

Chapter 10 - Simply a Warrior

Amen (the benediction of the 13-year morning prayer)

Lord, my cup is always overflowing, it's always overflowing, and no matter what I am thinking, saying, doing, being, I know I am with you. Hoo-ah, Baby!

Noah (Untitled, 2004)

*And the light shone down from the heavens,
Slender rays of gold breaking through the clouds,
Like gentle fingers caressing the earth.
Though in body, I'm on the ground,
My spirit is flying in the sky,
Wings spread free and alive, liberated,
So far away from the struggles below.
I am fulfilled and whole;
I am by myself, but I am not alone.
Such sweet release!
It is here that I let go.*

Mom—The Airport (May 25, 2005)

As we drove home, we strained our eyes to catch a glimpse of each silver bird leaping into the sky, and we blew kisses to all the airborne travelers that day, saying prayers for their safe return to their destinations. To this day, every time I hear the familiar, lofty, aeronautic drone of a plane, a jet, or even a helicopter, my heart skips an atavistic beat, and I am soaring like Noah in his poetry. For a moment, I allow myself the luxury of feeling as if I don't know whether I am coming or going. For a micro-instant, Noah is flying home with his jubilant band of brothers and sisters. The struggle against terror and oppression is over; the fragile roots of liberty have taken hold; the Middle East is stable and peaceful. Then, I remember. Though we Americans may be experiencing a lovely spring day, we are yet engaged in a struggle of immense magnitude, and though we may wish it with all our hearts, Freedom has never been free.

Back to the Sandbox

During the days of Noah's transit back to FOB Gabe, against a backdrop of news featuring al Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's attacks on hospitals, schools, and children, the power of the Beanie Babies taught everyone back home the pen is mightier than the sword. It seemed as though all of North Georgia was buzzing about Noah's R&R. To us, he had been like an apostle of hope. Wielding words of courage, gratitude, responsibility, and love, he had traveled the state, mentoring our minds with his sincere example and opening our hearts to the Iraqi people. The way he had broadcast his message to all who came within range was moving, phenomenal, and compelling. He never raised his voice, but his quiet passion spoke to the heart of America from the heart of the matter. GHS students and Ellijay community members were lighting up the airwaves and causing more happy stress at the post offices; the boxes were flowing. However, with each passing day, we knew Noah was getting closer to the danger zone. We were glad he had never lost sight of the big picture, but none of us could forget that his labor of love would soon be taking him back through an inconvenient, narrow door. Again, we were determined to be brave as he was and cheer him across the threshold.

Ashley (YMETM and I love ya, May 26, 2005)

We start the week at hump day! I think you are right and there will not be a dull moment in our hearts or minds! I hope Noah stays strong; I'm sure he will. He called me at 5AM from Germany. He said they were refueling and leaving in like 45 minutes. He said he felt bad about telling me not to cry at the airport and he wanted to make sure I didn't think it was mean. I assured him that I knew he meant for me to be strong so that he would be able to also. It was a good conversation. He sounded good. You and Rick are in my heart also! My lunch for tomorrow was canceled. At first, I was annoyed. Now, I think that's good and I can play catch-up. (Back to) Atkins! I hope all is well, and I'll talk to you soon! Ashley

Noah traded the trappings of a messenger of good news and donned the heavy equipment of a wary infantryman with his head high, but the most difficult part was probably that our champ had to go so far without his family and friends beside him; we'd always been there when he ran his heart out on the football field. This was different. Though he carried us in spirit, like the solitary oak tree of his poem, he stood alone as he returned to serve his higher purpose, to protect, heal, clothe, feed, sustain, and welcome some of the most vulnerable people on the planet to the security of the rule of law. It was a tall order, but it was something he had to do because, to Noah, Jesse and the Iraqi children had become his neighbors and he wanted to make them his friends. Just as his mentors and buddies so often had fed him, Noah was determined to make sure the citizens of Ba'Quba had a place at the table of freedom. The only way to complete his compassionate mission was to fulfill his duty as an infantry officer and do what was required to free the Iraqis from the bondage of totalitarianism and poverty, and he hoped that some day everyone would look back and understand that all the children deserve their chance.

Kristyn Case (Ashley's buddy, no relation)

I'm very pleased to say that I was and will always be proud to be Noah Harris's friend. He truly was the epitome of good people. His energy and goodness filled the room and people were instantly attracted to his charm. He opened himself and his heart lovingly to others, to the world, and ultimately something larger than himself. I have never known anyone to love his friends and family as much as Noah did. He constantly reminded us all of how much we meant to him, giving as many hugs as there were people to receive them. With optimism and faith, Noah fought with not only courage, but also passion for a dream to make this world a better place.

He was simply a great American, and he had a way of focusing his attention at finding the best in everyone and everything. He confided while he was at home that, though he had become a warrior, he wished to have the chance some day to talk to Cindy Sheehan (anti-war activist who captured media attention after her son was killed in Iraq in April of 2004). In the spirit of a true guardian of freedom of speech, he said, *"I might not agree, but I'd do my best to listen and tell her about the children of Iraq. I think her son would want us to finish the job we've started. She knows we can't just say, 'This is too hard; game over.' I think she is trying to make a point, but we gotta find a way to finish well."* Noah wanted to serve and protect, and he understood that, as long as there are citizen leaders who come behind him, willing to serve the cause of liberty like the Emilys, Ashley Case, Lucy's students, the UGA Bulldawgs, the prayer warriors, and, of course, like his Iraqi friend, Jesse, even through dire times when the quality of brotherhood and diplomacy seems strained, the vision of the Constitution can never be broken. Noah completely understood the unstoppable empowerment of liberty and, although he didn't hear them, he understood the words of Jim Fox, "It just takes one."

Thomas Paine

The cause of America is, in a great measure, the cause of all mankind. He that would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from oppression.

Obviously, Noah loved his parents, his friends, his community, his country, and Iraq; but even more important, he followed the Golden Rule and prayed for his enemies, and though he knew that some of the folks with whom he interacted in the daylight might be trying to kill him and his men at night, Noah was glad to make them laugh with his silly jokes and pronunciation of "Inshallah." Noah always believed in his maxim, "*A stranger is a friend you haven't met yet.*" However, as charming as Noah might have been, he also wasn't afraid to fight them in the dark because he had been taught to protect the weak and, in his understanding, his mission included the whole world. Part of his morning prayer was, "*...To lovingly be with all these other temples (people and other living creatures) of God.*" Like any other soldier, Noah would explain, it's not about the final number of fallen on either side; it's about the fact that freedom for every individual is an inalienable right. That is the bottom line. As our warriors and our leaders perform the difficult labor which is required to maintain the security and provide a beacon of hope to suffering individuals throughout the world, in their tactical imaginations they maintain the hope of creating the circumstances through which they may extend the olive branch of mercy, forgiveness, and inclusion. Our military personnel are tough on the outside because they must be; however, they know real change happens in the heart and the mind. Look into the eyes of any soldier; the unflinching expression radiates a balance of the steely will to defend mixed with the questioning light of a true seeker of peace. Just like his men, Noah felt it was an honor to be a member of the cadre of guardians.

Col. Robert H. Risberg (Noah's commander while in Iraq)

He was a wonderful young man and a fine officer. I have never known a more consistently positive and upbeat person. His soldiers loved and respected him and he felt the same way about them... Our business is one of danger and personal sacrifice... Noah Harris was the All-American Boy; he was the epitome of a positive person.

All his life, Noah took the high road with his good cheer and his "Honk, Honk, Honk, Honk-Honk" but, in Iraq, he knew he was surrounded by fierce animosity. At any moment, 24/7 while in Ba'Quba, his life and the lives of his men were on the line; and to control his personal fear, he drew courage and strength from his connection with God. Of course, he knew the 23rd Psalm, but also, in the camo Bible with the pink sticky note of faith, he had marked and underlined these words from which soldiers often draw comfort.

Marked in St. John, 15:18.

If the world hates you, ye know that the world hated me before it hated you.

Noah (Iraq Wallet Prayer)

I let go and unite with God.

I am fully and completely alive each moment with focused light, non-judgment, and positive energy. In all that I do I am protected, guided, courageous, and confident.

In faith, I fearlessly follow the path to my true destiny.

I AM ONE WITH GOD.

Oh, the heart of such young men and women who suffer gladly to lighten the load of the weak. They are the light-bearers, the good stewards who fight the wolves and go back and search for the one lost sheep as they lift the flag of Liberty. It is not for personal gain, nationalism, or jingoism they carry their banner with such resolve, but rather for the love of humanity. They give up much to spark the flame of goodness in the heart of the world, and their light doesn't see race, color, creed, religion; like a constant star, it just shines the truth on everything it touches. As proud members of our volunteer military, Noah and his band of brothers and sisters didn't choose to die for us; they chose to stand for justice. May there always be brave souls who will return to the front line, and continue building the wall of security around humanity.

Dad (Noah's return to combat)

On Noah's return trip to Iraq, he shared the flight with Capt. Jeff Green who was a special ops guy Noah often worked with. As I remember, Capt. Green had what sounded to me like an indigenous military SWAT team that would raid insurgent hideouts or, occasionally, pull a known bad guy from his bed at night. Noah and his men were the outside surrounding force and back-up. Noah and Jeff had become good buddies because they liked how the other worked. Ironically, Jeff ran into all of us at the airport as we were waiting for Noah's flight so they ended up sharing the trip back from R&R all the way to Baquba. As the story goes, they flew into Doha and ended up getting attached to a transport truck that was going to drive them back to Baquba except this truck had no armored protection—only a canvas top. The drivers had their weapons but, for some reason, they had no ammo. Before they really got started, these motor pool guys pulled over saying they had to run some errands so Green, Harris, and friends were going to have to sit in the back of the truck in the blazing sun for a couple of hours. If that wasn't bad enough, they said they were required to take all of their ammo clips before they left. Very reluctantly, Jeff, Noah, two of Noah's men, and the rest of the passengers turned over their ammo clips. The truck finally got under way and they were headed back into Iraq protected by only a tarp. Jeff said that, as they moved into the combat zone, these seasoned soldiers all looked at each other and, without saying a word every one of them reached into his shirt and pulled out a fully loaded clip of ammo. They locked and loaded and each took a position in the four corners of the truck's bed. Having been in combat numerous times and knowing the country as they did, they had no intention of giving up their ammo for anyone. So Jeff, Noah, and two of his men rode guard duty all the bumpy way back to the fob.

Letters to and From Home

Mom (retrieved from Noah's e-mail account)

Hey Sweetheart, I guess you are home (on the Fob) by now. We heard a helicopter was shot down in Ba'Quba. Watch your butt, please. We are just getting snippets of info and I am full of righteous anger—especially since you and Capt. Green were talking about hopping a ride on one. I feel like you are right up the street. When they shoot at you, they shoot at me. It is a small world, but I know you know how big it is having traversed half way around it for the second time in three weeks. How about Ashley getting #3—national production? That is so awesome. Someone emailed me and said the world is your oyster, and I truly believe it, but first you have to lead your men. And if you choose to stay in, I will of course back you because I will always repeat, it's about loving your calling! The money will follow the passion. You seem to be truly into what you are doing, and you have the support of all of America and lots of good people. You are a role model for us. I have heard from everyone about your visit. You made

such a strong impression. You got the mojo going and lots of people have your back. I think Ms. Miller is baking you and the guys cookies. I am still basking in the glow of your love - still cleaning up as well. I will pay your big bill today, and then you will almost be squeaky clean solvent. Books, food, and beanies on the way. Be on the look out for boxes—I sent some last week when you were here, and I put some in the mail the other day. I also sent some to SGG Rumpel and one to Dupree. Tell 'em we love 'em. Ashley and I are keeping in touch. She was so cute when we took her home. She put her sunglasses on to hide her tears. She is an upright cookie. We all just love you so much and cherish the ground you stride upon - no matter how hot it is. You are our hero! YMETM! IDWIC is my motto. 13 Hugs coming at you, Mom P.S. We are going to keep too busy to miss you! Read the poetry – it will expand your mind!

Hey Momma (May 27, 2005)

It is great to hear from you. I miss you so much. I am proud of how strong you were at the airport. I know it must have been hard. I am still in transit; no, I did not ride in a helicopter. I expect to be back to Gabe sometime in the next couple days. We will see. I enjoyed my visit home so much. It was very fulfilling, but I am excited to be getting back to my men. I will call you when I reach my final destination. P.S. Make sure we get a picture signed for Ashley with Governor Perdue. It is important to her. I love you. You are the greatest mom ever. I read the first poem on the plane. I liked it very much. I need to read it again. I love you. YMETM. Your ever lovin' son, Noah

Mom “Hola, Amigo, I Wrote You a Poem!”

