

Integrity Found, Integrity Lost

What happens when Mr. Right goes to Iraq?

My Sister-in-Law, Lori, has always held out for Mr. Right. She thought she might have discovered him in a Pennsylvania State Police Officer named Danny. They dated a handful of times. Things were progressing slowly, but that seemed a perfectly comfortable pace for both of them.

He was one of those guys we wish we had more of on our police forces. His integrity and sense of duty attracted him to a law enforcement career, but the feeling of power some feel in uniform while carrying a sidearm hadn't corrupted those values. He was the "Marrying Kind" according to Lori.

Their relationship continued to grow slowly. It was long distance and he worked many weekends. When he wasn't working, he spent one weekend each month serving in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard. Lori and Danny talked on the phone and exchanged emails, but only saw each other every other month or so.

One day Danny called to let Lori know that his unit was being sent to Iraq for a tour of duty. She decided to share with him the feelings she had, and see if he had started thinking long term. He told her that, while she was the kind of woman he'd been searching for, he couldn't make commitments before leaving.

She talked to me, upset. "Why wouldn't he want to make commitments to her now? Wouldn't he feel better knowing he had a girl who cared deeply for him waiting at home?" Lori had a romantic idea of supporting her man while he was off to war.

I told her that my respect grew for him. The integrity that it takes to walk away, and hope she will still be around, is much higher than the guy who wants to elope the day before he ships out. He wanted what was best for Lori, not what was best for him. In Danny's normal way, he put others' needs ahead of his own.

I told her that, if it was destined, that he'd return and she would still be available. Furthermore, she'd respect and love him even more because of this sacrifice.

They started writing, real letters on real paper, a rarity today.



Staff Sgt. Daniel R. Lightner Jr.

Age 28

2nd Brigade Combat Team, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania Army National Guard

Hometown: Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania

Died when a roadside bomb detonated near his Humvee during combat operations in Ramadi, Iraq, on October 27, 2005

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Several months passed. Lori was offered a blind date, which she accepted. Within a couple dates with Kevin, she had fallen in love. In August, Kevin proposed and she accepted.

She wrote to Danny almost immediately. She told him she had fallen in love, and of her happiness. She was nervous about his reaction.

A few weeks ago she received a letter. Danny was happy for her. She sensed he was genuinely happy, not putting on a face. She was relieved, and hoped that someday perhaps Kevin and Danny could meet.

Lori is getting married on Saturday, November 5th, 2005.

On October 27th, 2005, Staff Sergeant Daniel R. Lightner Jr. was killed when a home made bomb exploded along the roadside in Ramadi, Iraq. The explosion killed Danny, and injured two other soldiers from his unit.

Danny had distinct purpose in Lori's life. And hopefully, she had purpose in his. I'm further convinced by this story in a bigger plan that incorporates what may seem like senseless tragedy.

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