



ARTS AND LETTERS AWARDS

DAVID C. SAXTON HUMANITARIAN ESSAY COMPETITION

"The Promotion of World Peace and Harmony"

WHO IS KEEPING THE PEACE?

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Images of war flash across my television or computer screen daily. I hear the rising count of the dead nearly every time I watch news broadcasts. I watch the video clips of bombs exploding and soldiers shooting guns; it has never hurt me more deeply than it does now. We are Canadians. We are supposed to be the peacekeepers. Yet now, every time I see it, I can't help but think how redundant it all is. For as long as the world has existed, there has been war. Has there ever been world peace? We are told that our wars are necessary, that after we have won, there will be peace. Peace for whom? For the families who have lost their loved ones? For the civilians who will be forever haunted by images of violence? For all of those who gave their lives? Isn't it obvious? They have yet to find peace to keep; for as long as there is war, there will be no peace.

This all rings true to me and hits home to my heart more vividly than ever. On December 13th, 2008, I received the worst telephone call of my life. The kind that makes your heart feel as though it has solidified to rock and fallen deep into the pit of your stomach. It makes your thoughts race faster than your mind can sort or decode them; your whole world stand still as you try to comprehend the words. Pte. Justin Peter Jones, my friend, the soldier, is dead.

Justin Jones or "*Jonesy*" as he was known among us, his friends, was one of the most peaceful, light hearted, genuine people to ever bless my life with their presence. With a smile that could light up a room and a laugh that left echoes bouncing off walls, he was everything you could want in a friend. He was the kind of guy who gave his heart 110 percent of the time. Whether it was at his place of employment or being a volunteer with some sort of community organization or simply helping to put shingles on his

grandfather's roof, Justin gave his all in everything he attempted to do and always with an honest effort. I believe that it was these very qualities that also made him an ideal soldier.

Over the course of our friendship, which began when I moved to his hometown of Baie Verte in the 9th grade, Justin and I spent much time together. He became close to my family, we both shared the same close-knit group of friends and at one point we shared an innocent romance. I always considered him to be the “*goof*” of my group of friends. He had a uniquely dry sense of humour that often only he understood; he had a knack for getting into mischief, but an even keener knack for getting out of it and he absolutely loved anything adventurous including going overseas to Afghanistan to fight for peace. He left impressions on my life that will never fade or wear with time.

Needless to say, it came as a great shock to me when Justin announced that he was leaving his small hometown life to become a soldier. I tried as hard as possible to picture my goofy, innocent, care free friend in a camouflage uniform holding a gun. The thought alone made my heart sink. He was never one to be persuaded once his mind had been set, and it was more set now than it had ever been. So like all of those who loved and cared for him, I put my feelings aside to see him do what he felt was right and supported him in what he wanted to do in life; to give of himself and help others.

Through out his training, Justin visited home whenever he had the chance. I don't think there was one time that he returned that I did not spend time with him. We laughed, we told stories and shared memories; there was never an unhappy moment in his presence. One day, after he returned to training, my family received a picture via email from Justin; it was him in a camouflage uniform holding the biggest gun I've ever seen. Suddenly it wasn't so hard to picture anymore. Suddenly, it became real. As I

looked at the picture, I saw his beaming smile. He was still wearing it, so I was still able to smile for him too.

Even when Justin left for Afghanistan, I just kept believing that it would all be over before I knew it. I kept picturing his smile. The first two months flew by, with messages and phone calls along the way. Soon, he was home again. We spent numerous days together during his break. We celebrated his 21st birthday, we laughed, we danced, we sang, we laughed more. It was some of the greatest times I spent with him. When it was nearing time for his departure again I threw a surprise party for him at my home; anything to make sure he knew how proud we all were, how much we cared and how much we loved him as our friend.

Justin was only back in Afghanistan for little over a week when I received the phone call. It was like I had just been in his arms, welcoming him home. There are no words to describe the heart break and despair that I felt. Suddenly, all of the images that I see every day through the media became reality. It was no longer a news story; it was my life, his life, our life. I fell apart.

I remember a time when Justin was at a community gathering in his honour when he was told that people were praying for him and Justin responded “Do not pray for me, pray for world peace”.

We are lead to believe that it is our soldiers, the men in the uniforms that are keeping the peace. However; the war for peace is one far greater than that. Yes, our soldiers serve a purpose, one that needs to be addressed and fought for but they alone, cannot achieve peace. Peace requires far more than just the effort of our soldiers; it requires the effort of humanity. Until the day that we as people decide to put aside all

our differences and decide to love for peace instead of fighting for it, we will never be able to keep it at all. Until then, our soldiers must go and do their part.

Thank you my friend, my hero, my angel, Honourable Private Justin Peter Jones, for doing your part in trying to keep peace. You paid the ultimate price by giving your life so that I and the rest of your friends, family, neighbours and others throughout this town, this province, this country and around the world can live freely and peacefully and that my fellow friend is “WHO IS KEEPING THE PEACE”; who freely gave his life trying desperately to keep the “WORLD IN PEACE AND HARMONY”.

By: Danielle Higdon