In my mind, when I see your head tilted
as though listening to the hymn of the universe,
A wind song rises in my heart,
stirring the hairs on my arms...
And, I bend my neck backward and look straight
up into the moon, stars, or blinding sunlight...
And, howl my heart out in sheer delight!
Oh, to be the mother of a knight in shining camo.
“Woof, Woof, Woof, Woof, Woof!”

Dad's P.S. – I am glad the Army is feeding you and not me!!

Ashley 5/27/05 Hi Lucy!

It's good to hear that you are staying busy. Noah also called me today and said that he was in Anaconda, and at about 4:00 AM tomorrow, he will head to Baquba. He said the helicopter thing would probably not work out, but I haven't heard about any incidence involving helicopters in Baquba. What happened that shook your heart? I'm glad I didn't hear that info!!! Tell Alyssa I said good luck at her game! I'm sure she'll do great. That was so cute that Bill and Hailey showed up at the airport. Anyway, I'll call Chrissie and we'll have to set something up to celebrate Noah's birthday! It'll be a blast. I can't wait to see ya! Talk to you soon, Love ya, YMETM, Ashley

Noah (Hello Mr. Leonard!)

It was great getting to see you over my R and R. Thank you for taking the time to get together with me. I wanted to let you know I attribute much of my success and who I am to you. You have been such a great inspiration to me. Your advice and care have been there to keep me going in the right direction, and I just want to say thank you.

I am finally getting adjusted to the schedule. I was not back for 30 minutes before they sent me out on a mission. It took me three days to get unpacked. Though I have adjusted to the schedule, the heat is another matter. It is getting into the 120s almost everyday. We are now starting to decrease our presence in the city, as the Iraqi police and Iraqi Army are now better able to handle security. This is a good sign because the sooner they can operate without our assistance, the less American soldiers we will need in Iraq.

As we are now having more downtime, I am using what I have learned from the scholar's program to institute a leadership and self development program for my soldiers. I am trying to set them up for success when they return to the U.S. so that they will be successful in whatever they choose to do.

Mr. Leonard, thank you again for seeing me. Please send my warmest regards to your family. Take care and God Bless. Your boy, Noah

Mom (e-mail, May 29)

Dear Noah, Well I have baked cookies, written emails, and interfaced with all of the groups supporting the Wolf Pack. It's amazing! I really was afraid that I would be lonely and bored when you went back! Oh contraire! I miss you so much and long to hear the sound of your voice in my ears, but I am busy everyday, teaching, packing boxes, passing on your 13 Hugs and IDWIC, and engaging with everyone I can in positive debate about why we must stand up. My eyes tear up at the loss of each life, and I will always live *for* Sgt. Salie, but I am reminded of what the father of a fallen marine said, "How could I be so selfish as to enjoy the freedoms for my family without being willing to pay the cost of freedom?" This is what the majority of Americans voted for, and so we must gratefully pay, your dad and I with loss of sleep and time, and you, my brave son, with the commitment of your life. I am honored by your presence on the planet. You and Ashley are like visiting dignitaries in my little, ordinary life. Your love, sacrifice, and open-minded/open-heartedness are my inspiration. I look into the green terrarium of our home and realize that through your heroism in the desert, I am forever renewed, forever brave, forever young. YMETM, Baby! Your momma loves you and so does everybody else! *)

Annetta B. Bunch (Times Courier, May 19, 2005)

Second Lt. Noah Harris, home on leave from Iraq, made a surprise visit to the United Methodist Women's banquet May 10, at the First United Methodist Church of Ellijay. The Soldier especially wanted to visit the ladies of the Joy Circle, who earlier this year took 23 men in his command to become their prayer warriors...

Noah (Times Courier, Thank you note to Annetta Bunch)

Dear Mrs. Bunch,

I have been back in Baqubah for over a week now, and believe me; it is definitely hotter than the hottest day of football practice at the stadium. Thankfully, the ac in my room works really well, so I can cool down when I get there which is not too often as we are on alert 24/7. Things are going well and my men were really glad to see me when I got back, which made me feel very proud.

I just wanted to thank you for the nice article in the paper. It was symbolic of the treatment that I received while I was at home. I was truly made to feel like a hero by the whole town of Ellijay, and that made me even more determined to do my best to serve my country. It also made me so thankful to live in one of the most beautiful spots in the whole world. I look forward to the day

when our work is done, and I can come home and give back to those who have done so much for me.

Thanks again for everything, 2LT Noah Harris

Meanwhile, Back with the PACK

Major Bobby R. Toon

I was worried about him since he only got to us right before Christmas and we were soon deploying. I realized I would not have the benefit of accessing and developing him while he was running around Ft. Benning, training his platoon. He would have the difficult task of taking over and becoming a part of the platoon during combat. My concerns were unfounded because Noah Harris was new to the Army, but being a leader and being under pressure was not new to him... Noah was a natural, gifted leader...came from a wonderful, loving family who taught him the same core values we have in the Army. He was a quiet professional. He cared deeply for his men and I can assure you the Soldiers of the Wolfpack 3rd Platoon loved their leader. He always led from the front and never asked any of them to accomplish a task he was not prepared to do himself.

From the moment he received his platoon, Noah blossomed into the leader he was born to become. He loved his mom, dad, and Ashley, but we all teased him about which was more important to him, us or the Wolf Pack. To him, they were one and the same, all part of his big family. Bayonet Company has long since broken up and most of the guys have gained a new rank or two and others have completely changed their lives around. SPC Batista, the platoon's videographer, is now a sergeant in New York City. Freddie DuPrée is an SFC (sergeant first class) in Louisiana, Andrew Miller is a sergeant at Fort Benning and Ski hit the jackpot. He found Tanis, they got married, had Audrey Fern, and have a second child on the way. Although he loves riding his horses on his ranch in Texas, Ski plans to go to college and become a social worker for troops who are leaving the Army after having suffered catastrophic injuries. What a champion! Like all the members of the Wolf Pack, his mission is to carry on. A tribute to the LT would not be complete without a list of their names and their ranks when they entered Iraq and served as a dynamic part of Operation Iraqi Freedom III. Noah loved them all and he knew they loved him back; they were his DAWGS. Though Ski is now "Home on the Range" in Texas, he told Lucy, "A part of me will always be on the Fob in Ba'Quba." Being a member of the Pack is a forever thing.

MaryAnn Dowd-Sussman (Lucy and Noah's GHS English teacher/buddy, summer of 2005)

Last Sunday, I headed to a certain part of Yellowstone National Park to watch the wolves... and consider Noah and his third platoon, the Wolf Pack. How appropriate it was to observe these social animals caring for their puppies... and to think about Noah. Wolves have strong family bonds and each has a role in life... From across the valley, the wolves howled... wolves running strong with life—just like Noah.

THE WOLF PACK – PLATOON LEADER, 2ND LT. NOAH HARRIS

SFC RUMPLE, SSG BROWN J, SSG BROWN S, SSG BARR, SSG RODRIGUEZ, SPC BATISTA, SPC NEAL, PFC CHRZANOWSKI, PFC LONG, PFC KOCH, PFC MASON, PFC JAVIER, SPC CHAMPION, PFC NAGLE, PFC FREYER, PFC MOORE, SPC MILLER W, PFC MILLER A, SSG MURPHY, SSG DUPREE, SSG CONNER, SSG PETERSON, SPC ROSADO, SSG MOYD, PFC DUFFEY, SPC TELEKI, PFC DELOERA, PFC AGUILAR, PFC SALUESON, PFC COLEMAN,

PV2 KESSLER, PFC DIACOYIANNIS, SSG EVERSON, SSG STANFIELD, SSG MATOS, SPC CLAYTON, SPC NEAL, SPC PRITCHARD, PFC THAI, PV2 FRY, PV2 BURTON

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM III (3rd I.D. Summary)

The 3rd Brigade Combat Team of the 3rd Infantry Division deployed to Diyala Province in Iraq during January 2005 in support of the 42nd Infantry Division, a National Guard Unit from Troy, New York. During the 12-month deployment, the Soldiers of Task Force Sledgehammer brought security, liberty, and advanced democracy. The brigade conducted over 24,000 combat patrols in the province of Diyala, conducted many joint patrols with the Iraqi Army and police, and set the stage for two successful free elections in the province. The Sledgehammer team spent hundreds of millions to refurbish and rebuild buildings, schools, bridges, water filtration plants, sewage treatment facilities, emergency rooms and hospitals and the infrastructure of the province. After the success of the first national elections in December of 2005, democracy has an unshakeable foundation laid by the sacrifices of 3rd Brigade Soldiers and the people of Diyala.

Bayonet Company mainly did the 24/7 combat patrols and quick-response actions. Whenever they got the call, our guys were doing their best to provide support and assistance to the fledgling Iraqi Army (IA) as well as members of the Iraqi Police (IP). During the spring of 2005, the company was fortunate to have as its guest Michael Yon, a freelance reporter and photographer who fearlessly travels around the combat zone with the troops to record and report the reality of the situation on the ground. As Michael is not subjected to the guidelines of a large press association, his online site offers a no-holds-barred, close-up account of the heroism of our troops as well as the courage of a people struggling to be free. We are so grateful that he journeyed with the Wolf Pack for awhile because he rendered some wonderful photos of Noah leading his men as well as the following description of a regular patrol.

Michael Yon (Michael Yon: online, "Walking the Line IV")

...I saw Noah... during a big raid in Buhriz when his unit found weapons and bad guys in the houses. I followed Noah and his soldiers into the palm groves nearby where they found weapons. There were a bunch of beehives stacked next to the river and someone said, "That would be the perfect place to hide s....." There were dozens of bustling beehives; the locals have citrus trees planted among the palms, and I imagined the bees were there to pollinate the orange trees. That's how it works in Florida. Most of the soldiers sneaked back from the bees, but one walked forward and said, "We can search, guys . . . just have to be slow. Nice and slow." And he started lifting up covers, nice and slow, and looking inside.

"Ain'ch you ever heard of African killa bees?" asked a soldier.

"You ever done that before?" I asked.

"Yeah," he said. "These are just regular bees."

"Reg'la bees sting too!" said the killa-bees soldier.

The hive-checking soldier wasn't running away under an angry cloud of bees, which I took as an endorsement of his apiarian credentials, and I started lifting covers, too. Nice and slow. Then, a couple more soldiers started checking hives, which really *would* have been a great place to hide weapons. But most of the others stayed back. Then I said, "*Can you imagine if we take some RPGs (rocket propelled grenade) now? These bees are gonna sting.*" And that's when the lieutenant said, "*Let's go!*" That was one of the last missions I did in Baquba, and it was the last time I saw Lt. Noah Harris.

Dad

Noah had more than one adventure in the palm groves, says Captain Bobby Toon. These date palm groves covered a lot of acreage, but underneath the trees was razor sharp saw grass. He was telling me about a big operation in which they were doing a sweep of the groves and Capt. Toon was coordinating his men over the radio. Capt. Toon said Noah was occasionally slow in responding to his radio calls and on this one operation Noah wasn't calling back fast enough for the captain. He said he finally got so peeved that he yelled over the radio at Noah, "You have 30 seconds to get yourself to my position." Capt. Toon said he looked at his watch and knew that Noah would have to bust it to get to him through the saw grass. The 30 seconds came and went and no Noah. About 10 seconds later, he said, they could hear the brush crashing from Noah's direction and saw him break through the undergrowth with a soldier on his back, running for the finish line. He carefully laid the soldier on the ground and then collapsed next to him drenched in sweat. It turns out that one of Noah's men had badly injured his ankle and he was tending to him when the radio call came. He just scooped the guy up, threw him over his shoulder and took off. Capt. Toon said he just stared at Noah pouring sweat and gasping for air and he said, "I was no longer mad." He realized right there that every one of his men was giving 110 percent of themselves for this mission.

Lt. Clark Cave (ROTC Buddy)

Noah is the one of the greatest people... my mentor, my hero, my best friend. Although I met him my freshman year (UGA ROTC), it wasn't until Ranger Challenge Team my sophomore year (Noah's final semester) when I truly began to understand what an incredible person he was... In terms of character, he could have done anything he wanted, yet he chose to abandon a lush lifestyle and support his country. In terms of fortitude, Noah never faltered. He always pushed himself beyond his limits to accomplish his missions. In terms of relationships, Noah made people feel so comfortable around him. Most notable was his ability to push his body to extremes. An example that stays with me every time I run a PT test was the PT test we took at Ranger Challenge Competition in 2003. Although Noah had been averaging a 13 minute 2 mile which was my pace, the competition and the obligation of winning sparked something inexplicable to make him run a high 11 minute 2 mile. He never made excuses; he never complained; he just won which brings up the most admirable of Noah's abilities; he didn't know how to lose. He once told me what goes through his head whenever he competed at anything. He would motivate himself by talking inside his head. You know, "*Let's go Noah. Push it harder. You can do it!*" When he was still a cadet, he went to LDAC (Fort Lewis) and after only one year in ROTC, he got First in Regiment. At IOBC in Ft. Benning, he won the combatives competition. He also went to great lengths to balance work so that he could spend more time with his beloved Ashley because Noah cared more about relationships than anything. He gave his soldiers the power to not only endure the war, but to enjoy it.

