

Essay:

“Sloped on the hill the mounds were green,
Our centre held that place of graves,
And some still hold it in their swoon,
And over these a glory waves.
The warrior-monument, crashed in fight,
Shall soar transfigured in loftier light,
A meaning ampler bear;
Soldier and priest with hymn and prayer
Have laid the stone, and every bone
Shall rest in honor there.”

~Herman Melville, *Gettysburg*

The tall grass and open plains hide a solemn and tragic history. Seeing the tourists, the birds, the trees, I was in awe of how the location of one of the worst battles in US history could be the location of so much life. Gettysburg, the immense loss of life over a three day battle. So many soldiers lost their lives fighting for the preservation of everything we take for granted today, the perseverance and stability of this country. I tried to imagine what must have been going through the soldiers' heads as I stared out off of Little Round Top. The bravery, the fear, the prospect of a person taking the life of their fellow Americans, this was all lost on the tourists, snapping pictures and talking about the weather. I could only stare out, picturing the shells falling on the plains below, imagining the wall of grey moving up the hill, seeing the smoke of the muskets and cannons rising into the air. This, I thought, was where many heroes were made, where many heroes fell. And now, no one pictures the loss of life, but rather take pictures of the replica cannon at the foot of the hill or of the union officer dressed tour guide. When I returned home from the trip, the images still stuck to me. I could not imagine the pain of the families who lost loved ones there, the incredible sense of loss for anyone who has lost a family member or beloved friend who died to defend the freedoms many of us take for granted every day. And that

is when I learned about Ronnie. The thought of someone walking, sitting, learning in the same place that I am now connected everything I felt at Gettysburg to my own community. The coming together of the community, not just in mourning but in an effort to make a difference has been an inspiration to me, empowering me to try and find a way to make my own contributions both for helping the veterans and their families who have suffered physically or mentally and to strive to promote peace and compassion.

Having family members away on active duty is no stranger to my family. My Godfather was in the Army National Guard, one of my Grandfathers was in the Air Force, the other in the Navy, and three of my cousins are on active duty, two in the Air Force and one in the Army. I never really worry about them, however. Maybe it's just easier that way. I cannot imagine the feeling of loss if I were to lose or have lost any one of them, like the family and friends of Ronnie were forced to by his sudden and tragic passing. Hearing Ronnie's story, thinking about my family members off on a base somewhere far from their home, and looking off the hill that day at Gettysburg, I realized that I wanted to try to promote the end of these wars that plague the world. Parents, siblings, and friends should never have to receive news that the person they love has been killed. That is why I want to be an engineer. More specifically, an Aerospace Engineer. Space, the final frontier, is a place of peace and friendship. Hearing stories of Astronauts and Cosmonauts hugging and shaking hands with one another aboard the International Space Station shows how space has the capacity to create friends despite the conflicts between governments below. The ISS also is an example of what countries can achieve when they work together. As an engineer, it would be my goal to create technology to expand further into space, opening this frontier for all countries to come together and forget their conflicts in the pursuit of knowledge and exploration, in the pursuit of science. Hopefully, this uniting of the people of Earth would

mean that less, and hopefully no, families and friends would have to learn about the death of a loved one.

Learning about Ronnie and the community that came together after his death inspired me to do more than just invent things, it gave me the direction and purpose for the goals I had in life. Hearing the stories of perseverance and striving to achieve more that were inherent to Ronnie, whether it was wanting to be more than a cook or the 9 day, 4500 mile journey to Alaska, has inspired me to push myself to new limits. I have always pushed myself, but after hearing his story, I became determined to go further, and I was amazed at how much I could truly accomplish. Ronnie's tragic death, especially knowing that his daughter Gracie would grow up without the love and support of this inspiring individual, is heart-wrenching, but his memory lives on in the people he left behind and the people he continues to touch after his death through learning his story and through the opportunities his family opens up through the scholarship in his memory for others to pursue their dreams. The love of Ronnie and his family are an inspiration to each and every person that is touched by the ladybug that is his story, reminding all of us to never settle, never abandon our dreams, and never forget those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom and safety.