
EULOGY FOR JONATHON MICHAEL COTE

By Francis L. Coté

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Hi, my name is Francis and I'm Jonathon's father. I want to thank all of you for being here with us today. (French) À tous nos ami(e)s et membres de notre famille qui ont voyagé du Québec, nous vous souhaitons la bienvenue et nous vous remercions d'être ici avec nous.

Jon's mother Lori Silveri, is sitting in the front with Christopher, Jon's older brother and motorcycle partner. My wife Nancy is here along with Samantha, Jon's step-sister the fashion advisor and Maximillian, Jon's step-brother, the musician in the family. Also present are Jon's grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Victor Silveri and many aunts, uncles, cousins and other extended family.

The support and response from our family, friends, colleagues, the University of Florida, our military and even strangers has been overwhelming and greatly appreciated. What an impact Jon has made on us all! It is truly a glorifying testimony to God and His only Son, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

It is important to remind ourselves that God gives us life and free will to glorify Him until we join Him in heaven. For Jonathon, life began at 07:52 am Friday, February 11, 1983 at the Long Beach Naval Hospital in California, exactly 361 days after his brother Chris. He was in a hurry to get into this world and would prove

to live every moment to its fullest, never passing up the road of opportunities that we all face in life.

From the start, Jon was destined to be different than most. It began with the spelling of his name with “ON” instead of “AN”.

On May 8, 1983, Jon was baptized by Father Levesques at St John the Baptist here in Buffalo. My brother Serge and sister Myriam were Jon’s Godparents. Even though he was doused with cold water and oils, Jon was brave and did not cry and if I remember correctly, remained asleep throughout the ceremony.

When Jon was a toddler he would always outstretch his arms and say “hold you” which meant “carry me”. When he was young, Jon sometimes confused the pronunciation of some words. My favorite was the word “screw driver” which Jon called “goof-rider”. Even though we tried to correct his pronunciation, Jon thought he was pronouncing it correctly so it remained “goof-rider” for quite some time.

Once when Jon was 3, we decided to go to Church with his great grandmother, Mary Frances Pelosi (Mombrea), or “Big Grandma” as Chris and Jon called her. She was called “Big Grandma”, not because of her size; she was actually less than 5 feet tall. The reason they called her “big” was because Chris and Jon could not comprehend the high number which represented her age. Anyway, “Big

Grandma” was adjusting Jon’s coat during church services and Jon, thinking that she was trying to control him, screamed out loud “she pulled my jacket”. It was so loud that the priest stopped the homily to see what was wrong. We all laughed and the service continued on. Jon always made it known if something was not right.

As many of you know, Jon was always a healthy eater even when he was a kid. He also loved to work out. One time, while living in Jacksonville, North Carolina when Jon was still a child, we were preparing to attend weekly Mass. Before leaving the house I noticed that the pockets in Jon’s pants pockets were bulging and wet. He claimed there was nothing in his pockets yet it was obvious that there was. So, I pulled out his pants pockets only to find all these slices of apple and cheese. What a mess! In any case, he was ready for the trip to Church and just in case he got hungry, he’d have a healthy snack ready to eat.

On May 22, 1994, at age 11, Jon received first communion by the Senior U. S. Navy Chaplain, Father Smith at Camp Butler Okinawa Japan at St Francis Xavier Chapel and on April 9, 2000, Jon was confirmed by Bishop Henry Mansell at St Piux X Church in Getzville, New York.

Jon and his brother Christopher attended several different schools throughout this country and Japan but they graduated from Williamsville North High School in June of 2001.

Jonathon and Christopher were always like two peas in a pod. They were inseparable. They always had lots of friends and both enjoyed sports. When they were younger they loved skateboarding and when they were older they enjoyed snowboarding. They loved to play hockey and if I may brag, Jon was, and Chris still is, great at hockey. When they were older they both purchased pickup trucks and sports motorcycles around the same time and they loved riding their R1's together. Jon always stood up for anyone that he considered a friend. He also loved unconditionally.

After high school, Jon contemplated college but decided instead to join the U. S. Army. Since I served 20 years in the Marine Corp, I always joked with Jon about his joining the Army out of spite and we had many laughs over that.