Ron Bennett (retired sergeant, amazing portrait artist and cartoonist)

Our son Travis (Bayonet Company, Iraq) always remarked about your son, "Dad, LT Harris *always* has a smile and a good word to say to everyone he sees. He seems to know everyone's name and every morning that we see him, he has a friendly greeting and a handshake and a note of encouragement. He can make your whole day." What a great thing to remember about someone. I wanted to somehow show my respect and appreciation... I started working on a serious pencil portrait... As with all things done by hand, a drawing or painting is only a "likeness" at best. My hope is that the longer you are around it, the more representational it becomes. I originally asked for a "bit more serious" photo of Noah, but Brigitte Toon said, "You won't find one because that wasn't Noah!"

Hey Mom! (6/6/05)

It is great to hear from you. I am glad to hear that you all had such a nice time at Hailey's dance recital. Was Ashley holding up o.k.? I am sure she is doing well. You are right; she is a tough cookie, but I still worry. How are you doing Mom? Making a difference in peoples' lives daily, no doubt. I am doing well. Due to circumstance, I am not merely sliding by in life, but sometimes I feel like I need to adopt the Samurai attitude a little more. The last few days I have not been as deliberate in my decision-making as I usually am. I think it is an adjustment phase. It is quite a shock coming back here from the vacation I was living. One thing I do enjoy is the simplicity of life here. Granted, things are complicated when we get attacked, but life inside the fob is usually simple. There are some distractions, but not many. I realize it allows me to take the time to get to know myself. When in the US, even when I am alone I am not really alone. Here I get a chance to just be sometimes. I think I need to be more focused. Not that I am not focused, but it is my thoughts and initial reaction behavior that sometimes give me trouble. You won't believe this, but sometimes I speak without thinking and have trigger reactions. Ha Ha. You know me. I can be a little too energetic. And I'm always working on my strategy. You know, did I do the right thing? Again it may be that I am just readjusting to being here. One thing I am struggling to adjust to is the heat. Imagine a hot summer day trying to cool yourself of with a hair dryer. I love you. YMETM. YAMSS. I do what I can.

Letter from Mom (June, 2005, "Strategy, Strategy")

We are so grateful that Noah was able to call and write as much as he did. Like the rest of the troops, if he had some down time, he did his best to let the folks back home know that everything was going well. For a while there, like old times, the family was talking on the phone about how to explain the IDWIC decision-making process to Noah's men. The LT wanted to refine his own skills as well as formalize it for his men. We had talked about it often, but Lucy wrote him this letter thinking he might enjoy a little poetry. Being an English teacher, she had to get into the complexities.

Hey Captain (Ha ha! Before you know it, you *will* be one), Making a good decision is the hardest task on Earth. Being into symbolism, I think you'll remember that I've always used Robert Frost as an illustration for my students. He said it best about decision making in the poem we call "The Road Not Taken." You've heard it a million times, but in case you don't have a copy and your internet is too slow, here it is with my simple translation on the right:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.

the traveler comes to the crossroads

Then took the other as just as fair
and having perhaps the better claim
because it was grassy and wanted wear
though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the **same**

the choices are about the **same**

Both that morning equally lay
in leaves no steps had trodden black
Oh, I kept the first for another day

the traveler heads down one -

Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back

IDWIC in action

I shall be telling this with a sigh
somewhere ages and ages hence
Two roads diverged in a wood and I
I took the one less traveled by
and that has made all the difference.

reminisces with a sigh -
the choice "made all the difference"

So, this person walks through life and comes to a crossroads. He/she makes a decision and walks down one road and immediately recognizes that he'll someday say that he took the harder one, "the one less traveled" and that the choice will make a big impact on his life. Frost indicates it's the choosing, the decision-making that impacts us more so than the actual choice. To me, that means intention is very important because actually, as Frost says in the 3rd verse, the roads (the choices) are the same, but making a decision, however simple, has complex ramifications. That's why it is so hard to practice IDWIC. See, the traveler doubts he will go back and even if he tried to, he might not find the way and circumstances could have changed. The traveler can never really know empirically that he made the right choice, so, Frost, I think, is kind of poking fun and warning the reader to live intentionally, to think deeply about what we *can* do. Frost warns that when we get "ages and ages hence," we start thinking we made the right decision as a way of validating ourselves with, "I took the one less traveled by!" It's his way of suggesting we should stay humble! No one can ever really know whether or not he made the right decision, but Frost's traveler illustrates, we *can* move forward with good intention. His character did not turn around and go backwards – he made a choice. So, if someone wants to practice IDWIC, the important thing is to make a positive decision, develop a plan of action, execute the plan (even if he comes to a crossroads), evaluate the outcome, and move on. Kind of like the Army's after action evaluation process. Validate the process through taking responsibility for actions and outcomes. Congratulate success, make necessary changes, and decide what's next. Then, as Dad says, "Move toward the highest vision." Vote for the future. It is thus that we give our consent to the greater good of the team, the family, the country, the world. Noah, when you model IDWIC which you always do, it shows you believe in the unity and the future. It takes the mystery out of everything, and everyone knows what to expect. They understand that you have good intentions and that you will always do what you can. They also know that you are going to go for it. Honey, you are the best decision-maker and most totally positive attitude walking. U Be U. Your vision will sustain you. I love you so much, Mom
P.S. YOU CAN'T GO BACK! GO FORWARD! EMBRACE THIS MOMENT AND SUCCESS WITH EVERY FIBER OF YOUR BEING!

We don't know if Noah ever had the chance to share Robert Frost with his guys, but we are pretty sure he gave them this action acronym which he adapted from one of the Wolf Pack's favorite movies.

Noah - Action Acronym for Platoon Leaders, from *The Last Samurai*

A – Accept all possible losses before entering the battle.

C – Center yourself in mind, body, and spirit.

T – Trust your inner skills and warrior intuition.

I – Imagine success clearly with the mind's eye.

O – Only exist in the present moment.

N – Never, never stop once you have begun.

The Last Day

Noah to Mom (June 17, 2005)

Hey mamma, Congratulations on your eye. So you only got one done, but it fixed vision in both? I am happy for you. It is a great feeling, huh? Well, I wrote to Ms. Shade and Sen. Isakson. She replied to my e-mail the same day. She said the Sen. will be back from D.C today and I should hear from him soon. Pretty cool! As far as the credit card refund goes (somehow he overpaid), I intend to invest that money. I was hoping that Dad might be able to find a good stock and I definitely want an IRA. I know I am going to spend a bit of money when I get back on a car or truck and a hand gun. But I want to invest the rest if I can. For too long I have had lots of money going into the red, mostly because of my spending habits. I am doing some budgeting and investing classes for my guys. Like I said, SSG Dupree is doing one of those, and I am listening. I will do one on IDWIC leadership and decision-making (ha!). Maybe Papa Earl has some ideas too. Can you believe I will be 24 in a week? I was thinking about how old I'm getting when I saw Cinderella Man (bootleg version). It's a good movie. I know this isn't the message that they were trying to send but what I got out of it is gratitude for the Army and my country. Even in times of economic devastation, the military is a great place to be, even now. Everything is covered. From medical and rx med costs to housing to life insurance, and a check is guaranteed to be in my account every two weeks. If I do twenty years, after those twenty to the end of our lives, Ashley and I will be covered. Medicine and retirement pay. That is what I got from Cinderella Man. Ms. Mommy, what does that tell you I am thinking about? She's beautiful and she's wicked smart! Well, I love you and miss you. IDWIC YMETM, Your ever lovin' sun

Noah to Ashley (June 17, 2005)

Hey Babe, I love you so much. You must be really bored if you are watching videos from the blue dome. I didn't have my helmet on because I sat in the CP (command post) monitoring the radio most days. The guys who were outside were the ones who had to wear all their stuff. Well, you'll be happy to know that things are slowing down for us here. The IPs and IAs are starting to be able to handle their own security, so we have less of a presence in the city. Unfortunately they are not as well trained or protected as we are. As a result, over 10 have been killed and more than 10 have been injured in the past few days. I have been doing quick reaction force QRF (A Quick Reaction Force is any force that is poised to respond on very short notice, typically less than fifteen minutes) a lot recently. We get called out a lot to assist the IPs and IAs, but now they don't need us as much. My mom said she got the pictures of us and the Gov. I think I am pretty close to being readjusted to Iraq with the exception of the heat. I cannot even explain to you this heat. It feels like being in a sauna everywhere you go. It is getting into the 120s almost everyday. Yuck. We also are having the Arizona Cardinal cheerleaders coming to the fob to perform. I would get in on the action, but while the show is going on, all the officers are going to have to pull security on the perimeter of the Fob. Guess what? I am almost out of debt. My big credit card is paid off. What a relief. We need to get you there. How are your student loans coming? We both should have great credit. I am still thinking about what kind of car I want to get when I get home. What do you think? I am not sure I like the new body style of the Tacoma. I think a truck is the way to go for me. What do you think of an H2. This is what I am doing with my time when I am not thinking about you. I wrote to Sen. Isakson yesterday. I was surprised to hear from him immediately. After working in D.C., I expected to get a letter from an intern. I know I was really motivated to do networking when I was home, but right now my mind is just blank as far as future career goes. You are my future, but as far as what will happen outside of our marriage, I am blank. It is actually a pretty cool feeling, because I am able to just be. Life is so simple over here. Workout, eat, sleep, go on a mission. Simple. Because of our downtime, I am forced to fill it up, so I have changed the vision of our platoon. It is still to be an effective combat unit, but in addition I have instituted a goal of professional development. We

are having classes on everything from combat ops and vehicle maintenance to investing and budgeting. I really want to set these guys up for success when we get back. Some are planning on getting out of the military, so I am making sure they are prepared for that and some are staying, so I am trying to get them ready to step into new positions of higher responsibility. Anyway I will stop rambling. I wanted to let you know that you are my comfort zone. I think of you and feel good. I love you So much. YMETM. Your husband, Noah

Ashley to Noah (June 17, 2005)

Hey Sweetie, I promise that I am not as much of an internet dork as I seem. :) I'm not that bored, just missing you and the video of the Blue Dome makes me feel a little closer. I am happy to know that things are slowing down for you guys. I keep hearing that Congress is starting to push for bringing the troops home. They say we have been there long enough. From what you say, maybe it's getting closer. I sure hope so.

I would like to have a copy of the pictures of us and Governor Perdue. I can get them later though. It's no rush. You behave with those cheerleaders now. JK. I hope it's fun for all the men and gets their morale up. I'm so glad that you are out of debt. That's great that we got it all fixed, and that it actually worked. I'm not gonna make you help pay off my student loans. I'll work on them. I'm just torn right now between paying them completely off or saving for a down payment for a house. All of the finance books say to wait on the student loans bc they are only 1-3% interest and houses are much higher on a much larger price. I figure I'll try to save and then I'll have the money to figure it out.

That's awesome that Isakson wrote you back so quickly. I think it's neat that you are keeping your connections. Don't worry about confusion. You have plenty of time to figure it out. As long as we are together, everything will be perfect. I think it's a good feeling to be "blank." I would refer to it as open and free. I also think that's awesome what you're doing with your men. They need that kind of guidance.

Well baby, gonna go finish paper work and get my room all cleaned up. Oh yeah, this is a cute story... I sent you a fun package today full of surprises (muscle magazines that I hope you don't have and stuff) and I was at Wal-Mart. This kid about 20 asked me out. I told him that I was really flattered but that I had a boyfriend. I started showing him all of the stuff I was getting you and telling him how you were in Iraq. He said to tell you thanks. It was really funny. I love you and you mean everything to me. NCTU : > I love you so much baby... P.S. I hope that the almonds don't go bad.

Mom: Would You Have the Courage to Face the Dark?

I have asked myself that question so many times as I've wondered what gave Noah and his men the strength to knowingly travel into no-man's land, face a ruthless enemy, and befriend a suffering nation. How could my servant leader, precious Momma's boy, gift from God, at his young age of 23, be so confident that it was his purpose to use his highest potential to stalk death, not with a whimsy, but with relentless, sure-footed stealth, knowing with each step of his desert boots he was drawing closer to the final frontier, to the edge of night?

