

Juliet Madsen

Objects for Deployment



Juliet Madsen

Objects for Deployment

veteransbookproject.com



This book is for my husband and children.

I want them to see and understand that I really do realize that I am not who I was. I want them to have an understanding of what happened. I want them to see that I tried to take care of myself in Iraq, and that I will go on taking care of myself. They don't have to do it for me.

I understand they are hurt, too. I appreciate the sacrifices they have made.

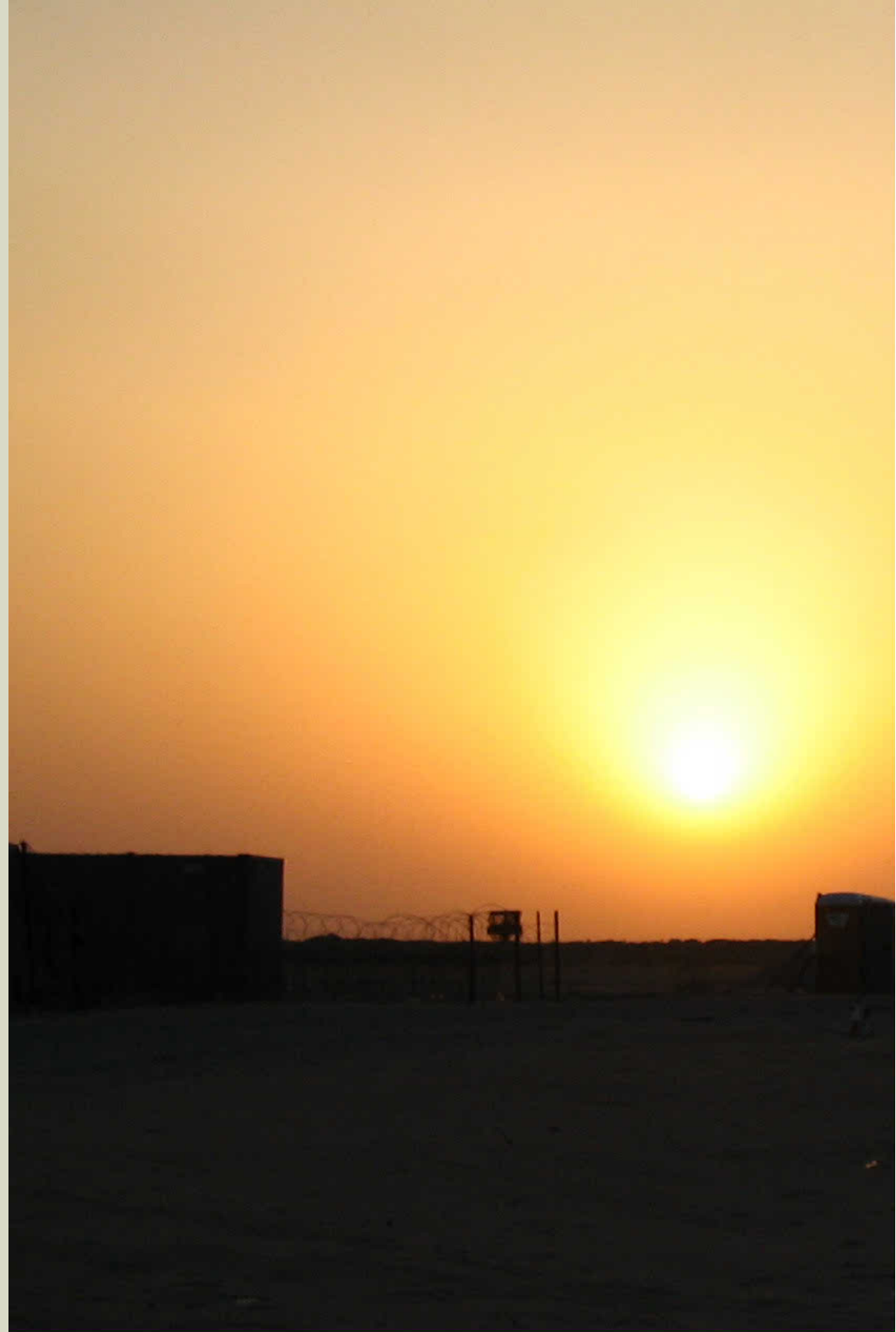
I see it. I am not very good at fixing it, but I recognize it.

I love you guys and am so proud of you.

This book includes pictures from before and after Iraq. Places we've been and things our family has done.

I don't know if they remember, but I remember. Maybe by remembering, we can find a new way to do things.

It feels like I am just waking up.



Since being in the Army, I have spent so much time wondering what I could have or would have been doing had Iraq and I never met.

