

23 MAY 2018

DEAR KIND SIR,

THANK YOU! I KNOW THOSE ARE 2 VERY SMALL WORDS BUT THEY HOLD IMMENSE MEANING.

I HAD THE HONOR OF MEETING YOU IN THE PARKING LOT OF SAM'S CLUB IN COOKEVILLE, TN ON MAY 22, 2018. MY FAMILY AND I CAME OUT TO MEET VETERANS AND PATRIOTS, AND WE MET YOU. SADLY, WE DIDN'T EVEN GET YOUR NAME, SO I WONDER IF I'LL EVER REALLY BE ABLE TO THANK YOU. THE BEST I CAN DO FOR NOW IS TO WRITE THIS LETTER AND HOPE ONE DAY IT GETS INTO THE RIGHT HANDS.

ANY TIME I CAN SHAKE A VETERAN'S HAND AND THANK THEM, I JUMP AT THE CHANCE. YOU SEE, MY DAD WAS A VIETNAM VETERAN. HE DROVE A TANK AND RETURNED HOME WITH A PURPLE HEART AND SILVER STAR WITH CLUSTER. HE ALSO RETURNED HOME WITH WOUNDS THAT WOULD HAUNT HIM FOR HIS ENTIRE LIFE. HE CAME HOME TO PEOPLE SWEARING AT HIM, SPITTING ON HIM, CALLING HIM EVERY HATEFUL NAME THEY COULD COME UP WITH. BUT MY DAD.... MY DAD, HE WAS PROUD OF HIS SERVICE. HE WAS PROUD THAT HE HAD BEEN IN THE ARMY. HE LOVED HIS COUNTRY! SO HE WOULD PUT ON HIS ARMY JACKET, JUMP ON HIS HARLEY, AND RIDE. HE NEVER HIB HIS

SERVICE NO MATTER WHAT NEGATIVE RESPONSE IT BROUGHT TO HIM. FOR THAT I'LL ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL. HE BROUGHT ME UP WITH GREAT PATRIOTISM, GREAT LOVE OF MY COUNTRY, AND TO ALWAYS BE PROUD OF WHAT YOU DO, EVEN IF ITS UNPOPULAR.

MY DAD WAS KILLED WHEN I WAS 13. JAN 21, 86 HIS FINAL RESTING PLACE IS ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY. WELL, HE'S WITH HIS FATHER NOW. MY ONLY SAVING GRACE IS KNOWING HE'S FINALLY AT PEACE. THERE IS NO SICKNESS IN HEAVEN SO I KNOW MY DAD IS FINALLY FREE OF ALL THE HORROR HE LIVED WITH UNTIL HE PASSED.

AND THAT BRINGS ME TO THE SAM'S CLUB PARKING LOT. I'M A VETERAN. I FOLLOWED IN MY DAD'S FOOTSTEPS AND WENT IN THE ARMY. ARMY AVIATION. 93P. BUT THANKING VETERANS IS NEVER ABOUT MY SERVICE. IT HAS EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD TO DO WITH MY DAD. WHEN WE PULLED IN AND I SAW ALL THESE BIKES AND RIDERS, I CRIED. THE EMOTION HIT ME LIKE A TON OF BRICKS. WOW! SO MANY PEOPLE WHO CARE SO MUCH ABOUT THEIR BROTHERS AND SISTERS. WOW! VETERANS EVERY WHERE, ALL UNITED FOR THE SAME PURPOSE. TO NEVER FORGET. TO RIDE FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T. TO HONOR ALL WHO HAVE SERVED. WOW! I CRIED, MY HEART RACED, AND I WAS FILLED WITH SO MUCH LOVE FOR PEOPLE I HAD

NEVER EVEN MET.

AND THEN I SAW YOU, SIR. SITTING ON YOUR BIKE WITH YOUR DARK BLACK GLASSES ON, WITH YOUR VEST COVERED IN PATCHES AND PINS. AND THEN YOU SAW OUR LITTLE FAMILY AND YOU CAME OVER AND GREETED US. I HAD SO MANY THANKS I WANTED TO EXPRESS BUT I FOUND MYSELF AT A LOSS. THE EMOTIONS WERE OVERTAKING ME. OUTWARDLY I SEEMED FINE BUT INSIDE I WAS A BUNDLE OF EMOTION. MY DAD WAS SO HEAVY ON MY HEART. AS I SPOKE WITH YOU YOU WERE SO KIND. SO KIND!! AND I IMAGINE IF MY DAD WAS STILL HERE HE WOULD PROBABLY BE DOING THE RUN TOO. HE SURE LOVED HIS HARLEY.

SIR, WHEN YOU PLACED THE RFTW PIN IN MY HAND AND HUGGED ME... I CAN'T REALLY DESCRIBE IT. IT WAS LIKE I WAS THAT 13 YEAR OLD GIRL AGAIN, GETTING A HUG FROM MY COOL DAD, AS HE TOLD ME HE WAS PROUD OF ME. IT PROBABLY SOUNDS CRAZY AND I'M PROBABLY NOT DESCRIBING IT VERY WELL, BUT IT WAS PEACEFUL. AND NICE. IT WAS SUCH A BRIEF THING, BUT IT MEANT SO MUCH. FOR OVER 30 YEARS I'VE BEEN SO UNSETTLED, TRYING TO FIND A PLACE WHERE I BELONG, AND IN THAT INSTANT I FELT I BELONGED. I FELT A PART OF. I FELT CARING AND UNDERSTANDING. THAT SIR WAS A GIFT, ONE THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH THANK YOU'S

FOR. YOU HAVE TOUCHED A PLACE IN MY HEART WITH YOUR KINDNESS AND I WILL FOREVER BE GRATEFUL.

TO YOU AND ALL THE RIDERS, THERE ARE NO WORDS TO ADEQUATELY EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE. TO TAKE SO MUCH OF YOUR TIME AND FINANCES, TO RIDE FOR PEOPLE YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW, IS BEYOND ADMIRABLE BEYOND PATRIOTIC. BEYOND KIND. WHAT AN AMAZING GROUP OF PEOPLE. THANK YOU, FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART, FOR CARING SO MUCH.

SIR, I HOPE ONE DAY TO BE ABLE TO THANK YOU IN PERSON. I'M GOING TO CONTACT SOME PEOPLE AND POST SOME PICTURES AND HOPE I CAN FIND YOU. UNTIL THEN, THIS LETTER WILL BE PUT ASIDE FOR SAFE KEEPING UNTIL IT CAN BE DELIVERED TO YOU.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU RICHLY FOR ALL THAT YOU'RE DOING. YOU WILL BE IN MY THOUGHTS AND IN MY PRAYERS. SAFE TRAVELS!

AMANDA GUDENKAUF