Noah had many "beastly" nicknames growing up. Quadzilla still makes me laugh when I think of it, and I love the way Lt. Gaddy called him a meat-rack, but in retrospect, the name that really suits is the one that we gave him. It came in a dream and, as we considered its implications, we became sure that it was correct. Noah seemed a good name for a long-lived friend, for a stable husband, or a caring dad. When he was just a boy, his sister Kym gave him a cup that had this rhyme, "Never idle, never still, always active, charm he will." We laughed at its accuracy and thought maybe he'd be a school principal or a politician or maybe a grape farmer on the land

across the creek from the house with the azalea. Never once did it cross our minds that the name Noah could mean warrior, but when we look at it now, it gives us great solace to remember a part of his morning prayer, *“The Earth and everything on it is mine to care for.”* This world was his Ark, and he became a true, loyal steward, like a good father who would not delay for a second to protect his menagerie from a flood or from the menacing jaws of those who sought to prey upon them. He was always that guy who was going to pick up the ball and run with it. Willing to sacrifice his own security and safety and even use his body as a shield, like the members of his pack, Noah was a Noah, a protector of the weak and a fierce leader of the kind of brave men who want to be in the center of the action and on the tip of the blade. They are our protectors and they must be fierce because they know what is at stake. Noah wasn't kidding when he told his cousin/little brother David before he left, *“Remember IDBIQ. I die before I quit.”* And he meant it when he told Christy Lindstrum in the ETC-3 interview, *“The buck stops with me.”* At the time he wrote this little scrap of a poem, it seemed like the kind of wishful dreaming that wakes many of us up in the middle of the night and, wrapped in the warm comfort of our beds, we vow to make changes only to forget our resolve by dawn's early light. I realize now *“A Peaceful Solution”* is one of Noah's many mission statements.

Noah (1999, “A Peaceful Solution”)

*Maybe one day Peace will come and War will end.
Maybe the solution is just round the bend.
Maybe peace is not meant to be,
But if it is, it will begin with me.*

He was carrying the light in front of him, banishing the shadows for the children, for the Jesses, and for Iraq because he knew that to fight against the “thief in the night” of terrorism is to fight for the Bill of Rights which we have long considered to be our birthright. From the safety within the heart of America, though we may think those freedoms will always be with us, perspective dawns when we remember Lady Liberty has stood at the crossroads of the world holding up the rule of law and the torch of freedom in New York Harbor for a mere 123 years, not much time when compared to the long, bloody tapestry of human culture. Looking at it that way, the odds don't sound so good to a lot of people, but Noah had been in that situation many times and he wasn't thinking about odds when he told Christy he had to do his best: *“We know the enemy is out there. We just do not know where. They won't face us. We actually do the combat patrols to get the enemy to attack us.”*

He wanted to get the job done for Ellijay, UGA, USA, for his family in New York City, and his friends in Washington, Japan, and Russia. He wanted the whole world to have the chances he had enjoyed. All of his coaches and teachers and his dad had taught him the same thing, “Once you are sure you are right, set a goal, and commit to a plan of action.” In wrestling, sometimes it is necessary to commit to a difficult move that will yield the pin because the team needs the extra point, and sometimes when a wrestler faces an opponent who refuses to engage, the best tactic is to take a shot. As all of Noah's athletic role models will point out, today's teams are building the victories that will come in future seasons. Noah understood the principle well, and in athletics, along with some tough losses, he had achieved some amazing personal bests taking risks for the team. In principle, the infantry's mission in Iraq was much the same. Risks were encountered to prepare the way for those who came behind, but this time the stakes were higher. In the battle to win a free Iraq, he knew he could lose his life or, worse yet, the lives of some of his men, but he

knew what he was fighting for. As he wrote to Annetta Bunch, and as he told his friends and well-wishers, *“I look forward to the day when our work is done, and I can come home and give back to those who have done so much for me.”*

Barbara Bush

Giving frees us from the familiar territory of our own needs by opening our mind to the unexplained worlds occupied by the needs of others.

Reminding us that freedom is our homeland even if we must fight for it, Noah was willing to take big risks to hold the line in Iraq and confront the terrorists who must be drawn out of the shadows where they lie in wait. It was uncomfortable, but he wanted to win this fight and triumph over injustice, and it would be a sad day indeed and a dangerous world if there were no longer young men and women like Bradley Arms, William Long, David Salie, and Ashley Huff who are willing to commit to the risky moves that the theater of war presents to even the most talented of champions. They faced the dark for the same reason as George Washington when he crossed the Delaware that cold, dark Christmas night so long ago, to prepare the way of freedom, to make the world better for those who come behind.

“I Am a Person of Action”

On June 16, Noah told me in an e-mail that he was reading a book I had given him called *The Traveler’s Gift* by Andy Andrews. Although the other illustrative stories that Andrews has chosen are equally powerful, I gave him the book when he was home on R&R because I thought the story of Joshua Chamberlain at the Battle of Gettysburg would present authentic truth to a warrior in a war zone. Andrews used the anecdote to illustrate his third principle, “I am a person of action.” I have since done a little more investigation into the story and found that, like Noah, Chamberlain was an officer and a gentleman of noble quality. The Confederate general who ultimately surrendered to him, John Gordon, called Chamberlain “one of the knightliest soldiers of the Federal Army.” Chamberlain was one of the good guys but is best known for his tenacity at defending a ridge called “Little Round Top” at the Battle of Gettysburg. After running low on ammunition and in danger of being over run by superior numbers, Chamberlain ordered his men to stage a bayonet charge down the hill, with the left wing wheeling to make the charging line swing like a hinge. It was a battle-saving, against-all-odds, simultaneous frontal assault and flanking maneuver for which he earned the nickname The Lion of the Round Top because he never lost sight of the big vision. Certainly he could have retreated with dignity because he was out numbered and out gunned, but Chamberlain pressed on to success. It is amazing that Noah read that story on June 16, 2005, and responded with an IDWIC kind of humble comment, *“Heroes are made by circumstances, being in the right place at the right time; courage is also a matter of circumstance”*

Joshua Chamberlain (at the dedication of the memorial at Gettysburg)

The inspiration of a noble cause involving human interests wide and far, enables men to do things they did not dream themselves capable of before, and which they were not capable of alone. The consciousness of belonging, vitally, to something beyond individuality; of being part of a personality that reaches we know not where, in space and time, greatens the heart to the limit of the soul's ideal, and builds out the supreme of character.

He Turned Right (Buhriz, June 17/18, 2005)

Outside the Wire

In Iraq and Afghanistan our troops use a clear image to express the relative danger of their missions. It has to do with a reference to concertina wire. “Inside the wire” means they are in a safety zone as on a base, and “outside the wire” denotes the danger zone such as Buhriz. These days, we think anybody who is willing to walk outside the wire for us and our country is a hero. When we meet any of Noah’s men, any military person, any policeman, or firefighter, we try to find an opening to express sincere appreciation for their service to us and our country because each of them never knows if he or she will be one of the ones called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice. They are our heroes; and, most especially, we respect and honor those who voluntarily have committed body and soul to go “outside the wire” and wage the War on Terror.

SGT Adony A. Batista (Member of the Wolf Pack)

I remember Lt. Harris was into what he did, he was always trying to perfect his craft, so it seemed like at this point (June 17, 2005) it was his time to put it all to work, if that even makes sense.

Sounds like the method he had applied to so many things he had done in the past; as a student, a wrestler, a cheerleader, and as a coach, Noah studied the best practices and was always on the lookout to add and develop new techniques. He had always studied incoming “intel” in preparation for athletic seasons, drama productions, championships, and degrees. Then, he’d get to work on the mission at hand and usually end up leading from the front. On the field, from center stage, in the classroom, and now, on the battlefield, he focused his experience on success.

Pop Pop (Words of advice to the LT)

Noah, during WWII, my future brother-in-law, Johnny McArthur of Anderson, S.C. was killed by a mortar during a special mission for which he volunteered at the port of St. Nazarre, France. Promise me, just do your job and don’t volunteer for anything special.

Pop Pop has been wearing Noah’s UGA varsity cheerleading jacket which makes him a Clemson Bulldog; sorry Tigers. His white hair piques the curiosity of all who see him sporting the bold red jacket with the black “Super G.” People frequently ask if he was a UGA cheerleading captain, and as he tells it, when they do, he shakes his head and smiles grandly answering, “No, but let me tell you about my grandson.” He is proud to spread Noah’s story. However, one day he realized there were gaps in his understanding of what happened in late June, and he asked Lucy, “Honey, the accounts I read were all kind of different. What really happened?” He was surprised when we answered, “It all happened.” The newspaper accounts are all true, but they are like pieces of a puzzle that had to be reconstructed a little bit at a time. Sifting through articles and listening to personal testimonies, we came to concur with the accident investigator’s adage that if five people see an accident, you’ll get five different accounts of what happened. It took a while to put it together, but thanks to many folks who provided video, news reports, and personal accounts, we have a complete picture. We had to do this for Mikey and Uncle Po Po who want to know every detail, and for Pop Pop so he understands that, though Noah did not listen to his advice, he loved him with the greatest love of all. Of course, it is for Noah’s heroes, the members of the Wolf Pack, Bayonet Company, Sledgehammer Brigade, and for Major Toon, Noah’s

leader. It's also for all the warriors who rode with their boy that night; they know who they are and probably have a piece of Noah memorabilia somewhere close at hand.

The bottom line is we wanted to know how our champion did in his moment of truth. After carefully formulating the question, one morning at IHOP in Columbus, Ga., Lucy looked Major Toon straight in the eye and asked, "Bobby, did Noah screw up? I just have to know because it would be important to Noah." Without looking away, but with tears glistening, Bobby said, "He did what I would have done." His men say the same thing so that's what we are trying to do, what Noah would have done. He would have forged ahead, insisted on a detailed account, and he would have wanted everyone to know where he was coming from. We have heard him described as a "Hoo-ah," a "meat-eater," and "a soldier's soldier." No matter what you call it, like his ancestors, he was simply a warrior who was determined to defy his fear and do the right thing.

General George Washington (Sixth Rule of Battle)

A General of ordinary talent, occupying a bad position and surprised by superior force, seeks safety in retreat; but a great captain supplies all deficiencies by his courage and marches boldly to meet the attack.

Whether he would have made it to general we'll never know, but there can be no doubt that he would have become George Washington's kind of captain. His superiors tell us that Noah was a good lieutenant in many ways. He was a strong leader who worked hard, expected the best from himself and his men, and put the goals of the team and the company's mission first. He was good at what he did but correct in his premonition about what makes a hero; it was the events of that late night patrol that reveal his great vision and his courage under fire.

Chris Vaughn (Star-Telegram.com, staff writer)

The day was a Friday, June 17, 2005. But the hour was late, around 10 p.m., when Chrzanowski (Noah's driver) gathered for a prayer, checked his St. Michael's medallion in his helmet, then heaved himself into the driver's seat of a shot-up, damaged Humvee nicknamed Tre Seis (36). Harris eased into the passenger seat. Long (Noah's gunner) climbed into the gunner's hatch with the .50-caliber. With three Humvees trailing, they gunned it out of Forward Observation Base Gabe... Chrzanowski had been in the Army less than two years. He had joined because his mother issued him an ultimatum—move out or start going to college. He talked to a friend's dad, a retired sergeant major and Vietnam veteran. "There are 211 jobs in the United States Army," he told Chrzanowski. "But there's only one way to be a soldier." As they drove around the city that night, the two prisoners (by an Army account, there was only one prisoner) in the back pointed out locations of insurgent-occupied houses and weapons caches.

Though we do not have video of the actual mission, we just about memorized the details of a recording of a similar mission supplied by Adony Batista. So it probably started something like this. Noah gathered the team leaders and the platoon around him and explained calmly while chewing his ever present stick of gum what was going down for the night. "*See what kind of trouble we can stir up. Keep in mind it's long past curfew; so, see any personnel out, we need to chase 'em down and question 'em. See any vehicles, make sure they are not I.P. before you go chasing 'em down. Be safe tonight, guys. We might dismount a little bit and walk around. See what we can find. OK, I just want to say a little prayer.*" The video cuts off before the prayer and switches to Sgt Barr yelling, "Mount up!" accompanied by the Wolf Pack's theme song blaring in the background. Jay Z intones, "Bring 'em out, Bring 'em out..." However, when we

mentioned Noah's prayer to Sgt. Duprée, he immediately responded that it was funny when Noah prayed, kind of like he was just talking to God, and we thought about the way he talked to God in the car or to the portrait of Jesus in our home with a kind of quiet, *carpe diem* intensity. That being the case, it probably went something like, "*Dear God, please watch over us tonight. Keep us safe from harm. Thank you, God. Drive on! Amen.*" Though the mission on this particular night was different, Noah was probably chewing gum and Ski was complaining about how Noah threw protein bar wrappers all over the Humvee. Nothing stopped that boy from getting hungry! The night probably started out as just another great story that reveals the day-in-and-day-out determination and integrity of the soldiers of the U.S Army. The only difference was that they had an insurgent in tow to help them with their task.