These thoughts weigh me down, remind me of who I was long ago. I know I am never going back there. I am here. I dragged my whole family here with me.





I long wanted to be a physician's assistant and made it into three different master's degree programs for PA school and never went. I always thought I could do it next year but next year is gone. Now hospitals mean medicine, IV's and feeling lost. I should have become a PA; I would have loved to be one.

I know so many things could have been
different. Sometimes I wish I could turn back
time.



If I would have gone to PA school right away, I would have still gone to Iraq, but it would have been in a different capacity.

My husband, Peter, says there is no use in saying "what if." Instead, life is here. "It is what it is." I used to get so angry at him for this phrase. Now I am starting to understand and agree with it.







I went with the 82nd Airborne from Fort Bragg. I was the only female in my squad. I was the oldest. They kept calling me "Mama."

I wasn't prepared.

So many things were wrong. For example, I went to Iraq with a broken rifle. The charging handle was broken, so it would hit you in the face and didn't fire correctly. They didn't have time to swap out the broken parts in the United States so they said, "Someone will fix it in Iraq."



I went into the bad news bears unit.

It was awful.



I was a paramedic who worked at Camp Bucca, one of the internment camps in Iraq.

I actually trusted a couple of the inmates at Camp Bucca more than I trusted certain soldiers I was stationed with. Some prisoners who were surgeons and translators were also my co-workers (forced co-workers, you would say). I worked side by side with them.





During my time at Camp Bucca I met some wonderful soldiers from all over the world.

Three people meant the world to me. One was Dr. Naffie, a surgeon who was a detainee and a friend. Dr Naffie trained me, treated me and cared for me. I pray for him every day.

Another helper was Mahmood. Mahmood was raised in Miami and worked as a detainee and translator. He was funny, energetic and strong.

Finally, we had Raheem, a microbiology student at the University of Baghdad, who was detained after walking home from classes one night. He was smart, kind and a true friend.

Thank you my friends; I think of you often.









I journaled every day in Iraq. Reading back through it, I see that I knew this would change our lives. I don't remember being aware of that, but I was.

Reading back through my journal, I can also tell something was wrong with me. Peter even called the Commander because he saw it, too; he said he could tell there was a problem. She told him he didn't know what he was talking about.





9JUN04

Long night. Even with 2 tylenol PM on board I could not sleep. I feel so alone. Its 0600. I've been awake for atleast an hour. At 0430 I walked out to the latrine and thought how easy it would be for an insurgent to kill me with no witnesses. Nice thought huh?! We walk around this compound as if this we American soil. As if it was ours. Arrogant. (see as an American I can not even spell arrogant.)

18 JUN 04 Olexumetung... I can't sleep
I took a shower and before it gets
unbearably hot I am in the roof.

I am so much lower than I thought
I could go. I am painfully aware of
being so alone. I am painfully aware
of my paws. They seem larger than
life and take my breath away. I hate
this country. I hate what I am doing
here. I hate letting Peter and the kids
down and that what I feel like I've
done. I have. I'm here with them not. I

My nightmares were so vivid. Someone dressed in black, in the back of the trailer while everyone slept. Someone pulling me off of the top bunt by my ankle. Screaming, I woke up feeling like someone had a hold of me. I couldn't get away.



I had been having problems for several weeks. They say now that it was a brain injury and untreated heat stroke. When I got back to Fort Bragg they told me that my heat stroke was the second worst case they had ever seen. The worst case died from his injuries.

You don't have to be dehydrated to have heat stroke. At first, I started having really bad headaches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, tremors, and my body started being unable to sweat.

My speech was starting to slur.

The explosion I was in while leaving Camp Bucca only magnified the heat stroke. My kidneys started shutting down -- rhabdomyolysis.

DD FORM 600
1 JUL 73

PATIENT'S BAGGAGE TAG
(DO NOT DETACH)

ORIGINATING CARRIER

PATIENT *(Last name-First name-Middle*

Madison, Jr

GRADE

4

SS



While in Iraq, the heat stroke affected the left side of my body. I had trouble walking. I had significant speech problems, vision problems and big memory problems.

But, I was still treating patients every day.





I knew I was getting sick and something was very wrong, but I couldn't figure out how to prevent it. There was no way to avoid it.

I would start an IV in my ankle, thread the IV tubing up through my clothing, and tape the IV bag to my shoulder to make sure that I was getting extra fluids and extra vitamins.



I didn't get much support from the command.
In the beginning, I worked in the clinic in
Tallil. I talked to the doctors every single day,
but they did nothing to help.

The doctors and people in my squad would say, "Your eyes look bad." But nothing was done. I spoke to the Commander about it and she told me, "Do yourself a favor and don't write it down. Don't make any kind of medical chart for yourself... Don't make a paper trail."

