

Family, friends remember Sparks teacher

By Michael Orton

SPARKS – Sharon Landsberry, the wife of the Nevada guardsman and teacher killed during a school shooting in Sparks last month, recounted during a tearful memorial ceremony here Sunday that her husband had reconnected with friends and reiterated his Marine values just two days before he died.

Master Sgt. Michael Landsberry – the Sparks Middle School seventh-grade math teacher and Marine veteran who joined the Nevada Air Guard in 2001 – died Oct. 21 after a 12-year-old student fired gunshots that killed Landsberry and injured two others before the shooter took his own life.



A Marine salutes the family of Marine veteran and Nevada Guard Airman Master Sgt. Michael Landsberry on Nov. 3 during a memorial service.

Photo/James Pierce

More than 1,000 people, including Gov. Brian Sandoval, attended the memorial service that included full military honors at the Sparks Christian Fellowship church.

Sharon Landsberry said her husband had played golf with friends and recited the Marine anthem entitled Ask Me What I Was just days before the incident.

She repeated the anthem during her eulogy to her husband.

"I have seen death and felt its warm breath. It did not faze me for I was different. I was a warrior. You ask me what I was? It was my destiny, until my last breath, to be a United States Marine. And my spirit shall live forever," she said.

Witnesses said Michael Landsberry acted in a heroic manner and tried to stop Jose Reyes when he realized the student had a semi-automatic pistol and had fired shots outside the school building moments before class started.

"Mr. Landsberry's heroic actions, by stepping toward the shooter, allowed time for other students in the playground area to flee," Washoe County School District Police Chief Mike Mieras said.

The event rocked the school's faculty and its more than 600 students. Vigils were held leading up to a viewing Saturday and the service Sunday.

Government officials, military personnel, family and friends spoke during the ceremony. One of them was Andrea Cook, Landsberry's stepdaughter, who graduated from Navy basic training a few days after the shooting.

"I love you dad and I will make you proud," Cook said. "One of the hardest things was to graduate from boot camp and not have you there because you were the reason I joined. You were the reason I pushed so hard in my physical fitness assessment and studied for my tests. I just wanted to make you proud."

"There's no such thing as an ex-Marine and (Landsberry) lived that," said Brig. Gen. Bill Burks said, the Nevada National Guard's adjutant general.

"He lived the core values. He was the consummate military professional, and with his Batman personality and pictures of him in costume, he just had this unique sense of humor."

Landsberry's impact and influence on his students was well represented during the memorial ceremony.

"He had such a great personality," said Chelsey Avera, a student of Landsberry's whom he nicknamed "Cherry Top" because of her red hair. "He would always make people smile. He liked to walk down the halls at school on Wednesdays yelling, 'Hump day.' He was our hero."

Landsberry enlisted in the Nevada Air Guard in 2001, the same year he began teaching in the Washoe County School District. He deployed to Kuwait in 2006 and Afghanistan in 2011. During his military career, Landsberry earned more than 20 awards and decorations.

"No one could have imagined or anticipated what happened that day," Sandoval said. "What is conclusive, though, is Michael Landsberry's selfless act to give his own life that others may live."

In Cook's closing words, she summed up what fellow teachers, military personnel, family and friends had expressed throughout the ceremony.

"You have always been a hero and your friends and family knew that, but now the whole world knows that," she said. "You're my hero and I will make you proud of what I will do. I love you."

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