Major Bobby Toon

We had developed a technique of convincing detainees we were done with them and offering to drive them home in order to figure out where they lived so we could search their homes. When Noah took this guy home, we found out he was making ID cards for insurgents. When faced with serious jail time, he rolled over and started to provide intelligence on the insurgent leaders in Buhriz. Noah was actually performing a recon with this guy in the back seat on 17 June. The purpose of the operation was to recon and PID (positively identify) future target locations.

Major Toon sent us a slide that showed a storyboard of what Noah and the Wolf Pack were able to capture during the home search of this admitted bad guy. They were all probably pretty excited as they headed back to the base because they had completed a big mission for the night, breaking up a counterfeit operation, hauling out the necessary paraphernalia and equipment, as well as a pile of cash. So, with the zip-tied insurgent in tow, Noah and the Wolf Pack turned toward the fort to go inside the wire and catch a good night's sleep.

Contrary to some reports, their mission did not start as a joint operation with the Iraqi Police, but as they were heading down Market Street to the intersection with Canal Street where they would turn left to go back to Gabe, Nail Moraki (Noah's interpreter) must have heard on the radio that a nearby unit of Iraqi Police (IPs) were in a situation they couldn't handle and were taking fire and needing help. The command in Ba'Quba had realized that by having the Terps (interpreters) monitor the Iraqi radio nets, they could gain greater SA (Situational Awareness) of what was going on in-country. Noah decided to call back to FOB Gabe and ask the ROCK X-ray, Battalion tactical Operations Center (military talk for the base personnel guiding the ground operations) for permission to go support the IPs instead of returning to the FOB. Major Toon said, "I stayed on Noah and the other PLs (platoon leaders); once we received fire we had to be aggressive and attempt to close the distance and fix the enemy in order to prevent their withdrawal." This is something that Noah had often talked about as he told the interviewers back home about combat patrols. He told us, "*If we don't return force with force, it will simply embolden the enemy and weaken the Iraqi Police.*" When he called the base, the X-ray approved his request, and as the platoon continued forward, the convoy made direct fire contact twice before reaching the intersection of Market and Canal. At that intersection they linked up with the IPs Moraki had identified and turned south. Instead of retreating back to the safety of the base, they turned right to face the enemy and take it to them.

We had been concerned about his state of mind during the engagement with the enemy, but after talking to those who were there, though it had been a tough night, the final five minute ride had

all the trappings of honor. We think it went down something like this. As the third platoon drove forward into the pitch-black darkness, uninterrupted by street lamps or the ambient glow of a town, suddenly, the sound of enemy fire ricocheted through the night. One of the Wolf Pack yelled, "Where are they? Where are they?" The gun fire was coming from the roof of a building on the left and maybe the right as well. The radios crackled and growled to life, and the platoon leader droned calmly in the background. His helmet was cock-eyed from the radio through which he listened through one ear to command back at the FOB. The other ear was trained on Nail Moraki, his interpreter who stayed on the radio and gave constant updates about the deteriorating condition of the IP's who are in trouble. Ski and Bill were putting in their two cents as well. Noah and his interpreter had been monitoring insurgent activity in Buhriz throughout the evening on the Iraqi police channel. It had been an active night and word came across the airways that an Iraqi police patrol was pinned down and outnumbered several streets over. Even though his assignment was over for the night, the LT called Rock X-ray – the tactical operations center – for permission to assist the patrol. Permission was granted and the humvees moved out to provide support. They would rendezvous with another I.P. patrol car on the way.

It was noisy and hot and chaotic, the communication interrupted by the sound of metal striking metal, the groaning and grinding of the heavy equipment, and the staccato sprays of striking bullets which were punctuated by brilliant blips of light. Someone called out, "Come on, let's talk, everybody. What have you got?" Mortar fire illuminated the gloom with brief, menacing explosions; grenade launchers lit up the night vision goggles as men shouted their positions, "We took a pretty big hit on that one." The platoon leader's voice escalated when his Humvee took a hit, but the Pack drove on into the enemy fire. Bullets were pinging off the armor, and grenades bounced off the Humvees; the convoy returned fire as the troops cautioned their brothers in arms about the IEDs that were in plain sight. One of the guys told us, "The entire night the platoon was getting attacked by small IEDs, nothing major, but nerve-rattling." A voice called, "Watch on the left! On the left!" A voice demanded, "Where is it? Where is it?"

Suddenly, the lead Humvee rolled over a small IED, lighting up the night and catching fire. A voice yelled, "We're in the kill zone. Kill zone! We gotta get out of the ambush. Back up. Back up!" The platoon leader in the second vehicle behind the disabled Humvee responded almost gently as though directing traffic at a busy, fast moving intersection in a Southern city. "*Y'all follow me. Pull around him. There you go. Whip around. Don't follow too close.*" The engines rumbled, bouncing through teeth-rattling potholes, and there was more enemy fire. Sparks flew like fire works on the 4th of July. A voice called, "Who's in the front?" It was the platoon leader, the LT; he'd taken over the lead position just as the convoy was careening toward the intersection. As they approached the T in the road, the intersection of Market Street and Canal Street in Buhriz, they met up with the I.P. and one of the men yelled, "Are we getting out of here? Where we going?" Noah was at the crossroads, as he had been so many times before, only this time the roads were not the same. He knew the difference between them. One led to safety, back inside the wire, and one led to his warrior destiny. The voice called again, "Are we heading left?" The platoon leader's voice answered with intentional, deadly calm, "*We're heading south (right). It's a go; let's get 'em.*"

The platoon leader made his decision; he was voting for the future, for the highest vision, for the big success, for the win, and he wasn't holding back. There was no way they were going to

abandon the valiantly struggling Iraqi Police. Not on his watch. If their new brothers in arms were going to have to fight their way home, they were not going to be alone. It was around midnight as the convoy turned right and picked up speed on Canal. The small IEDs continued to light up the night as the gunfire escalated; the sound of Bill Long's .50 cal cut through the inky gloom, sporadically drowning out the voices of the Wolf Pack as they chattered back and forth, from Humvee to Humvee, monitoring the fire and the road. "Check the roof! Check the roof! Where are they?" The bullets rained down and the lead Humvee returned fire, even the driver. It all just happened so fast.

Chris Vaughn (Star-Telegram.com staff writer)

Chrzanowski opened his door so he could fire his M-4 rifle easier. At that moment, as their vehicle crested a rise in the road, Chrzanowski's Humvee drove over a roadside bomb. Chrzanowski, his door open, went flying.

Back at the base, the members of the command had been leaning forward, holding their breath, carefully monitoring the unfolding events as though their attentive, prayerful focus could bring the boys home safely. The convoy was so close to the base that everyone in the Sledge Hammer Brigade heard the explosion and felt the concussion. They knew what it meant. The men on-site could tell by the blinding white-out and the way the Tre Seis instantaneously was engulfed by flames that this IED was a big one and it was packed with deadly white phosphorus, a perfectly timed hit. Back at the fob, the company's first sergeant, John Gaston, and Captain Jeff Green suffered an agony of despair when they heard the quiet words of one of Noah's men, "Our LT, our interpreter, and specialist Long are down."

Major Bobby Toon

I know in my heart that Noah made the right decision to not take the easy way out and return to the FOB and leave the I.P.s out there alone and afraid to face the enemy with little firepower by themselves. No telling how many of them would have died if Noah and the Wolf Pack hadn't charged in. Noah was trying to take the fight to them when he turned right instead of left. It wasn't like he didn't already know they wanted to fight that night since he had already taken fire twice.

Jimmy W. Hall (Gainesville, Ga.)

This fine fellow sacrificed all for us. He's gone forever. No future family, no career, and no white picket fences will ever be his. This is genuinely upsetting, but also enlightening. It bodes well for the rest of us that wonderful people like Lt. Noah Harris still exist in the year 2005. What he gave up, the rest of us may obtain and hold due to his unselfish actions. In an odd twist of fate, it is ironic that a prisoner that Harris was escorting was also killed in the enemy assault... The prisoner's own comrades killed them both, having no regard for even the lives of their own. If ever there was a distinction between good and bad, this exemplifies it. Noah Harris was a good man.

Michael Yon (author of Michel Yon: online magazine, and the book, *Moment of Truth in Iraq*)

There is a difference between Coalition soldiers... and the terrorists and criminals they confront. Whether you call them insurgents or resistance fighters or terrorists, the people who wake up in the morning plotting how to drive explosives-laden cars into crowds of children have to be confronted.

Corporal (posthumous award) William Long, translator Nail Moraki, and First Lt. (posthumous award) Noah Harris went out in a blaze of glory fighting for democracy, and John Chrzanowski, with burns on much of his body, was instantly engaged in a life-and-death struggle for survival. Since he was a little kid, Noah had been in the right place at the right time, and though there are some who have a hard time understanding, we still think he was in the right place at the right time. We believe he found his destiny, and for people like us who come from a long line of champions of freedom, we think he took the right road; and probably if he were here, Robert Frost would agree when we proudly say, "...with a sigh," Noah "...took the one less traveled by and that has made all the difference."

Major John Porambo, Special Forces (Noah's ROTC Instructor)

It was like a drop-kick to the chest; it still hasn't hit me yet. For a warrior, Noah achieved the highest honor by giving it all for the cause of Freedom.

Mom: Honor Is His Touchstone

He was willing to go outside the wire to help his country and to help the world, and when he came to the crossroads, though he could have gone left, gone back inside the wire happily, he turned right. I couldn't be more proud—it's what leaders of the free world do. Every day when they are confronted by mighty challenges, they work and build their communities, their countries, and the world; they choose to face a challenge head on because even though it's a risk and there are one hundred safer doors to go through, they take the hard one because it's the right thing to do. You better believe that I look up to and I talk up the vision of my son and his men. Noah had the heart to go forward into peril because he had faith in those who were coming behind him. He went through that narrow door and had confidence the mission would continue. Though Noah had expressed his concern about whether he was suited for the military, we think he was made of military stuff. For sure he was made of American stuff. He saw a problem and he wanted to find the solution. He was the kind of guy who was fascinated with rearranging the notorious analogy of the world as a crab bucket. Crab fishermen know they can throw crabs into a bucket and the creatures will never escape because as soon as one crab gets a leg up, the other crabs grab on and drag the leader back down, so none of them make it out alive. Maybe it was because Rick had used the "leaky bucket" story to build team spirit, but when Noah first heard about the crab's behavior, he worried it like a sore tooth until one day he smiled and said, *"I'm gonna be the crab who figures out how to pull the other crabs out of the bucket."* He never wanted anyone to be left behind in a bad situation. His favorite image in his poetry may have been the wind dancing freely, flying solo actually, but he turned out to be the rock, the wall upon which we stand. His greatest desire was to live up to Emerson's success poem, "To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived." As his ILA friend Guy Milhalter said, Noah was "the strong one." Like America's guardians and leaders, all along he was at the top of the wall pulling everybody up, using his life to serve, and because he was so beautiful to those who knew him and good at giving, Noah's death seems the opposite of idyllic; it was rough, harsh, ugly, but I will always remember his last moments on this planet as his highest achievement because Noah became the embodiment of the highest form of philanthropy, his every action, a message of love and a touchstone of honor.

Captain Daniel Dunn (Fort Lewis and IOBC buddy)

Noah is a hero. In this world, it's hard to find a good role model for the youth of this nation and

the world all over. But if we had more kids that knew of Noah Harris and the way he lived, and if they just felt that they should emulate even one aspect of his life, we'd see a major positive change in society the world over...You could know him for five minutes or for five years, or his whole life and he'd have changed everything in your world around, inspiring you to change for the better if only in a slight way. He'd reach out and take hold of you to help you in a time of need at a personal cost of time or effort. I never saw him hostile or pre-judgmental when he approached someone. He was always open and welcomed whoever it was he was just meeting as if he'd known them his whole life. To Noah, it only took 5 minutes to be a good friend.

Oh my nature boy, you gave your softness, your body, your heart to hold a hard line of truth and strength and freedom. Like the millions who have come before you, you took responsibility, closed the back door of escape, and intentionally walked into the battle against the shadow of death so that the world can move toward freedom and justice for all.

The Official Army Report

Lt. Noah Harris died as a result of a hostile action that was described as homicide, from ballistic injuries of the head. The interval between onset and death was recorded as seconds to minutes (Ski and Lucy will tell you with conviction that they never knew what hit them). His body came home to Dover, Delaware, where he was cremated with the utmost care by the Army on June 25, 2005, his birthday. In the alternate universe, where all things are perfect and just, we allow ourselves to imagine that his ashes were lovingly placed in a special urn, just at high noon, the moment of his birth and the moment the bells were tolling 24 times in his honor at the beautiful Methodist Church. His family was walking down the aisle to initiate the celebration of his life. His awards and decorations include the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Parachutist Badge, and the Combat Infantry Badge.