Anything that could have been done correctly was done so wrong.

I knew it was wrong and I still couldn't fix it. It's like a car sliding on ice. You can see an accident's going to happen, but you just can't get the car to move out of the way. That's where I was; I was sliding down the hill.



I treated a rape patient today



* 24 people died in Baghdad today.



I worked night shift at the prison, which is great because you're not in the sun as much. But we only got two meals per day. Our dinner was breakfast, and we didn't have lunch in the middle of the night. We would work 15 days straight. Then we'd have a day off.

But during my sleep time, they would say things like, "You can't sleep today because it's mandatory fun day. You can't sleep today because we have to walk around the base cleaning."

And I would say things that really pissed them off, like, "Well that's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. Do I keep you up four days straight?"



The day everything changed, I had worked this long 14-night stretch. I was still working with an IV bag on my shoulder. My vision was messed up. I was having trouble with my tremors and left-sided weakness, dragging my left leg.

I was the only female on night shift, so I was the only one sleeping during the day. I was in the top of a bunk bed right by the door.

They decided we all needed to move to tents. So they said I wasn't going to be able to sleep. I begged and was given two hours to sleep.

I can't even describe it. My head hurt so badly.

Everyone else was packing to move to the tents across the compound. The guys next door had the radio blasting.

I was so angry. I went and yelled at them to turn it down. I got right in one man's face. So, they turned it louder after I left. I was so angry. I went back.

That major said, "I was hoping you were going to come back over because you need to apologize to those men."

He had me standing at attention in the sun, yelling at me. I was so angry and had tears streaming down my face, which is what happens when I get angry.

That is when XO (second in command) came by.

I put my finger in the Major's face and said, "Hold that thought."

I went to the XO and said if you don't send me back to Tallil I'm going to go back in a body bag. I'm sick. I know something is wrong.

He knew me more than the others and agreed to send me back.

I was so relieved. I knew I would die there. I knew if I left for Tallil, at least I had a shot.

That's when the IED hit.

My head hurts and I'm tired
I wish I could go to sleep and
not wake up. It would be so
quiet so peaceful. I am dying.



I was headed back to Tallil in the convoy.

I was falling asleep.

My head bouncing me to sleep and the heat draining my energy.

I woke up to the truck spinning.

The sand was so fine and everywhere.

The radio was going nuts from so many people trying to get through.

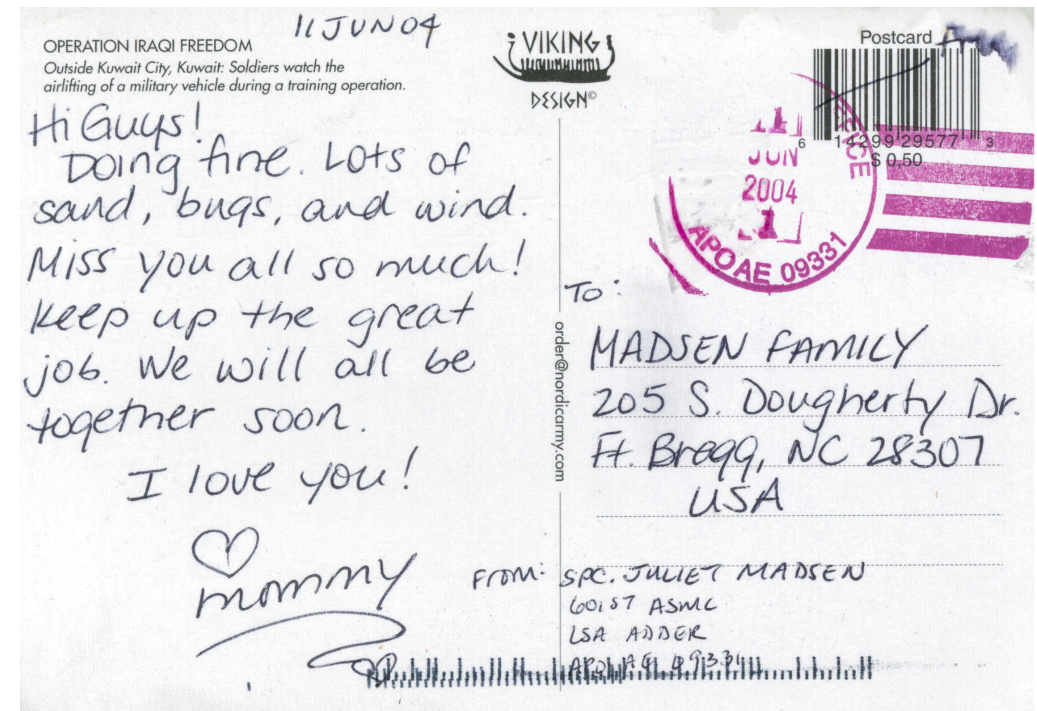
Trucks were on fire. Smoke, explosions, screams...

