

## 11 Lives

I still remember every word on my plane ticket and every minute on the plane to fly across the world to change my life forever. The three of us, Mom, Dad and I, travelled from the United States all the way to Iran.

The summer of 2021 since dad was getting stationed by the military in Afghanistan, we moved to Iran. The military moved the family to Iran, a local and safe country. Dad was supposed to start his training by July in Afghanistan. Therefore we had 1 month to get comfortable in our soon to be house for the next year.

Adapting to Iran was difficult. I had to leave my friends, and had to start homeschool, as well as having to separate from my Dad.

The time came to wish my Dad best of luck since he was training to save Americans in Afghanistan against the Taliban. My mom was in tears, and I was on the verge of tears. I still remember telling Dad, "I love you really much and go be a hero!" Before Dad left, he promised Mom and me that he would call us every night unless something important was happening. When he left, it felt really different without Dad in the house.

Days went by; weeks went by; eventually two of the slowest months went by, but we were still receiving calls from Dad every night. It was all good until we got dad's call exactly two months after he left. He wanted to talk to mom first, to let mom spill the tea to me. The phone call travelled to Mom's bedroom with the door shut. Since I figured it would be half an hour to an hour long as usual, I went back to play my Xbox. Once Mom finally got done with their talk, she let me talk to Dad for a little bit. She had been crying so I figured it was not the best news, but after all Mom can get a little emotional with the tiniest things. Dad had to get off the call after only twenty minutes of talking since they had a one hour time limit at the military cell booth. Mom decided to tell me the "news" in the morning because she wanted me to sleep well.

When morning came, I was nervous but eager to know. At breakfast I asked Mom about what Dad had told her about last night. She responded to me, "Dad said that they got the call from the President to go further into Afghanistan to find and evacuate Americans before the Taliban could kill them." It took me a second to think of why my Mom was crying so much, but then it hit me. My Dad is going against the Taliban and that he might not come home again. That thought made rain droplets pour from my eyes. For the rest of the day, I couldn't think of any positive thoughts, just "what if's." My Mom kept trying to comfort me, but nothing helped.

If my Dad didn't make it, I wouldn't have anyone to play video games, nerf war, or dirt bike with, since mom doesn't do those activities. They were our way of bonding. Just thinking of those activities and memories made me cry.

The whole week we didn't get any calls. My hope that I could hug him again was dropping day by day. Every night was almost like my whole day was homeschool and waiting by the phone to hear my Dad's voice. My Dad's calls were reassuring me that I could see him again, but not getting them changed my comfort level.

Two weeks later, Mom and I were eating dinner and trying to talk positively. Mom's phone rang. I didn't have any hope that it could be Dad since we have been getting so many robocalls lately. Mom flipped her phone to look at it and saw a random number. She assumed probably another robocall, but she still answered it since the military can have unfamiliar numbers

sometimes. Mom whispered to me, "Someone from the military," And went to her bedroom. I tried to listen to the conversation through the door, but all I could hear was my Dad's name— Ryan Walter. All I wanted was to see my dad again.

Mom had been in her room for 1 hour, and I was getting worried. I couldn't hear her talking on the phone, only crying. Through the door I asked Mom, "Can you come out now?" She responded, "Give me a minute." From her voice, I knew that it took a lot to say those words. When she came out, she looked rough. She asked me, "Do you remember the last things you said to Dad before he left?" I said softly "I told him, "I love you really much and go be a hero." " She told me how those words were really special because I wasn't seeing Dad again. We both cried all night. It was easily the worst night of all twelve years of my life.

September 2021...

We moved back to America for the service and funeral for Dad.

Here we are now walking down the aisle to sit in the family reserved section at the funeral. Since I was crying and had mom leaning into me sometimes, it was hard to hear what they said about Dad. I thought it was the end, but the Five Star General came up to the podium. Mom nudged me and whispered, "You might want to hear this." I looked up and stopped crying. It turned out whenever I told Dad, "Go be a hero," He was such a hero. He earned The Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest award for someone who has given his life for America. I cried in happiness. Now I don't just say, "My Dad died." I say "My Dad died as a hero for evacuating eleven lives in Afghanistan against the Taliban."