Corporal William Long's Army Bio (Wolf Pack Platoon, fallen hero)

Cpl. William Long was born in Boston, Mass., on April 16, 1979, to John and Susan Long. He was raised in Boston for a short period before relocating to Lilburn, Ga. He enlisted in the Army on October 17, 2001, as an Infantryman and completed One Station Unit Training at Fort Benning, Ga. His first assignment was with the prestigious 1st Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment's Old Guard located at Fort Meyer, Va. He served with the Old Guard for three years and performed at numerous military ceremonies, including at Arlington. His awards and decorations include the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star Medal, the Army Achievement Medal (2nd Oak Leaf Cluster), Army Good Conduct Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, National Defense Service medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Parachutist Badge, Combat Infantry Badge, and Expert Infantry Badge. Cpl. Long was assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division (M), on June 20, 2004, where he served as a rifleman and a team leader. He is survived by his father John Long, mother Susan Cordner, and stepfather Lee Cordner.

Nail Moraki's Army Bio (Bayonet Company translator, fallen hero)

Nail Andraws Moraki was born in Telkaif, Iraq, on October 6, 1968, to Andraws and Froniya Moraki. He graduated from the University of Mosul with a Master's degree in Linguistics in 1994. In December 1996, he moved to the United States where he attended Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. From 2001-2004 he worked as a teacher in the Michigan school districts of Warren, Madison, and Southfield. In July 2004, he started working for the Titan Corporation as an Interpreter on FOB Gabe. His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star Medal and the Secretary of Defense Medal for the Defense of Freedom. Mr. Nail Moraki served with Task

Force 1-6 Field Artillery, 3BCT, 11D and Task Force 1-10 Field Artillery, and 3ID (Task Force Liberty) as an interpreter and translator. He is survived by his mother Froniya of Warren, Michigan.

The magnolia blossom is considered to be a symbol of nobility, white and pure. I had focused on it so much, wanting it to bloom, but I almost missed it. There was so much going on and the air was already redolent with the gently undulating tendrils of the wild honeysuckle bushes. Suddenly, there it was, on June 19, 2005, the fragrance of the sweet blossom intruding into my grief with a merciful message of perseverance, its powerful aura reminding us that Death did not win, the circle cannot be broken, there is no separation; we are connected yet. A friend had pressed into my palm a card with Psalm 30: 11-12: *You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you for ever.*

Jim and Anna Anton (LT Dan's parents)

Dan felt privileged to serve with your son and believed that no one was more deserving to be addressed as "Soldier," the highest accolade that could be bestowed upon any man, than was Noah, your beautiful gift of love from God... "In the sweet sorrow of our separation, have faith in the things hoped for and belief in the things not seen..."

Images of Bulldogs, Bobcats, dress blue uniforms, big smiles, great hugs, positive attitudes, all things Noah great and small bubbled up in my heart and I saw Noah, the shooting star, find his way and go through the narrow door, threading the eye of the needle. As I bowed my head and pushed my nose into the core of the hand-sized petals, I remembered how one of his men had joked with me, "You can't spell lost without LT." And I thought to myself, "You can't spell light either." I may not have laughed out loud, but the merciful blessing of humor warmed my aching heart all through that week as we prepared to celebrate the gift of Noah's life. I could feel him whispering, "*YMETM, baby!*"

Lt. Bradford L. Gaddy

Just thought I'd let you know that you managed to do it once again. You know what I mean because you always had a knack for getting all the attention out of the group of LTs in Bayonet Company. Now as you know, that is not always a good thing (smile buddy). Seriously, as I sit here and hash out these lines, it's hard to imagine not having you around to hang with when everyone else wants to rest or chill out. Lord knows you had more energy than anyone I ever met. Can't figure out if it came from all the food you ate or the time you spent in the gym. There won't be a meal eaten in the chow hall that the guys don't think of you, Fat Boy. I'm going to miss your hands all in my plate and, "Yes, I am going to eat that!" Then, there will always be the gym. I wish I could name the place after you today, brother, because not only did you live there, but you made sure the rest of us did also. Thanks for the motivation that seemed to come so naturally to you, buddy. From the moment you set foot in the company area back at Ft. Benning, you never missed a beat fitting in. Professionally, you wasted no time establishing yourself with the platoon and the LTs. We knew right then that you would fit in, and that made all of our days go by a lot quicker. That's when the good times started. It almost seems impossible that you managed to pack all of us in that Honda Civic to get where we were going, but with you, where there's a will, there's a way. For those times that will serve as memories between the boys, "Thank you." I just want to borrow that passion you had to make others feel as happy as you did. It won't be easy, but I know that's what you would have me do. Going to start today, Fat Boy, I promise...See ya when I see ya, buddy.

We know that if Noah had been born a Spartan, in ancient Greece, in the minds of all his brothers, he and William and Nail would have gone straight to the Elysian Fields and been greeted with open arms by David Salie, Bradley Arms, and Uncle Johnny. It seemed we could hear their voices whispering, "Drive on!" "United We Stand!" "Do what you can!" "Woof, Woof, Woof, Woof!" as family, friends, Noah's town, his state, his country lifted up all the brothers and sisters in prayer. It was some kind of tipping point that caught the attention of all who came within 50 miles of his home. I remember staring into the faces of the steady flood of well-wishers who were compelled to bear witness to the passing of a warrior; there was a special light in the eyes of everyone I saw. I think Ski explained what it was when we visited him in San Antonio where he was recovering. He asked us to forgive him when his beautiful blue eyes glimmered with a concentrated, spaced-out expression that made him seem far away and told us not to worry because he was just looking for that piece of his heart that will always be in Iraq. He said he's proud to live with that little hole that can be patched by love, but never completely sealed because it reminds him to tell the story of how "the hand of God" saved him so that he could remind the world of what it means to take a stand when you want so badly to just do your job and then get on home in one piece. All of Noah's people, all of the guardians of the precious gift of life, carry that same brand of awareness because we have seen his light in their eyes and we remember.

Uncle Po Po Glenn (New York, N.Y.)

I was mad at you. I was mad at me. I was mad at God, country and even the damned doves out my back window. Then you told me not to be and I was not any more. I quit anger, and as I did, my fingertips began to tingle, and I knew it was you. I knew it was you in there, spiking my blood. They tingle off and on everyday, now, and I understand, of course, that heroes don't leave you with anything to be long mad about. I understand, at last, that real heroes can't leave you. Real heroes can't help themselves, but leave an unending and glorious legacy, and that sounds so perfect to me that maybe I'll try to be one myself. I love you, nephew. Regards to Nank (Po Po and Lucy's mother who died of polio in 1952, Uncle Johnny's little sister) and Buck (Pop Pop's mom, a.k.a., Granny).

Major Bobby Ray Toon (Fort Benning, the Boot Ceremony)

I realize that you may not have had the pleasure of knowing Bill Long or Noah Harris, but I am glad and believe it is appropriate that we are honoring their memory in the same Memorial Service. These two men spent almost every day for the last seven months of their lives together, and since we got on the ground in Iraq, they had grown very close and spent every ounce of their energy working to make the lives of the people there better. Myself and some of my brothers got to witness the hard work and tireless effort they devoted to our mission. It was truly inspiring to see the Bayonet 36 crew in action. I have seen them both, under fire from the enemy, covered in sweat from head to toe, every muscle in their bodies tightened as they returned fire and closed with the enemy. Once you have been under fire together, a bond develops that is hard to put into words. I believe the immortal words of William Shakespeare from *Henry the V* sums up what I am attempting to relate to you. "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; for whoever has shed his blood with me shall be my brother, and those men afraid to go will think themselves lesser men, as they hear of how we fought and died together."

First Lt. Christian Mitchell of Fort Stewart, Georgia

Noah was a brother to me. I knew him from UGA, IOBC, and Airborne school. I will never forget

the good times together, and the bad times we drove through. What is ironic is that the day you were killed, I was also injured in an IED attack in Baghdad. I visit your memorial, here at Fort Stewart, at least once a week. I had soldiers in my platoon killed in Iraq, and although this was hard on me, it was nothing compared to when I found out... Noah, I love you brother.

And of course, there are special sisters.

Ashley “High Speed” Henderson Huff

I am very proud to stand here and speak about Noah because he would have done the same thing for me. Noah and I knew each other through most of college. You would call our relationship atypical for UGA. Between the Greek socials and the football parties, we did things like go train in the woods on weekends, go to inspections, wake up at 5 a.m. to go to PT and then compete against all of our other ROTC friends. Despite the fact that we were both very competitive, Noah and I got along right from the beginning and I'm sure that's because as all of you know, Noah was a very likeable guy. He always knew how to have fun; he kept me laughing and he was very smart. He spent a lot of time telling me about his big plans to go into politics and how he was going to run the country the right way, and how he was going to enlist me to vote for him no matter what. Then, two days later, he'd turn around and tell me he was going to be the CEO of some major corporation and excel in the business world, but all of these plans were on hold until after he served in the Army. Noah had a tough time deciding which branch to be in, he would tell me that if he did signal corps or one of the other support branches, it would look a lot better on his résumé, but then when it came time to decide, it was infantry, and the reason he chose that he told me was he really wanted to lead those soldiers into combat and take those soldiers to the front and, of course, I wasn't surprised because that's the type of person that Noah was. He could have been like most people here and just gotten a job in Atlanta and gone on with his life, but he took the tough road and he never once looked back once he made up his mind. I'm sure the things that I valued so much about him like his charisma, humor, and determination were the same things that made him such a great platoon leader. When we lost Noah, it was a complete shock to me. Our class was very close and we all have a lot of memories—some were fun and some were challenging, but they were always very rewarding. Even though I've known for a year that I am deploying, it took the death of Noah to make Iraq a reality and I think that was true for our whole class because we heard a million times about war and what it means, but now that the Bulldog Battalion has lost one of its own, that's when it hurts and I hate to believe that one of the guys from a group that I love so much is gone... Noah made me realize how important it is to see my friends and value my relationships.

Bev McCarron (*Star Ledger*, “Army Lt. Ashley Henderson Huff”)

After graduation, Huff was commissioned as a second lieutenant and chose the Military Police Corps. Huff was assigned to the 549th Military Police Company. She was stationed in the restive northern city of Mosul, performing a mission fraught with risk, training the fledgling Iraqi police. Her duties required her to accompany the police, who are often targeted by insurgents, on their patrols.

...Military police units perform some of the most dangerous missions in Iraq. MPs are responsible for protecting convoys and often back up ground troops on operations to hunt insurgents. Huff was on patrol with an Iraqi police unit on Sept. 19 (2005) when a suicide car bomber pulled up alongside her Humvee and detonated the explosives. Huff was killed, and two other soldiers in her Humvee were injured.

Some may worry about the impact of a gigantic explosion on the soul while others question whether it was worth it; but those of us who have faith know that there are angels among us and the Iraqi children do too. These special souls were willing to live and die for us because they believe that our potential and our dreams should be protected. In a Momma's selfish moments, I sometimes wish I had not quoted so often Browning's, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for?" On bad days, I wish that his coaches hadn't been so great. If they had been a bunch of slackers this never would have happened. I wish his mentors hadn't been so motivating, his ministers so confidence-inspiring, his people so loving and beautiful because we were the ones who taught him to face his fears and even his death. We were the ones who gave him the courage to face the dark. And now we must be the ones who have the courage to follow his vision and contemplate his actions and understand how his sacrifice will always matter. For his band of brothers, there was no question. The guys tell us it was a turning point for everyone in the area because they all came to understand what they had to do, and their only regret was that they had to come home before the job was completely finished.

A Life and Death that Matters

Dan Murphy (The Christian Science Monitor, "An Iraqi city becomes turnaround story. Despite violence, including a nearby attack Saturday, Baquba sees improvement.")

...Baquba was symbol of everything going wrong in Iraq - and its neighborhood of Buhritz was a symbol for everything going wrong in Baquba. This city just 50 miles north of Baghdad was crawling with Sunni Arab mortar teams, snipers, and bombmakers. They had made parts of the city their own, killing police when they found them and driving the rest into hiding. Their grip was so strong that only 60 percent of the region's polling places opened for Iraq's first post-Saddam election. In Buhritz, not a vote was cast; some polling sites were torched. But today, US commanders are pointing to Baquba as a symbol of what might go right. Every polling place stayed open all day for the Oct. 15 (2005) referendum that approved Iraq's new constitution earlier this month. Violence was light, while voter turnout was high. While Sunnis, Shiites, and ethnic Kurds of the city all have different visions of Iraq's future...Baquba is a reminder that...security gains are being made in many Iraqi cities.

Asked why, Lt. Col. Rob Risberg, commander of the 1st Battalion of the Army's 10th Field Artillery Regiment, scratches his head, then says it hasn't been rocket science. "The Iraqi Army and the Iraqi police have really come along — they can handle most of what comes their way now," says Colonel Risberg... "We're here to back them up, but I think we're seeing the benefits of getting cops on almost every street corner." There have also been heavy doses of force. In June, Buhritz was almost a no-go zone for Risberg's men. They didn't come down except in force, and even then were almost certain to be shot at.

