



The Takeoff- May 2020

I can remember the exact moment that I met Zach. It was the first day of Lacrosse practice freshman year. We were split up into groups based on our positions and of course we played the same position. This was my first year playing lacrosse and Zach had been playing for some time already. He cheerfully talked to everyone and offered advice to all us newbies. This is something I cherished as I am often someone too shy to ask for advice. Zach helped me through the next four years of lacrosse and we became amazing friends in the process. It got to a point where we would read each other's minds on the field. We worked seamlessly together.

When it came time to select a college we both had various options but I fully intended on going wherever he was going and we surely were going to be rooming together! Of course he chose Adams State. The time we spent down there transformed us from friends to brothers. Being an only child I always wondered what it would be like to have siblings and I now know what it feels like to be both a younger brother and an older one. We could always learn something from each other. Toward the end of our first semester there was a lot going on between sports and school and Zach came to me and let me know he was leaving Adams State and enlisting in the Navy. This took me by surprise because to me we were just two dumb kids living it up in college. I was initially a little upset because I felt like he was just up and leaving but as I spoke with him about it I realized I was actually jealous...the thing about Zach was he always knew where he was going and what he was going to accomplish. He was always a doer and not a talker. He never needed to show off or explain himself to anyone, if the man wanted to achieve something he did it! After hearing him out on his decisions and his whole life plan I thought to myself man I really need to get my life together. I made the decision to leave Adams State as well.

Zach and I spoke almost daily throughout his time in the Navy aside from deployments. His texts were always asking about how I and everyone else was doing back home and what we had going on in life. He had a way of always keeping those around him motivated and on track and was never afraid to check someone that was veering off path. He quickly turned into an inspiration to myself and so many others as he got out of the Navy and went straight to flight school. I always remember making comments to him about taking some time off and spending time with friends and family but he was dead set on the task at hand. His goals were huge and he always reached them, of all the things we can learn from Zach to me his display of commitment is number one. Commitment is defined as the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity, etc. This embodies Zach to the fullest, if there was a test he passed it, if there was a mountain he climbed it, if it was something as simple as visiting my parents while he was home he made sure he was fully present and in the moment. Everything he did he



fully committed to and that is why, while his time was cut severely short, his impact was that of a person who lived 100 years.

I remember exactly where I was and what I was doing when John called me on April 4th, I remember getting off the phone and instantly calling Jalissa to tell her, I had never heard her cry like she did that day. Zach was extremely close with her, he had an ability to relate and speak to anyone he crossed paths with.

When Alex called me and broke the news I was devastated, it wasn't true to me because it just could not happen to Zach he was too good of a person with literally the biggest heart one could have. Zach was planning to come home to watch John take on the Ironman in Boulder in June and was texting Alex and I making sure he jam packed a visit for everyone in the short time he was home all while supporting John in Boulder. We had just made plans the day before his passing to go to the lake while he was home. Zach's loyalty was what stood out to me the most. He never was scared to do the right thing no matter how hard it might be. He always stood up for what was right no matter the backlash it could cause. For those he cared for his loyalty was endless and I thank him for showing me what it is like to have a true friend that was always there through thick and thin. We can all take a page from Zach's book to be kind to everyone and for those that are loyal to you show them endless loyalty back!

Alex and Jalissa Nelson

May 4, 2020