

## **E-Blast Archive**

**October 31, 2006**

### **A Final Lesson From a Fallen Hero**

I took time out from politics today to attend the funeral of Eric Herzberg, Jr., of Severna Park, Maryland. Herzberg, 20, a proud Marine, was killed in Iraq 10 days ago. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. It was a glorious fall day, perhaps the last warm day of the season. It was a privilege to be present as this young Marine was laid to rest.

I asked his grandfather how long Eric had wanted to be a Marine. "Ten, fifteen years--since he was a little boy," he said. One of Eric's high school friends, riding on the bus to the gravesite remarked, "Man, that boy loved this country and died doing what he believed was right." Others, clutching their Kleenex, nodded.

As we think about our country's future and the challenges ahead, I think of people like Eric. Most of our fallen heroes may not have gone to Harvard or Yale, but I would bet that they had a greater sense of professionalism and dedication to principle than most politicians in Washington.

Eric's father shared this tribute to his son with me. He gave me permission to share it with you:

"I'm Eric Herzberg, Lance Corporal Eric Herzberg's father. Thank you all for coming here to honor Eric, especially those of you who traveled great distances. We are humbled by the show of support and love for our son.

I would especially like to thank Kevin Kavanagh for being here today. Kevin's son, also named Eric, also 20 years old and also from Severna Park, was also killed in Iraq last month. Kevin has been a tremendous source of support this week.

We are here to pay our last respects and to honor Eric. The word "honorable" has at least 10 different meanings in the dictionary. I think almost all of them fit Eric but this one is my favorite:

A keen sense of ethical conduct: **INTEGRITY**. Describing one whose word, once given, is a guarantee of performance.

We received the news of our sons' death with shock and then uncontrollable grief. We've cried for him many times each day, at the most unexpected thoughts or memories. Eric, when I think of why we cry so hard for you--

It's not because you are in pain. We know that now you are at peace now.

It's not because you were unprotected and alone when you died. Not only were you with your friends, your brothers, but you had legions from across America praying for you.

We cry for you not because you were unprepared. You had the best training in the world, the best equipment, and the best leadership. And you prepared yourself by deepening your relationship with the Lord who made you. I believe you knew how temporary this world is and you prepared yourself for the next world by reading His word every night.

And we certainly don't cry because we think of you as a victim. The victims right at this moment are us--your friends and family, particularly your mother Gina, your sister Katie and your brother and best friend Matthew. We feel almost immobilized with grief right now - but we know you

would not want us to remain in this state too long. We know that you want us to continue to serve others as you did.

No, we don't cry for you because of those things.

We cry for you because of the huge sense of loss we feel, which is also felt by our community of family and friends. And we grieve because of all those whose lives you now won't touch here on earth. Eric, we all needed your presence here. Today we feel that sense of loss for what you won't accomplish on this earth.

Yet still, through all this, we remember the Marine with compassion who turned thoughts of hate and division into love, affection and unity--one Iraqi at a time.

We remember the son who always spoke the truth, and can help heal wounds--even those within his own family.

We remember the friend who is always loyal and faithful.

And the spiritual warrior who never shied away from necessary battles but always brought his faith and humanity with him.

Eric, we cry because we know you would have been a dad who would have raised kids just like you.

Yes, we came here to honor you, Eric, but we had it all backwards. It is you who have honored us. We feel honored just to have known you as long as we did, and to have seen the example of your life. You were tested under the most trying of circumstances and your character and integrity never went unnoticed.

"Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him." James 1:12

I know you are wearing it well son. Goodbye for now. We love you."

There is nothing I can add to the words of a grieving father, except to say that we owe it to these young men and women and their families to accept nothing less than victory against the dark, evil forces that rejoice every time a young Marine is killed.