Then on June 17, Lt. Noah Harris of Dawsonville, Ga., and Cpl. William Long of Lillburn, Ga., were killed when their Humvee was hit by a roadside bomb in the area, and Risberg decided he'd had enough. "That was the straw that broke the camel's back," he says, pointing to the crater left by that earlier bomb as he rolled through Buhritz with just a three-Humvee convoy. The Army shut down the area for six weeks with Operation Sunrise — basically letting no one in and no one out — and began major sweeps through the area. Risberg said the operation had a twofold objective: To capture fighters in the area and to persuade residents not to support them. Risberg was helped by Capt. Bobby Ray Toon, from Grannies Neck, Texas, who was directly responsible for Buhritz.

Harris...definitely left his mark on Toon.... "He (Noah) was an incredibly strong person, in the prime of his life. He could have had a great life outside the Army but believed in what we were doing in Iraq — to him the price was worth it."

Pop Pop (June 25, 2005)

My great niece Emily Meiberg and her schoolmates started Project Noah's Dream to help collect Beanie Babies for Noah and his men; the whole school got involved. And last week on her school's closed circuit television, when little Emily bravely shared with her classmates the events of June 18, 2005, she told her friends about how Noah always said, "I do what I can." She closed her remarks that day with "Noah did what he could."

When Noah and William planted their DNA in the dust and rubble, the seeds they left behind were full of the spirit of America, and it wasn't long before they sprouted and started to grow. Their mission and their lives grew even more important to the Sledgehammer Brigade, in fact, to the soldiers in the whole area, and Noah and William would have loved how the story of the incident created a paradigm shift in the brigade's strategy of action. In less than one year, on June 7, 2006, the notorious terrorist and al Qaeda leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed 1.5 miles (2.41 km) north of Hibhib right next to the city of Ba'Quba and, though the citizens of Diyala and Iraq are still struggling, no one can deny there is hope that the sense of Iraqi patriotism is starting to spread. The people now have the tools with which to communicate freely. Before the 2003 war, in Iraq there were no independent media outlets; as of 2006, the rapidly growing free communications industry had established 54 commercial TV stations, 268 independent magazines and newspapers, 114 commercial radio stations, and more than 2,000 private Internet cafes, and of course there is no telling how many Beanie Babies, school utensils, and medical supplies have been sent by the American people, but the Iraqi people are getting the message and beginning to believe in the power of the ink-stained finger. The winds of terror and war are still capable of creating blustering gusts, but the ripple of freedom will have an effect that will last for all time.

George Washington

Freedom, once it takes root, is a plant of rapid growth.

We are not blood-thirsty for revenge, but rather patient and prayerful. When we close our eyes, we don't "see red"; rather, we see yellow ribbons and American flags for as far as the eye can see, erected in honor of our heroes who fought for freedom, not just for themselves, but for others. We see their names carved in granite, embossed in bronze, on the sides of buildings and on street signs in the lands in which they fell. Best of all, we see the ecstatic faces of Iraqi children as they wave the flag of their own patriotism and swarm around troops like Ski with their small hands waving a big "thumbs up." In our hearts we feel the reverberations of the mighty bell of liberty and we hear voices calling, "Let freedom ring!"

Jan Komara (Young Harris, Ga.)

For the Fourth of July holiday weekend, I drove from Florida to north Georgia. When I reached your county, I was astounded to see yellow ribbons and more yellow ribbons—about 50 feet apart—that extended miles along the highway. It was an incredibly impressive tribute and I was extremely moved by the obvious love and respect of the community for the Harris family. I saw Noah's name and looked him up on the Internet... I have told many people about the symbols of caring; they were also awed by the magnitude of the project. I felt a need to let you know that because of your town's spirit and dedication, many other people now know about Noah, his family and community's loss, but also of their pride in him.

Mom's Birthday Letter (returned unopened along with boxes of shrink-wrapped home made cookies—enough to share with all of his men)

Happy Birthday Big Un, 24 big ones—moving in on a quarter of a century! Feeling grown up? That's nothin'—I have over a half of a century and Pop Pop's got over three quarters, and we still don't know always what we are doing with our lives. However, we all agree on one thing, our greatest accomplishment is YOU! You are our shining star and NOTHING compares to you (NCTU)! Celebrate! You are SO loved! High noon 6/25/81. The beginning of greatness.
YMETM, Mom and Dad

Yes, celebrate. Noah would not want anyone to take his passing badly; he would want us to take it goodly and Godly as he did; and he'd want us to do our part, to be a servant leader, and rise to the challenge of improving the world by one thing no matter how small. In Iraq, Noah saw we still have a long way to go before all citizens of the world experience justice, but he remembered how far we have come since the day Thomas Jefferson threw the gauntlet of "consent of the governed" into the world of ideas, declaring to tyrants and despots that the creator has endowed each living being with inalienable rights that include life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We remember that Noah said, "*I am thrilled to be a part of this.*"

Courtney Stewart (Adopt-a-Troop volunteer)

It just today occurred to me that even though I was only blessed to have Noah in my life for a short while, I knew him well enough to know that he would not want anyone to be sad for him. As much as I have cried over the loss of him in this life, I have smiled 1,000 times as much just knowing that he truly lived life to its fullest, and that he did it with more honor than many...Noah truly taught me what it meant to be selfless and an American. That is a lesson I will carry with me and pass on to as many people as I can.

He Who Tells the Story Rules the Culture; The Culture Rules the World.

In the grand scheme of civilization, though this life is but a blink, what we say and do here will echo for all time, and a great story will never be forgotten especially if it is about conscious risk and sacrifice taken for the greater good. That's why the Spartan battle to protect the homeland at Thermopylae was reinvented in the movie *300*, a box office hit based on a story of sacrifice that occurred thousands of years ago. Just like the stories of Washington crossing the Delaware and Chamberlain at the Little Round Top, the values exhibited by the warriors who fought and died on a little patch of soil in Greece have been resurrected countless times because they teach us not that there is something worth dying for, but there is a vision of the world worth living for no matter how great the personal sacrifice. Like all great accounts of individual courage, the words and images inspire our imagination and vision with love of family and freedom. The words actually move us to action; we want to do our part.

Missy Millican (UGA cheerleading, 1999)

...I am so blessed to raise my children in this wonderful country. I know it would not be the country it is today without the sacrifice of our brave men and women throughout history. Now Noah is added to that list and I know the generations after will be thankful for his sacrifice... Brett (UGA running back, named to the 2000 National Good Works Team by the American Football Coaches Association) has used Noah as an illustration of sacrifice, bravery and courage in some of his sermons. We put his picture on the screen so the students can see an example of a hero.

The power of such words is so important it can be said that he or she who tells the story rules the culture; and the culture rules the world. We must remember that in addition to all the simple American folks of good will like Brett and Missy, Osama bin Laden understands this all too well, and since the early 1990s he has been spinning a tale which he uses to inspire terror and hatred of the devil. In his story, American leaders, citizens, and even babies, along with other “infidels” figure as the embodiment of Satan of the world and deserve to die.

We know this is not true, but it seems few of us have any idea what we can do to combat the scathing rhetoric and invective that is being used and brandished as a tool to tarnish our image and, worse yet, pierce and destroy the vision of our people. Like Noah, we world citizens who love freedom and justice find ourselves under attack at the cross roads, weighing the choices. It is a shock that there are some Americans who want an easy win or want to stampede backwards, deny the past ever happened, and avoid the pressing responsibility of protecting the weak, thinking, “Let’s just get out of here.” Others want to slow down, plug their ears, and rest upon a bench as they try to figure out whom to blame before they take another step forward.

However, Noah’s people can hear the voices of children calling and realize the circumstances have changed and we can’t go back; rather, we must seek and find a positive way to go forward. We must follow Noah and finish well. We must lift the torch and support his band of brothers and sisters who have filled the ranks and come behind him. Though the world might have forgotten who we are and how much we have done for the cause of liberty, Americans of good will must continue to stand up as we always have and, most of all, we must encourage our own children to honor the country that gives us so much.

We must promote the positive and share the stories of honor and sacrifice. The summer before 9/11, Jim Fox, the great American who coordinated the area-wide construction of the ribbon trail to honor Noah, took his sons on a trip to Washington so they could witness and understand the roots of our freedom and justice. Like him, we must seek out the symbols of integrity and courage that built this country and place them first every day. We must endeavor to be like the countless numbers of North Georgia patriots who have created visible memorials to Noah and our troops in homes, on walls in businesses, on the sides of buildings; like Ronnie Thompson who dedicated the walls of his dealership to a fallen hero, just as Gilmer County Board of Education emblazoned Noah's name on the sides of a Bobcat wrestling/cheerleading gym; like GHS teacher, Sharon Luke and her annual staff who dedicated the 2006 yearbook to a fallen bobcat and his favorite teacher, Linda Miller (ironically and sadly, Ms. M lost her battle with cancer just 5 months after Noah's death); like UGA ROTC refurbished a "pumping iron" room in their LT's honor, like Pam Hamalainen and The Veteran's Affairs of Dawson County and the Chamber of Commerce who keep Noah's story on their web site, and like Larry Munson who has dedicated his one and only talking bobblehead doll to a UGA cheerleading captain. We must set our lamp of freedom out where it can be seen and shine our light. We can never afford to think that we have done enough or declare that it’s time to just take a seat and rest at the crossroads, and, God forbid if we allow ourselves to race down the path of least resistance believing that the world’s attention should be commanded and dominated by the people with the smoothest, or most popular, or loudest, or ugliest, or most inhumane voices, because then the Osama bin Laden's of the world and those of his ilk who hate America for all of the best things she represents will win the tipping point of what he calls the “Third World War” and a critical mass

of hatred could surge and douse the light of personal freedom; all because we empowered the negative voices to drown out the quiet, positive voice of wisdom.

The whole world knows as we move forward, like our soldiers who take a knee and reach out to young people all over the world, the olive branch is always there, but we must continue to take responsibility and cheer for our guardians who are still willing to go through that inconvenient, narrow door as Noah did to fight the predators of the weak and drive them out of the shadows where they snarl and snap in their cruel effort to reduce humanity to a lifeless carcass they may use and feed upon at will. We must be courageous and hoist Lady Liberty's torch and stand for the one principle that has made our country so wonderful. Noah and his band of brothers felt it and were not afraid to face the night and die for it. Man to man, it's called brotherhood, woman to woman, it's called sisterhood, and person to person, it's that warm, amiable, broad-minded intentionality that is better known as good will. Though he carried a big stick and the courage to use it if necessary, Noah always said, "*It is our positive, optimistic attitude that will win the day.*" Today he would tell you again, "*I do what I can; follow me.*"

Emily Sims (Athens, Ga.)

Noah was my tumbling coach at United All Stars here in Athens. He touched my life in many ways during that time. At Georgia games he would yell my name over the hedges always putting a smile on my face. I can't even explain to you how much Noah has affected my life and decisions. Whenever I think about doing something I think, what would Noah have done in this situation... He helped me believe in myself and who I am.

Now that he is no longer with us, I am determined to accomplish everything he tried to. I can't help but want to touch lives like your son touched mine. I would do anything to be the person he once was... I will not rest until I touch lives like he has done.

Noah used his eyes, his charm, his tactical imagination, and his 13 hugs to promote his message of love and personal development. He'd tell all the Emilys, "*Sweet Pea, eat your protein, drink a little green tea, pump a little iron, and today, just do what you can.*" To him that meant take care of the body, heart, mind, and soul, make good decisions, and forge ahead with a grand vision for the world, confident that right action and faith will clear the path ahead and open the doors for those who come behind. With his actions, Noah humbly lived a life that mattered because, though he embraced every moment here with a joyful, hungry gusto, he never lost sight of the broad range of possibilities, and he included everyone in his vision, remembering, "*A stranger is a friend you haven't met yet.*"

He'd want us to remember before we have our little talk with God each night to consider whether we practiced IDWIC to the best of our abilities; and he'd want us to pray to remember our highest aspirations in our dreams, wake up like he did, and hit the ground running. When we hear the ugly words of those who wish to wield power over others, he'd want us to remember how David Salie said, "Drive on!" And when we hear America's detractors, he'd want us to remember the hope of the Iraqi children. When we feel a little faint in the face of adversity, he'd want us to think on Sgt. John Chrzanowski and Lt. Ashley Huff, and remember our friends. When the pundits shout the words of failure, and insist peace in the Middle East is impossible, we think on Noah and William and the thousands of Iraqi patriots who have died at the altar of freedom, and we remember they are always with us, angels watching over as we struggle to continue the mission.

