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SCHOOL NEWSLETTERS

**LHS Reflections from the Principal, 12-12-06**

By Gus Mancuso  
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REFLECTIONS FROM THE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL  
Tuesday, December 12, 2006

IT HAS BEEN AWHILE...since the last "reflections" from the high school principal. It was not by design. It has been very busy, with some unanticipated situations that have occurred. One of these has had me "down" for the past week.

It is Sunday afternoon before the Packer game and I had anticipated writing this a week ago on Sunday, December 3. It was then that I got a call from Jim Newman, one of our teachers at LHS. Jim wanted me to know that Jesse Tillery, a 2005 LHS graduate, had died on December 2, while conducting combat operations in Iraq.

As a parent of three sons, one of which is a full-time police officer in La Crosse, Wisconsin, I suddenly got a large pit in my stomach. I had to concentrate very hard as Jim explained the details, including the whereabouts of Jesse's siblings Joelle (2001 LHS graduate), James (2002 LHS graduate) and Jared (2004 LHS graduate). He then mentioned that Martin, Jesse's father, a truck driver, was en route home from Montana. Kathy, his wife and mother to the kids, was at home when she was notified of Jesse's death.

I hung up the phone and thought about Jesse. While I did not know him personally, I remembered who he was and what he looked like. Jesse was a nice, quiet kid who was easy to smile at . . . he would always smile back.

On Monday, I talked with a number of people including Jim and Dan McGlynn, Jesse's counselor. Dan had worked with Jesse throughout his years at LHS. Dan indicated that Jesse had enlisted in the Marines during the fall of his senior year--he had always wanted to be a Marine.

On Monday, I called Jesse's parents and asked if we could meet. In these situations, I have come to find out that, often times, parents are alone waiting for loved ones to come home. Martin, Kathy, Jim Newman and I talked and agreed to meet on Tuesday.

On Tuesday, Dan, Jim and I met with Martin and Kathy in my office. It was a very, very hard meeting for everyone. It was good, however, to talk about Jesse's life, his passion for people and his passion to be a Marine. Everyone shared the impact Jesse had on those whose lives he touched. The Tillery's are kind, gentle, hard-working people who would do anything for you--good, solid people and very loving parents.

On Saturday, I attended the memorial service for Jesse. It was a very powerful experience. Jesse's parents were presented the Purple Heart. Fellow armed service soldiers, past and present, and a large number of Marines were in attendance.

Pastor Milt Van Natta offered some very nice remarks about Jesse. His comments mirrored the announcement read to our students at LHS on Wednesday about the kind of person Jesse was. Jesse was a kind, respectful, humble young man. Jesse was the best friend a person could have, loved his family and always wanted to be a Marine.

Jesse was content with who he was. He was not into material things. He had a smile for everyone. He loved to read and had a great appetite for history.

To all of us, Jesse's legacy was that he appreciated his blessings (content), knew what he wanted to do--be a Marine (commitment), and was a true American hero in making the ultimate sacrifice for others.

This past week, I have done a great deal of thinking about Jesse's life and its meaning. I know that I will always hold a special place in my heart for the Tillery family. I will be thinking about them over the holidays. I hope that all of us keep them in our prayers, appreciate Jesse's life and contributions, and appreciate our own gifts because of the sacrifice of people like Jesse Tillery.

In honor of Jesse Tillery, Lincoln High School will be purchasing a Legacy Stone at the Veteran's Memorial Park in Neillsville, Wisconsin. With the purchase of this stone, the family can create a registry book at the visitor's center, which will consist of pictures, articles, stories and poems in honor of Jesse.

I hope to touch base with you once more before the holiday break. Until then, promise me you will hug your kids, tell them you love them and keep the Tillery's in your thoughts and prayers.

Until next time . . . . . Happy Trails,

Gus Mancuso, Principal  
Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln High School