

To the Honorable Judge Hogan:

I've always heard about these kinds of letters but I never thought I'd be writing one myself and I'm not sure that anything I have to say will hold any weight or hurt me, but I have to try at least.

A little about myself: I'm 34 years old from Carthage, TX. I served 4 years in the United States Marine Corps infantry as an 0311 rifleman and deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in that time. I struggled desperately upon returning from deployment and those struggles magnified immensely post transition from Marine Corps to civilian life. For years I've battled with PTSD and everything that comes with it from the sleepless nights to the anxiety, depression, and everything in between. I lost any feeling of any sort of purpose for a very long time. In fact, I credit those days with being by far the lowest and darkest points of my life, surpassing even the time I spent in custody and now as I write this letter pending trial. Physically, mentally, emotionally, Ryan Nichols saved my life.

Ryan and I met about 10 years ago while we were both still enlisted in the Marine Corps while on recruiting assistance duty in Longview, TX where we were both recruited from. We instantly became buddies. Even though we were stationed in totally separate parts of the world, we still kept in touch. As of just a few years ago, Ryan and I both ended up back in our hometown areas roughly 45-50 miles apart. That's about when he really took notice to underlying sign of severe depression through my humor which also serves as a coping mechanism for me at times. One evening when I was having dinner at a restaurant alone, Ryan took it upon himself to pop in and join me to catch up and reminisce a little. Before we parted ways, that's when he told me about the disaster relief nonprofit that he started called Rescue The Universe. He told me he wanted people he could trust to help him with and asked me if I would join him on the next hurricane that came which ended up being hurricane Barry. When I joined him for that, I had no idea how much that little trip would impact and change my life for the better. I still struggle with remnants of my past from time to time, but I actually feel like I have passion and purpose again finally. Ryan knew what he was doing there. We've had many conversations about it and everything we want to do with Rescue The Universe to help more and more people in the future. We've been all over doing high water boat rescues over the past couple of years and Ryan's experience with that far exceeds my own. He's rescued dozens of people in need and has a huge servant's heart for others. He's also inspired me to start my own nonprofit to help veterans and first responders with struggles like mine I previously described.

Ryan is also a son, a brother, a husband, and a father. His family misses him terribly and his youngest has even made mention of not remembering what he looks like. The media and prosecution's version of him are the exact opposite of what anyone who actually knows him would say. Ryan is one of the most caring, compassionate, and generous people I've ever known and to say that those traits have rubbed off on me is an understatement. He is also probably the most intelligent and passionate person I've ever met. Ryan Nichols is my best friend and brother. I could go on and on about what good he brings to the world.

I hope you will consider allowing Ryan to go home and be with his amazing family. They need him and I know without a single doubt he will honor any and all conditions if allowed to go home to them. I know that any decision you make will be fair. Thank you for considering my letter, your honor.

Sincerely,

Alex Harkrider

12/10/2021

