To my unborn son or daughter, this is the story of your father. You are about 8 weeks along in your mother’s stomach at the moment. I wanted to tell you a story of your father if something happens to me during my deployment in Afghanistan next year.

First off your father was born in California in the early 80’s with very broad shoulders said your grandfather. Your grandfather said I was destined to play football and born to be a force to reckoned with on the field. Although these were your grandfathers dreams it wasn’t your father’s visions of the future. You see your father loved technology. Computers, video games, and anything to do with technology that was pushed the way of the future. Even though your father was entrenched into technology, he also loved television shows that had heroes that always triumphed in the end. Shows like the Million-dollar man, Incredible Hulk, Knight Rider, He-Man and the Thunder Cats shaped your fathers’ moral compass. Some shows used technology like Knight-Rider to use technology to get the advantage over bad guys.

Your uncle was very much into sports and forced your father into playing football at a very young age while his high school friends. Even though I wasn’t interested in playing the game and rather be in the house soaking up stories of my heroes, I half-heartedly would go out to play the game my father admired. While playing with your uncle’s older friends it seemed I had a little bit of advantage over them even though I was smaller and younger. I was sly, fast, strong and reckless despite my size to get open to catch a pass thrown to me and then run into the opposing teams end zone. The only reason to get to the end zone so many times in your father’s head was to make us win the game as quickly as possible to get back inside the house to go back my interests. The first of many games we played everybody in the neighborhood thought my skills were a fluke, but after countless games in our neighborhood and other neighborhoods my legend grew of my prodigy for the game. At first I didn’t pay attention to all the praises and it didn’t intrigue my curiosity. This changed later on when I realized this activity made people idolize you like a hero I so admired on my television shows. This made me realize my potential, so I decided to put on a show every time I touch the ball. Not because I wanted to go back into the house but to show what I could do and spread my story like Hercules around the neighborhood even more. Kids started to tell stories of my feats on the playground of me outrunning, outjumping, and outplaying starting high school players during the offseason of the football season. It was almost like Bo Jackson was growing up in our city and tall tales were reaching far and wide.

When I reached 7th grade the game wasn’t fun anymore and the comparison to other great players in the neighborhood was getting overwhelming so I decided to take a break and thought I was going to quit the game for good. I noticed all the people who idolized me were disappointed and asked me questions on why give up that recognition. I thought about what they said to me and I realized quitting the game was like my heroes I watched on television all of a sudden quit for minor personal reasons and I sympathized with them. The following year I decided to play again but as a minimal role as a full-back. A full-back rarely gets the ball in a football game so I was fine with the idea. Before our first game I missed one of the practices during the week from over sleeping. The coach said I couldn’t play in the game because of negligence on my part. During the first game we lost by a couple of touchdowns that I still remember to this day. I blamed myself for this lost because I always said in my head “what if I was in the game would it make a difference?” When the next game took place the coach let me in during the second play. The play was to the half-back who played touches the ball most in the game. He got a few yards and I got switched out with the another player who brought the next play to the quarterback. Other players realized the head coach ran all of his game plays in order like what he does in practice. I thought to myself that I had chances to make in the game then I realized if I came out of the game ever other play and that the full-back rarely got the ball in the first place. This is when I switch went off in my head and I had to do something as soon as I touched the ball. When my play finally came up in the coach’s index cards, adrenaline flowed through every vein in my body. When I crossed the line of scrimmage I ran as fast as I could took off. Everybody on the sideline told me after the fact that everybody in the game looked still while I was already in the end zone. I then scored again on my second opportunity when I touched the ball. After that game I realized this is what I was meant to be doing with my life. Game after game I was doing things that were high school and college level running skills. Just for us to have a better opportunity to win the game and never let my teammates down again. We had 9 wins and 1 loss that season. All of these accolades on the field drew the attention of the high school coaches and they couldn’t wait until I was a sophomore in high school to play at a more intense level on the varsity team.

When I left junior high school my coach said that I should not waste my talents try out for half-back position because I was the best back he had seen. I took the advice and was on the freshman team. Something was different this year. I wanted to lift weight, be ahead of everybody on the running drills, and show everybody that I could be relied on. Also I felt changes in my legs. Every practice was like torcher because my legs felt like anvils and they were swollen from running to be the best that I could be. I didn’t know the consequences of what I was doing with my body. Our freshman team were good but there was a difference in your father in the games. Even though I was great in practice, in the games my body was not as explosive as it was before. I was still doing great things and makes impossible plays but I felt like my body had an Achilles heel. The harder I worked the worse I got at the game. I didn’t know what to do and I kept silent for two years. My sophomore year I played hard in practice to get the starting job from a senior player. In the games though my body was moving the way I wanted it to. We had a mediocre year in that football season. My Junior year I was still starting in the games but my body was still falling apart. I was the strongest person on the team but during the games if somebody barely touched me I would fall over. Even when I took my first step off a kick return, I would fall over if I tried to run at full speed. Finally, during the season, I lost my starting position because I couldn’t produce what I did at practice.

In the summer before my senior year I had to do something about this inability that plagued your father. One day I started talking to one of the kicking coaches who was a part-time medical trainer. I told him the only time my legs felt good was when they were cold. He told me there was this ice-packs that you put in this fabric that Velcros around the knee that maybe I could use. The wraps looked like a knee brace or ankle weights. I decided to use them during warm-ups around my shins during practice. For once in a long time in your father’s life his shins felt at ease. I felt like the old me. This turned into an exceptional performance in my abilities of the past. I still did better than all the other running back in practice but I still held back from practicing to be the best because I was afraid of overexerting myself would give me shin problems and effect my balance like the year before. Our first game I didn’t get to play until the 3rd quarter. I was on defense first and intercepted a ball and ran it back 80 yards. When I got to run the ball I was clearly faster and more cunning than before and scored again. The legend and myth from before was coming to fruition again. Somehow I didn’t have the head coach’s confidence into my abilities our fourth game start the game. I was already the leading scorer on the team. After every game I was getting recognition from players, coaches, and scouts from Yale and other great colleges. After all of the turmoil over the years I got the offensive player of the year and Most valuable player from perseverance and with never giving up. This is the lesson I will tell you for the rest of your life to inspire other people to be their hero. My way was to sacrifice my body for my team. Yours is what you make it.