 3 boys and a girl with just 6 years separating the youngest from the oldest. I was 16 years old at the time of Kevin's death. Kevin and I shared a special bond, one that I consider to be still intact to this day. It was I that answered the door on October 29, 1983 at 1330. It was a beautiful autumn afternoon in Ohio with cool temps and a very blue sky full of large cumulous clouds. The weather might be a strange thing to recall about that day, but only seconds before the door bell rang, I was standing in front of the sink making a sandwich for lunch and I was momentarily daydreaming out the window looking at the beautiful sky. I literally had the thought of what a beautiful place heaven must be. It is a strange thought for a young girl, but it was indeed what was in my mind when the doorbell rang.

My father was sitting just feet from me at the kitchen table facing our front door. I told him that I would answer it. When I opened the door, I saw a man from the military in full dress standing before me. Startled, I looked beyond him to see a black government car in our driveway with white lettering on the side trying to make sense of it all. The gentleman before me was Major Edward Wooten. He asked if this was the home of Kevin J. Lannon. When I confirmed that it was, he asked me if my parents were home. My mom was unaware as to what was about to unfold. She was upstairs vacuuming with music playing as she cleaned. Everything happened so quickly. I stood along side my father as the news was delivered. I distinctly remember seeing my father stand to greet Major Wooten and then place his right hand on our counter as if to support himself. Still, I had no idea what was to come; but I was feeling uneasy. As Major Wooten spoke the words, I saw my father's quiet spirit break in the most literal sense. His entire countenance changed. Truth be told, he never fully recovered from that moment. Once I knew that my Dad was OK and that he was still standing, I ran upstairs and told my mom. To this day I regret how my delivery lacked gentleness because I was in complete shock. Both of my parents were the very definition of grace, professionalism, and dignity throughout the worst time of their lives.

The moment I sensed that both of my parents were OK and things seemed under control, I ran out of the house on our front lawn and dropped to my knees looking back up at the same beautiful sky that I was gazing at only moments before. I begged God to bring him back. I believe that when you are in shock, you experience a brief movement when you believe that you can will a different outcome; perhaps it was just my age. I promised anything. I even prayed for God to take my life instead of his. I knew how badly my family needed Kevin. We all did.

When reality sank in, I made a promise to God and Kevin on that day. I promised Kevin that his memory and his sacrifice would never be forgotten for as long as I could breathe. I would speak his name, tell his story, and continue to allow him to live in my heart. In doing so, I hoped that he would continue to live on in the hearts of others as well. I have kept that promise; it is my both passion and my honor.

Kevin was kind, had a wild heart, and a thirst for life unlike anyone I have ever known. He was an unbelievably wealthy man in terms of friendships for someone who lived such a brief, yet full life. He is so well loved and long remembered to this day. He was proud of me, and love me truly without

condition. Because of many difficult and extenuating circumstances that plagued my family at that time, Kevin was the single most important person in the world to me. I lost everything on that day.

Fast forward many years and the love for my brother lives as strongly as it did almost 40 years ago now. He has been honored in many ways by many people. Everyone wants to do their part. I am in contact with many of my brother's friends be it military or school friends. Everyone has a story to tell. Every person has an indelible imprint left on their heart from this kid with eyes the color of a Carolina blue sky. He had a grin that got out of as much trouble as it got him into. He had a propensity for kindness, always wanting everyone to do their best, to live their best life. He believed in everyone and uplifted others- believing in those who didn't believe in themselves. He befriended the lonely and the awkward. He made everything look easy especially when it wasn't. Nothing was easy for Kevin.

Kevin went AWOL to go into battle. Read that again- AWOL to go IN to combat. He was away from his battalion in a secondary special forces combat medic school called Goat Lab. He was ordered to stay put. He would not let his battalion go without their own medic. In the end, Kevin chose his fate; and I begrudge him not one bit. Kevin gave his life for another critically wounded soldier when he chose to pull a paralyzed soldier out of the way of a helicopter that was coming down crashing. Kevin cleared that soldier- William Sears. It was in doing so that he lost enough time to clear himself and he was crushed and decapitated by the blades. Kevin was cited for taking care of not only American soldiers and performing life saving surgical maneuvers in combat, but also for treating the Cuban soldiers that he injured. They shot at him, he shot back- disarmed them, gave them medical aid, then said no hard feelings and grinned. That sums up the very essence of Kevin.

Kevin met God again on October 27, 1983. He went back into the loving arms of God and the rest is history. Many pieces to pick up in the wake. Every person doing the best that they could.

There is not a single day since that I do not think of my brother. There is no honor too small or too great for his precious soul. He lived the Ranger Creed. His last act before going on the final mission that took his life was to receive holy communion. That fact- saved my mother in the most literal sense. I am told Kevin said he would not make it back from the final mission after cheating death several times. He had a sense. In that dark moment full of fear; Kevin connected with God as a final gift to his mother.

What ever decision is made, I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to consider this honor, for reading this letter, and for making it a priority to remember those who gave all.

Of all the things our government focuses on, it seems to me more of this type of work should be done.

God bless you and yours in this Christmas season and all the days of your life.

Kindest regards,

Mariann Lannon