Sergeant John Gaston (Bayonet Company's first sergeant)

Noah was a wonderful man who went out of his way to treat everyone with dignity and respect. There isn't a single soldier who Noah walked past without greeting that soldier with a simple hello and an uplifting smile. He was totally focused on being the best at everything he did and he was a joy to work with. He strongly believed in God, and in that, I know he is in heaven right now awaiting our arrival.

Footprints In The Sand

Looking back to the beginning of America's history and further to Nehemiah laboring at the wall or the Spartans protecting the gates of their country, we gaze through the mists of history at a vast, infinite beach that is covered with the footprints of all the brothers and sisters who yet are lifting and carrying us forward as they always have to a future that is filled with the hope of freedom for everyone. Their peaceful smiles beckon and encourage us to follow them in their mission and claim a destiny that is greater than the comfort that comes from fulfilling individual, petty desires, one that leads to a new dimension in which all are included in the warm circle of light. See, in our version of the story, the struggle to gain individual sovereignty for all humankind is worth it and though many might fall at the hands of barbarism, the good guys win in their effort to provide security and lead the people of good will to unite in the effort to lift the beleaguered masses who are suffering to be free; and even the jihadists join in because they finally recognize that terrorism only leads to a dead end of misery and despair and despotism. Like Noah, we believe for the highest vision and we look forward to the day we can walk down Market Street in Buhriz, Iraq, and turn right on Canal to find the spot where our American son claimed his destiny as a hero for Lady Liberty. We will make an etching of his name from the road sign on Noah Harris Drive at FOB Gabe and leave our footprints in the sand of a free country in a free world.

Janice Burgess (Answered Prayers)

...the word came that Noah had been killed in battle. Every member of Fruit of The Vine can tell you exactly where they were when they heard that Noah was gone. We can recall who told us, how we felt, and the emotions that were stirred within us. As the shock became acceptance, I began to wonder what I could say to a group of faithful prayer warriors that had prayed so diligently in faith, believing that our prayers would bring Noah "safe home." What could be said to comfort them and keep their faith strong for the nights of prayer that lay ahead for other young men and women who needed that "shield" around them? In my heart, I felt the whisper of my Heavenly Father. "Tell them I answered their prayers." And I knew it was true. Noah was sheltered safe in the hands that had created him. He was safely returned to the place from where all good and perfect gifts come. Noah was truly "safe home."

The prayer warriors still meet. They still light the candles. They still cherish "home", and mountains, and rivers, and blue skies. They still do what they can. But now they pray without fear. Because of a young man named Noah, they have courage. They meet knowing that even in the worst of times, during the worst moments of anguish, when the bad news comes, their Father hears their prayers.

Doug Langston, “The Gentle Warrior” (written especially for Noah’s 24th Birthday)

“Noah, why’d you do it?
Why’d you go and sign?
What was the big hurry?
You had lots of time.

There was a family all around you
And your friends were everywhere,
But you were on a mission,
You had your cross to bear...

... You grew up in a loving home,
Both Mom and Dad were there,
It didn’t take long for all to see
Just how much they care.

A beautiful place you had to live,
A house built in the woods.
Even though it was remote
You still had all the goods.

As you got older, it became quite clear,
You were different from the rest.
A heart of gold, concern for others,
A recipe for success.

Noah, why’d you have to do it?
Why’d you have to go?
You didn’t have a thing to prove,
You were 39 and 0.

You could’ve put your feet up,
Or soaked them in the creek,
But a leader has to follow his heart,
And listens when it speaks,

You knew after 9/11
There was something you must do.
You knew down deep inside
There was something calling you.

You put others’ needs before you.
You pushed your own aside.
That’s why your men all loved you.
That’s why you serve with pride.

Your body went down in battle,
But your spirit will never die.
That's why we are all here today
And hold our heads up high.

So, why did Noah do it?
Now I plainly see
He did it for his country,
For his love of you and me.

So, little Noah I always loved you,
Right from the very start.
But today Lt. Harris,
I salute you from the bottom of my heart."

Just as the sudden appearance of the rainbow and the wafting fragrance of the magnolia fill our senses with the magnificence of creation, throughout the history of humanity, the great prophets, performers, and poets have reminded us, "The best is yet to come." Noah had that kind of a hopeful heart for the world and we can feel it now. Like him, we choose to believe in the abundance of life and the higher destiny of humankind. Our seers remind us that in the twinkling of an eye, we will move to a higher vision and like Noah, they understood, "*No pain; no gain.*" So we must examine our tragedies and never forget. The fire fighters from NYC who visited Gilmer High School reminded us, "It's tough to remember people holding hands as they jumped to their deaths," and it's tough to contemplate the blinding explosion that took Noah, William, and Nail and forever altered the life of Ski and all the members of Bayonet Company, but that's just the point. We must choose to look beyond their travails into the essence of their wonderful lives and remember the promise that resides in the selfless love that has gotten us where we are today. We must remember our cheerful avatars of freedom, our light bearers who with faith the size of a pink sticky note were able to fly to the other side of the earth, rebuild walls, battle bad guys, and model strength and softness with bullets and Beanie Babies. Though he would rather have taken a stroll with his love and sat beneath a bough in the many quiet arbors of his home place, Noah had to put the light of hope on the table first because, as he told his dad, "*I've had a wonderful life.*" Noah believed it was something that everyone deserved, so he took responsibility and walked the walk. That's why we must remember and share his story far and wide even of his ashes understanding that God answered a mother's prayer, and brought Noah home in better shape from Iraq than when he went. When he flew away as our champion he had a heart as big as America, but when he came home, he was a hero for the world; and he brought Iraq with him just as when he came home from Russia, from Hawaii, from Washington, from Athens. The message of good will was the same, "*Dad, leadership is the same everywhere you go. You put up your arm and wave and pretty soon people are smiling.*" Each time he returned from a distant land, he was more convicted because he could see the unstoppable wave of love was spreading and he felt he was a part of the rising tide of human dignity. He could see how the ripples have gone out and come home again and gone out again, providing the tree of liberty with just the right soil and moisture; and thus, he believed the best is yet to come. From his perspective, like the mighty oak which he so often referenced in his poetry, humankind slowly has been rising above suffering, terror, and degradation, spreading mighty branches of truth and

justice so that all may come to enjoy the sweet shade of peace, love, beauty, and wisdom. We know with a parent's heart that our boy always planned to be part of the fertilizer of freedom, and he fulfilled a destiny beyond our earthly imagination.

Helen Keller

When we do the best that we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another.

We tell his friends that Noah traveled many miles during his life, and the same is true after his death. It was long after his birthday that we heard the gravel crunch in the driveway, and though we had promised each other to be strong, we felt the tears flow with a weird mixture of relief and grief because the dust of our boy finally had come home to the banks of the Ticklebug for the last time. Major John Porambo had accompanied the package from Dover to Atlanta where he had been joined by Major Tony Owens for the final leg of the trip. As they stepped into the stillness of the blue evening shadows cast by the stately poplars, we were surprised at how John and Tony wrestled with the ungainly box to get it to the deck and into the house. We had always assumed the ashes would be light.

We kept them for a year in the great room of our home so that Noah's friends could touch the beautiful brass box the Army provided. During that time we built a site and re-landscaped the house so that it would integrate with the fractal of honor in our living room. Around here, all the wide paths lead to *Noah Pointe*, but at the final approach to our hero's resting place located in a hairpin curve on the creek, Rick fashioned the flagstone walkway so that it narrows and a person must bow the head to pass under the lacy branch of a white pine and enter the sanctuary alone. The cozy outdoor chapel is formed by the sheltering trunk and deep shade of the huge maple under which Noah was conceived as we lived in the tent and built our home. The surrounding wild azalea bushes complete the enclosure as they dust the walks with pale pink blossoms and brush the air with an amazing fragrance from the middle of June until the fourth of July, as though to honor Noah and his country's birth. With great care, Rick constructed and aligned the lone rock bench; on exactly June 25 at sunset, those who linger by the creek to pause and reflect will be dazzled and graced by the harmonious convergence of the sun, the earth, the gentle breeze, and the splashing waters as Mother Nature creates a symphony of sparkling flaming colors, a liquid, flowing rainbow of light, just for Noah. Under a large, but simple, scarred triangle of plain Georgia flagstone, we spread most of the ashes so that Noah might in fact return to the ground of his birthplace. On its surface rests the candle which we light every day for all who are suffering through the struggles of this life, but most especially for those who have found their mission of protecting and strengthening the unity of world. God bless our guardians! On a simple cross beneath the tree: 2 Corinthians, 5:7, "For we walk by faith, not by sight."

The rest of the ashes have ridden the wind and water in places that only Noah and his parents and family know about. We will say that on a dusty June day, Pop Pop and Lucy hung one of his IDWIC dog tags from the scaffolding surrounding the rebuilding project at Ground Zero, New York; and there is a rumor that there are ashes being held in reserve for a trip to Hawaii and perhaps Japan. No one will ever know the story of what happened to all of them because Noah's people are not finished spreading the love, but Uncle Po Po's story must be shared because it is Simply American—full of challenges and passion, a bit irreverent (cover the children's ears), but, just like Noah, it is heavy on the humor and love.

Uncle Po Po WARNING: PG-13 for language - seriously)

My “consarnded” (Foghorn Leghorn, WB cartoons, “word”) sister, Lucy, wanted me to write this. Check with our father (Pop Pop, a.k.a. Foghorn Leghorn) bout the adjective. Truth is, what with Noah and his family living atop one of God’s mountains, me and mine living in a city of man mades, I was not much of an uncle to Noah. Not until 3 or 4 years before the shit that happened did I even know him. Thank God he was an easy one that way. If he was not, he was some damned actor. Which, turns out, he was. Some damned actor to fool a whole world of us with his straightforward honesty. Honesty that would sometimes aggravate me to orneriness. But you knew you knew him from the start. Knew you better know it, too. Lest he kick you into purgatory with one of those telephone poles he had the cojones to call legs.

But that is not what she wanted me to talk about, my consarnded sister. It was so damned outlandish that I even forget whose notion it was. Not that that mattered, anyway, but it was probably Ashley’s. But we damned well did decide to scatter some of Noah’s ashes off the Observation Deck of the Empire State Building. Because that boy had loved this city I call my home. Once he told me, “You like it here because you’re never bored, Uncle Po Po.” I answered him back pissy, like, “Think you know everything, boy?” for these reasons: (1) He was smarter than me and I was not ‘bout to give him the satisfaction of knowing it. And (2) He did have to know every GD thing. Good gracious, but he did.

Anyway, Ashley, Chrissie and mother, Gloria, met me at my saloon, ‘Toad Hall,’ in the Soho neighborhood of Manhattan. About a half mile from Ground Zero. Where that hellish event went down. The one that led to my nephew’s becoming a giant. Compared to the rest of us. And let no man nay-say that. Even think it, I will know. Anyway, those skirts drank a little, gave me some uppity guff about paying their bill. Causing me to chide them over the fact that it was my friggin’ hootch, and I would damned well be the arbiter of what in hell to do with it.

After that, it was decided that we would meet the next morning, outside the Empire State, by the entrance to the Observation Deck. Did I voice my misgivings, then? Some, probably. New York City never being the same after that September 11. Security being tighter than bark since then. Everyone suspecting the worst. Metal detectors everywhere, including the entrance to the Observation Deck. Which is why I left my apartment that morning with the boy’s ashes in an Altoids container. Metal. Which is why, shortly after some 20 minutes of taxi ride, I occupied a stall in the Men’s Room of ‘The Heartland Brewery,’ which is still located in the base of the Big E. There, with shaking hands, I busied myself with transferring my nephew into a Ziplock, which I had procured with no little difficulty in Midtown.

Then, it was back to street level where I hooked up with them pretties. We made it through security all right. Took 5 minutes of elevators to the Observation Deck. She was crowded that late morning, too. Thank God for the beautiful sunshine. Now, these days, people do not just dump powder off the side of NYCs tallest building. Anthrax, anyone? Therefore, I had briefed the women on the need for our remaining inconspicuous. We probably circled the rectangular deck twice, before finding a space where I might lean through the railing. As soon as I did, in order to provide cover, Ashley, Chrissie and Gloria leaned in and around me. I wrested the baggie from my pocket, reached down over the railing as far as I could, and just after I loosed that boy’s fine, almost silver dust—I found myself tasting it. For in all my scientific calculating, I had not accounted for updraft. Still, I poured until the few grams were gone, and I do remember seeing one pouf of Noah swirl toward the Chrysler Building. One of his favorites. I turned around to hug the women, and noticed that they had sucked in their share of that feller, too. Ashley was

freckled to beat all on her black jacket. We laughed before we all teared up, anyway, and Chrissie's cheeks streaked up in country boy (dirt). Thank Gloria for noticing some of him drift off into the atmosphere, too. We did not get arrested. Imagine the hoot Noah would have had if we did.



IDWIC & 13 HUGS

Rick-n-Lucy

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