

Op-Ed

Eighteen Minutes

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Eighteen minutes. That's how long he spoke without so much as stopping to think. For eighteen minutes, he told me in gory detail everything that happened to bring him to where he is in his life. And it was after those eighteen minutes that I realized that this man, a Marine who became a double amputee, was even younger than I am.

The Yellow Ribbon Fund is an organization that welcomes injured service members home by helping them and their family caregivers throughout the recovery process. Through two classes at American University, I have had the privilege to learn about and work with this organization, and the cause has become dear to my heart.

I was 21 years old, and as my senior year began in August of 2013, I started looking forward to the future and thought about all of the things I'd like to accomplish. It was that semester that I learned about the Yellow Ribbon Fund and began to understand how fortunate we have been as a nation and how thankful I am to those who've sacrificed to help make it possible. I owe this to my work with the Yellow Ribbon Fund.

During the semester, I learned about what the organization does. The Yellow Ribbon Fund provides the families of injured service members with free hotel nights, rental cars, taxi rides, apartments, and meets many other needs to insure injured service members and their families have peace of mind and togetherness during a difficult time of recovery. It was not until I spoke with three injured service members about their experiences that I was able to understand the magnitude of the challenges they face as well as how much they appreciate the help of the Yellow Ribbon Fund.

Our class created several public service announcements, and we were able to interview service members who had been injured while at war. We turned on the camera and simply asked one of them, "Can you tell us a little about yourself?"

Then he spoke for eighteen minutes, leaving all of us feeling a sense of gratitude and patriotism. He explained why he had joined the military, what his experience was like, and how he had been injured. He then explained all that

the Yellow Ribbon Fund had done to bring his family to him, aid his recovery, and give him peace of mind.

It was then that I realized that this man, a year younger than I am, who sat in a wheelchair in front of me, exemplified the reason I am able to enjoy the safe and happy life that I do.

For many of us, it is easy to forget the sacrifices people make to keep us safe. However, it is imperative that we try to remember it every day. In the eighteen minutes that this man spoke—this man who risked his life to keep our country safe, who has done much more honorable work than I have so far in our young lives—this man has experienced challenges that I can only imagine. His life will never be the same. And after those eighteen minutes, neither will mine.

As a civilian, it's now my turn to serve. I may not be able to change the world, but I can make a real difference, and show my appreciation for that Marine's sacrifices by supporting an organization like the Yellow Ribbon Fund.