I have known Ivan Ross for approximately 2 years. During this time, I have known Ivan to volunteer as a firefighter in Bay County and continuously put others above himself. Ivan is a 2015 graduate of Mosley High School and was voted “Top 10” by his classmates because of his bigger than life personality.

During February of this year my son, who recently graduated with Ivan called to tell me that Ivan had no place to live. Please keep in mind that in February Ivan was still in his senior year at Mosley High School. We invited Ivan to come stay with us for a few days. It was during those first few days that I became aware of Ivan’s situation and the amazing young man that he is.

Ivan’s father had died at an early age leaving him without a father. His mother remarried a few years ago and Ivan received a stepdad. Not surprisingly, Ivan and his stepdad did not get along. I could go into the reasons that Ivan gave me, but this letter is about Ivan and the young man he is and not about the relationship he was unable to have with his stepdad. When Ivan was 16 his mother asked Ivan to move out, thus, choosing his stepdad over Ivan. Ivan was lucky enough to move in with his aunt. Yet, he would have to virtually “pull his weight” because she couldn’t afford to have him live there for free. During this time, Ivan would have to pay his aunt rent, pay for his own cell phone, insurance and buy his own food. When Ivan couldn’t afford to pay his aunt rent because he had to have his broken truck fixed she decided to kick him out.

Fast forward to the night Ivan came to live with us. Ivan was working two jobs, one at Wonder works and the other cutting lawns. Yet, he would volunteer at the fire station every night he wasn’t working or they would allow him to. Needless to say, we offered to have Ivan live with us and told him we would reevaluate the situation after graduation.

For the few months we were blessed to have Ivan stay with us he was absolutely no trouble. To be honest we didn’t see a lot of Ivan. He was either going to school full time, working at Wonderworks, cutting lawns or at the Fire Station. Yet, if we needed anything from him, he was just a phone call away.

About a few months before graduation Ivan shared with me that he had not passed the reading portion of the FCAT, so he would walk the stage at graduation but would not receive his diploma. Ivan had been taking the FCAT every chance the school would allow him his junior and senior year, but would always miss the passing score by just a few points. When I probed Ivan to what he thought the problem was he simply stated that he couldn’t concentrate through the long passages to thoroughly understand what he was reading. Luckily as God would allow it I have a friend who was willing to take Ivan in and evaluate him to see if medication would help.

All Ivan cared about was getting his diploma so that he would be allowed into the Fire Academy so he could become a Firefighter/EMS. Unfortunately, graduation came and Ivan only received his certificate of completion. Yet, two weeks later and after seeing a doctor and receiving the proper medication Ivan took the reading portion of the ACT and was able to pass, thus giving him the score he needed to receive his actual diploma and apply to the Fire Academy.

Ivan is working at the fire station and is currently going through the Fire Academy and will graduate soon. This young man has essentially been on his own since he was 16 years old. He is such an incredible person that even his classmates voted him “Top Ten” in his class while most of them had no idea the hardships he was personally going through. I can’t think of a more deserving person who would cherish this gift more than Ivan. This young man has been through so much in his short lifetime and wants nothing more than to help others with his life. Please consider Ivan a candidate for the Lasik’s for Heroes contest and change a young man’s life because all he wants to do is to help others with his.