Jon received his basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia in July of 2001. Once a year, the Army offers admission to 150 regular army soldiers for the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. In November 2002, Jon received one of those invitations. Although Jon considered the opportunity, he declined as he wanted the challenge of combat with the 82nd Airborne. With us today are several men that Jon served with in the US Army. If I could, I'd like them to stand so we can recognize their service to our country. **(PAUSE) (CLAP)**.....Thank you men.

I'd also like to have any other men and women who have served or are serving in our military to join them in standing so may honor you also. **(PAUSE) (CLAP)**

Jon served 4 honorable years in the 82nd Airborne Division as a parachute infantryman. Jon enjoyed jumping out of airplanes so much that he often went sky diving in his free time.

Jon earned the rank of Sergeant in 3 short years. He received an Army Achievement Medal for being selected out of approximately 750 soldiers as the soldier of the month. He was very dynamic in a team environment and self-disciplined to work independently. Jon was deployed to Operation Enduring Freedom in Bigram, Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Baghdad, Iraq. While in Iraq, Jon was responsible for the seizure of two 81mm mortar tubes from Iraqi insurgents that led to the significant reduction of mortar attacks on Camp Victory. Jon performed armed patrols in and around Baghdad. During one patrol near an air strip, Jon sent us the following email regarding one of his patrols.

armyboycote@hotmail.com: "Last night February 4th, 2004 we were patrolling our sector outside of Baghdad international airport. I was driving the last HUMV in our convoy of 5. We stopped about sunset to wait for dark to set up a vehicle check point to check for anything that could be used to shoot down airplanes that landed at the airport. Anti-Coalition forces pay Iraqi's approximately \$5,000 to shoot down a U.S. airplane. That is why it is important for us to be out there.

We started to roll out around 21:00 to set in our check point. The first HUMV had its lights on, the second did not, the third did, the fourth didn't and mine did. We do this to mask how many HUMVs are in the convoy. As we were approaching a turn onto a road I heard over the radio, crack...crack...crack and "are you taking fire?" As we turned the corner it looked like the fourth of July with tracer, glowing red, rounds firing in all directions and all you could hear was brrrr...brrrr...brrrr. I heard someone in the back of my HUMV yell whoa . . . whoa . . . whoa, ducking more and more as the rounds came closer and closer to his head. The gun truck unloaded fire with the machine gun to my right while tracer rounds flew from left to right in front of the HUMVs. It took me a couple of seconds to realize that our convoy was being ambushed and we were driving right through it. Everyone went around the turn and down the street when I realized that it was our turn to drive through the stream of bullets. As I came around the corner and faced this stream of red glaring rounds passing in front of us, all I could think was that there was no way around it and the only way to get out of it was to drive straight through it. So I held my breath, dropped the HUMV in first gear, floored the accelerator pedal and hearing the HUMV pick up speed I pushed the shift stick into second, then the M-249 gunners opened up along with the guys with M-4s. I held my breath and drove right through the crossfire. None of us got hit nor did the HUMVs. For the amount of bullets flying around that night it is a **miracle** that none of us got hit. **(PAUSE)**... Jon was right; it WAS a miracle that none of them got hit. God protected Jon. As you can tell by the

sound of his e-mail, Jon wasn't afraid to be a warrior for our country. He had the warrior spirit. He served and served well.

Jon honorably separated from the Army in August of 2005. He made a decision to attend the University of Florida in Gainesville and exercise his education benefits provided by the Army. Initially he pursued an accounting degree but later decided to change his major to Exercise Physiology which we all thought seemed much more suited to Jon's personality. During his first year, he joined UF's Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity or "Sig Ep" for short. Jon developed such a bond with his fraternity brothers that they later passed a student body proclamation in his honor while he was missing in Iraq. Several of Jon's fraternity brothers and friends are here with us today and I'd like them to stand also. **(PAUSE)**...thank you all for coming.

My brothers and I started a tradition several years ago. It's an annual camping trip that we take with our sons, nephews, brothers in law, etc. My wife calls it the "man trip"; WE call it the "Wilderness Alliance". This tradition was inspired by a book we read entitled "Raising a Modern Day Knight" by Robert Lewis. Our intentions are to bond with our sons and instill good Christian values in them at the same time. We have long talks around the campfire at night where we discuss integrity, morality, living life as a man, taking on a leadership role in society, sex, dreams, etc.

