

Remembering on Memorial Weekend

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A funny story came up at the memorial for my cousins' son, Cpl. Keaton Coffey (US Marine Corps). Though the story is not related to surfboards, this picture (with Keaton clowning on the far right) best illustrates the mood. A fellow Marine, Keaton's roommate, repeated it to the hundreds upon hundreds packed into the church that day to honor a fallen hero. It was about a time when the Marine had gone on leave one weekend, and when he came back, he said, he caught Keaton red-handed, eating his last piece of cake, a coveted slice he'd looked forward to. The Marine was incredulous and said something to the effect of, "Really, dude? You're eating my cake?" And Keaton, his mouth full, simply replied, "But it tastes really good with milk."

The story struck a chord—for several reasons. It was a moment of levity amidst so much pain; it showed Keaton's sense of humor, the dry wit that mirrors that of his dad, a former firefighter; but more than anything, how even the simplest moments can end up taking on so much meaning, becoming forever engrained in our memories.

It's hard to believe three years
have passed since Keaton was

killed, in Afghanistan, in the line of duty. He had so much to live for... just 22 years old... only two months shy of his wedding to Brittany Dygert... the only son, the only *child* of Grant and Inger Coffey. Keaton was so proud of what he'd accomplished as a Marine. Its beyond painful, even now, to contemplate the loss, to those who loved him so deeply and to his country.



I love this picture too, because it shows how much even his dog, Denny, adored him. Look at that paw stretched around Keaton's shoulder! The pair were a team, trained to go first into danger to sniff out explosives and save countless other lives. But danger was everywhere in Afghanistan. As it turns out, it was a bullet and not an explosive that killed Keaton. Denny survived, and, thankfully, my cousin, Grant, Keaton's dad, and his mom, Inger, have the option of taking Denny in his twilight years as their pet.

The day Keaton was laid to rest whole communities lined the streets near Boring, Oregon, his hometown, for the procession. The sight of it and the throngs of Marines in uniform, veterans on motorcycles, firefighters and fire trucks at the funeral nearly brought me to my knees. Keaton was a beloved son, a



source of pride, one of their own.

But Keaton is also one of yours, in the end, whether you knew him or not, for he gave everything in service to you and his country.

On this Memorial Day weekend, I'm glad you took a moment to read this and remember Keaton, and if you'd like to extend a hand in his memory, give to **Wounded Warrior Project** and/or **Keaton's Memorial Scholarship Fund**.

It was May 24th three years ago, a few days shy of Memorial Day, that we lost him. For that reason, Memorial Day and Memorial Weekend have taken on new meaning. I trust, as do his parents, that Keaton is now at peace, smiling down on us. And so does the Marine buddy, once miffed at Keaton over something as mundane as a slice of dessert. As he said to Keaton at the memorial, he'd see him again one day, and then he admonished him, "Save me a piece of cake."