



An Inspiring Dad

Eric Herzberg's story as told to Single Parent 101.

By Linda Blachly, Managing Editor

For a father, the most painful part of divorce can be the loss of access to your kids. Relationships can be strained for years following the break-up of a marriage, no matter what the cause. Restoring relationships with children can take a long time.

Eric Herzberg has twice felt the pain of losing the son with his namesake—Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Eric W. Herzberg Jr. The first time, it was the result of his divorce. The second time, it was caused by a sniper bullet in Iraq in 2006. This time there's no recourse.

Looking back, Eric is very grateful that he and his son were able to restore their relationship before he deployed to Iraq at age 20. Three months later, Eric got the knock on his door the night of Oct. 21, 2006, with the sad news that his son would not be returning home.

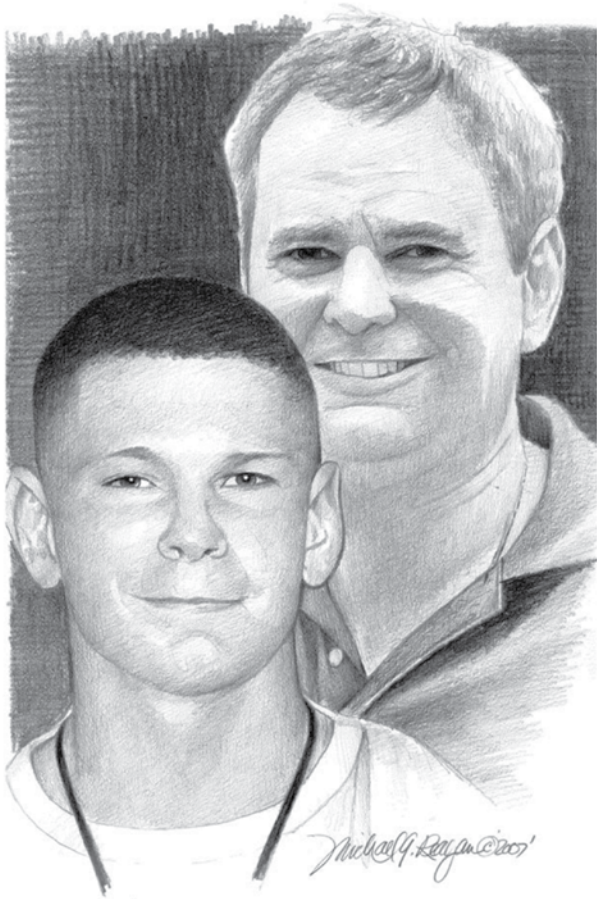
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“First there's shock, then uncontrollable grief,” said Eric. “On a good day, it feels like a full body migraine. On a bad day, it feels like a burning ball of fire that wants to consume you.”

The day of the funeral, Eric's pain was compounded when his ex-wife would not allow him to speak during the service at Arlington National Cemetery. However, Eric felt God allowed him the opportunity to share his words of love for his son through syndicated radio host Laura Ingraham. Laura unexpectedly came to the funeral and agreed to read Eric's letter on her radio program the next morning. In that tribute, Eric remembered a son who “always spoke the truth and helped to heal wounds, even those in his own family.” (To hear Laura reading this tribute, link to <http://www.ericwherzberg.com/EricHerzbergTribute.mp3>.)

Eric has been determined from the beginning that grief would not consume him. Instead, drawing from his deep faith in God, he is fueled by a sense of purpose to carry on the legacy of his son.

“So many good things have come out of this,” said Eric, recalling how he was contacted by his son's best friend, Justin Carman, who served with Eric Jr. in Iraq. Justin grew up without a dad, and through this tragedy, the two connected and stay in close contact.



“He even calls me dad,” says Eric. Two scholarships were created to honor Eric Jr., one in Maryland and one in Florida, which Eric and Justin are proud to present to deserving students. For information, visit <http://www.ericwherzberg.com/scholarship.html>.

Another positive thing happened when Eric contacted artist Michael Reagan, who draws charcoal portraits of fallen heroes. Eric asked Michael to draw a portrait of himself with Eric Jr., and the result captured the heart and soul of his soldier son.

“What Michael does is bring a level of realism to the portrait that is amazing,” said Eric. He doesn’t just draw a portrait but captures the essence of the soldier—a look, a dimple, a mischievous twinkle in the eye. “There is a message with each portrait that says: ‘I’m all right. I didn’t suffer. I like where I am. Don’t worry about me.’ There is a message of calm and healing that comes with each portrait,” said Eric.

Michael, a Vietnam veteran, is internationally known for his portraits of professional athletes, movie stars and world leaders. Michael has made it his mission to honor today’s fallen heroes by drawing charcoal portraits of them. To date, Michael has

drawn over 1,800 portraits at the request of the families and has donated these free of charge as a measure of his love and respect for each family.

Over a year ago, Eric met Michael and discovered the artist trying to run a foundation, the Fallen Heroes Project, he created to support his efforts. Michael was doing this practically by himself while drawing two portraits each day, seven days a week. Eric offered to take over as much of the business aspects as he could. “I convinced him to reach the families directly and figured out how to get the message out. God opened doors in amazing ways,” said Eric. Michael gets 25 to 30 requests per week.

What’s even more compelling about Michael is that he not only draws portraits of the soldier but, in special situations, also includes family members and pets. Some of the most touching portraits are those drawn of the soldier holding a baby who never had a chance to meet his or her dad. “Can you imagine what that will mean to that child someday?” asks Eric.

That’s what keeps this grieving dad going each day as he connects with family members who have also lost a loved one. He hears story after story of how the portraits comforted them in some way, such as how a grieving mother finally had her first peaceful night’s sleep in over a year after she received the portrait of her beloved son.

And, for Eric, it keeps the memory of Eric Jr. alive. “He was so fearless. I have an amazing admiration for him,” said Eric as he reflected on his son’s personality. “He deepened his faith when he was in the Marine Corps. He had a quality and decency about him.”

Eric draws his strength and new-found purpose from his son, who lived a life full of purpose and meaning. “At the end of your life, no matter how long or short, one of the highest callings is to know you made a difference. This was a wake-up call for me. When I said goodbye to Eric, I said I would finish the legacy he started – living a life of service in God’s will, living a life with purpose like he did,” said Eric.

For information on the Fallen Heroes Project, visit www.fallenheroesproject.org.