Jon was able to make a few trips with us. He was always so energetic; he could hardly sit still. He'd entertain us all with his humor and exuberance and he left us with memories of a happy, adventurous guy who was busy gathering experiences in life and trying to decide what to do with his career. Such are normal tasks of young men of his age. It is a necessary part of the great learning experience.

The stories of our camping brotherhood will live on and I am so glad to have shared these memories with Jon, my other sons, Christopher and Max and my brothers, nephews and friends.

Another tradition our family started several years ago was an annual hockey game which we'd have a day or so after Christmas. We rent a rink at the Pepsi Center for two hours and play. I can't tell you how much fun it is to lace up my skates, put on my hockey equipment and jersey and play with the guys; especially with my sons, Chris and Jon. I'd like to say I showed them up on the rink but that wasn't the case. Their youthful stamina was much better than my older, slower body.

Our family loved it when Jon would come home from the military or college for breaks or vacations. He was such a bright light. Jon was a great cook who loved to make Jambalaya for us. He learned how to make it from an army buddy and boy was it good!

In recent years, Jon and Chris would get together and entertain our family and friends with stories of their strict upbringing. They'd tell stories about how I made them move firewood for an entire day or how I made them help me build a fence for our yard. Or how I'd shave their heads when they were young and then use a compressor to blow away the excess hair. They'd talk about the time I gave them cake which I served in a bowl with milk over it, because I liked it that way, even though **they** didn't like it that way. Together they were like two comedians entertaining the crowd with their stories about me being a tough dad. They'd go on and on and they'd play off of each other and they way they'd tell the stories you couldn't help but laugh. I'm glad they were able to laugh at those times and not hold it against me that I was a tough father. Throughout this ordeal I hoped that Jon's tough upbringing actually helped him through it. And Chris....I'm sorry if I was too tough on you.

After his first year at the University of Florida, Jon was offered a position with Crescent Security Group joining Mike Skora, his 82nd Airborne Platoon Sergeant. Prior to leaving for Iraq, Jon and I talked on the phone about the high risk job, discussed the consequences and Jon reminded me that he had no ties to a wife or children. He did not want to pass up this opportunity as he felt that he would look back on his life and wish that he would have taken the job. I could tell there was nothing I could say that would change his mind. So on Saturday, July 15, 2006, Jon departed Jacksonville Florida-International airport for Kuwait. That

was the start of a non-stop work schedule running convoys up and down the main service roads from southern to northern Iraq.

After 31 days without a break, Jon, who was exhausted, begged his team leader for a day off which he received. On that day, two Crescent Security personnel who ran the mission were killed by an IED. **(PAUSE)**...Again, God protected Jon. There were other difficult and dangerous situations that Jon faced while in Iraq as a contractor and in early November 2006, Jon had enough. He realized that it was time to come home. I remember the call from Jon. He told us that he was coming home for Thanksgiving and then returning back to UF after the Christmas holiday. You can imagine the relief it brought us to know that Jon had his fill of the high risk security job and was coming home. The feeling of joy was overwhelming. Jon was coming home!

However, on November 16, 2006, which was to be one of Jon's last missions, Jonathon and the four other Crescent employees were kidnapped.

Jonathon was driving an armor plated vehicle for a convoy consisting of 25 trucks which stretched about a mile and a half long. The convoy they were protecting was traveling to an Italian Military Base to transport their equipment. At approximately 12:30 p.m. near Nazaria, Iraq, the ambush took place at a fake checkpoint. Over forty armed men kidnapped five of the seven Crescent security personnel along with all the truck drivers and all but two vehicles. Later that day,

the truck drivers were released. The four U.S. Veterans; Paul Reuben, Joshua Munns, John Young and Jonathon along with Burt Nussbaumer, an Austrian veteran, were not released.

We had not seen Jonathon since the video which was provided to AP News on January 4, 2007. For 523 days no one seemed to have any answers. No one knew where Jon or the others were or even if they were alive.

Jon and the others were innocent Americans providing security for our country and for the freedom of the Iraqi's. They were kidnapped by Iraqi -Shiites, the very people they were trying to help.

So why do we have private contractors in Iraq? Nowadays, contractors do just about everything a soldier would do. They sling Spam in mess tents; they tote guns along base perimeters; they shoot; they get shot and sometimes they get killed. The United States is putting hired help behind the front lines to ease the burden of its understaffed and overworked armed forces. That's the price we pay for having an all volunteer military. By paying civilians to handle tasks previously handled by the military, the administration is freeing up U.S. troops to do the actual fighting. But the use of contractors also hides the true costs of war. Their dead aren't added to official body counts. Their duties - and profits - are hidden by closed-mouthed executives who won't give details to Congress as their coffers and roles swell. It is estimated that there is one contractor for every 10

foreign soldiers in Iraq - 10 times the private involvement in the first Gulf War in which I served. Although Jon was not in the armed forces at the time he was killed, he was **again** serving our country in this war. I believe that Jon and the others were captured to be made examples of since they represented America. The criminal behavior of the kidnappers can only be justified by the devil himself.

Throughout this ordeal you have heard me testify to my faith in God. Many of you have questioned me about this. Let me try to explain... **(PAUSE)**...

Almost every house has one of these in it. **(HOLD UP YOUR BIBLE)**.....It's a Bible. Whether it's on a bookshelf or a closet or a box in the basement, my bet is you have one. Even hotel rooms have them. Pick it up and open it up. Don't start from the beginning because if you do you'll probably never make it to the end. Instead, go to the New Testament and start with the Gospel of John. That summarizes the whole of the Bible. **(Talk SLOW)**.....Basically what it says is this....God gave **HIS** son for us so that we may have eternal life! God has been with us throughout this ordeal. He knows what's it's like to watch His Son suffer and die. He's been there.

We are assured of Jon's place in heaven with our Heavenly Father. Jonathon was raised in the Christian faith since he was an infant. He is at peace now. No more separation, no more loneliness, no more estrangement, torture or whatever other bad things happened to him. That's it; it's over....he's at Peace!

(PAUSE)...

We love you Jon. I am proud to have been your father here on this earth. We know you're at peace and in God's hands. We look forward to the day that we will be together with you again with no worries of life's pain or enemies' torture. Rest at ease soldier; your mission here is completed.

To all of us, Let us learn something from this. Our time on this earth may be short. Let us love each other more deeply. Let us express our love for one another. Do not be ashamed of your faith. Let us pray to God every day for our blessings, our needs and the needs of others.

Please remember to pray not only for us but for all the families who have lost their loved ones while serving the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan.

If you'd bear with me, I would like to take a minute and thank some people. First I'd like to thank our Pastor, Randy Rozelle and Father Roy Herberger who have been there for us throughout this ordeal. These two spiritual leaders have been blest with the gift of empathy.

I'd like to thank my wife, Nancy and my sons, Christopher and Max and daughter Samantha. We have gone through this together. You have strengthened me

when I was down and hopefully I did the same for you. We have become even closer as a family through this tragedy and for that I am thankful. I love you all!

To our family and friends, you have also gone through this experience with us. You have loved us, fed us, kept us company or given us space as we've needed it. We thank you all!

To Jon and Christopher's friends, we have always loved having you around and we love you like you're our own. We thank you for all your support and running last year's benefit for Jon. And to Dean Bourke, thanks for creating the FREECOTE website that helped us make this incident known and supported globally and in recent weeks helped us in dealing with the press.

I'd like to thank the Agents of the FBI and the DEA for their support and assistance and especially to Joe from Basra who's here today. Thank you Joe! To our military and honor guard, we thank you and appreciate your service. To the Patriot Guard who escorted Jon's body and stood vigil outside the funeral home and here today, thank you also. To the various law enforcement agencies that also assisted in escorting Jon's body, thank you for your kind gestures.

To Gintzler Graphics, Sterling Sommer, xpedx, and the PIA, thank you for your generosity in providing the paper, imagining and the printing of these leaflets **(HOLD UP ONE OF THE GREEN LEAFLETS)** free of charge and for the shipping

company that wishes to remain anonymous which shipped them free of charge to Jordan. To Dr. Khalid Qazi and his colleagues who assisted in translating the text from English into Arabic for this leaflet. It was our intention to have these air dropped over Iraq but unfortunately, for reasons unknown to us; we were never able to do so.

To members of the press, thank you for respecting our privacy when we needed it and being men and women of integrity.

To the strangers that have embraced us, we have been honored by your support.

In closing I would like to leave you with a prayer....

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
forever in the next.*

Amen.

By Wendy Lynne