We had 5, 6, 7 patients. I don't know. I directed our medical team to start triage.

My patient was in a truck seat. The truck had been destroyed so badly that he was buckled into his seat which lay outside the truck in a pool of gasoline.



I remember, the Med Evac hadn't even left yet and the Military Police opened the highway to civilians. Ten feet away a bus went by full of Iraqi civilians. I can close my eyes right now and picture all their faces. I can remember what it smelled like and what the air tasted like.



When we finally got back to Tallil, people kept saying, “You look funny, are you OK?”

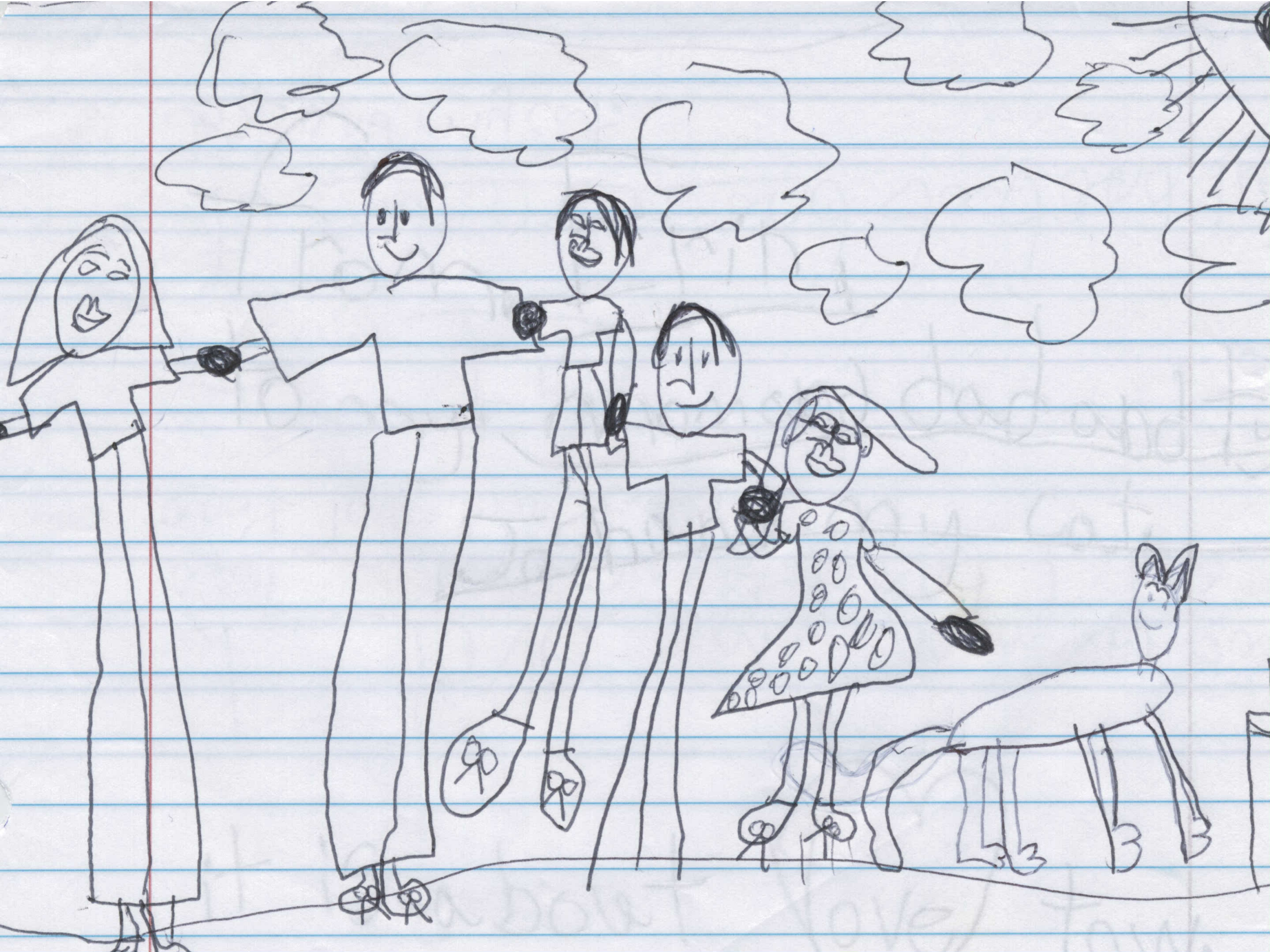
They said, come eat. I wasn’t hungry, but eventually I went anyway.

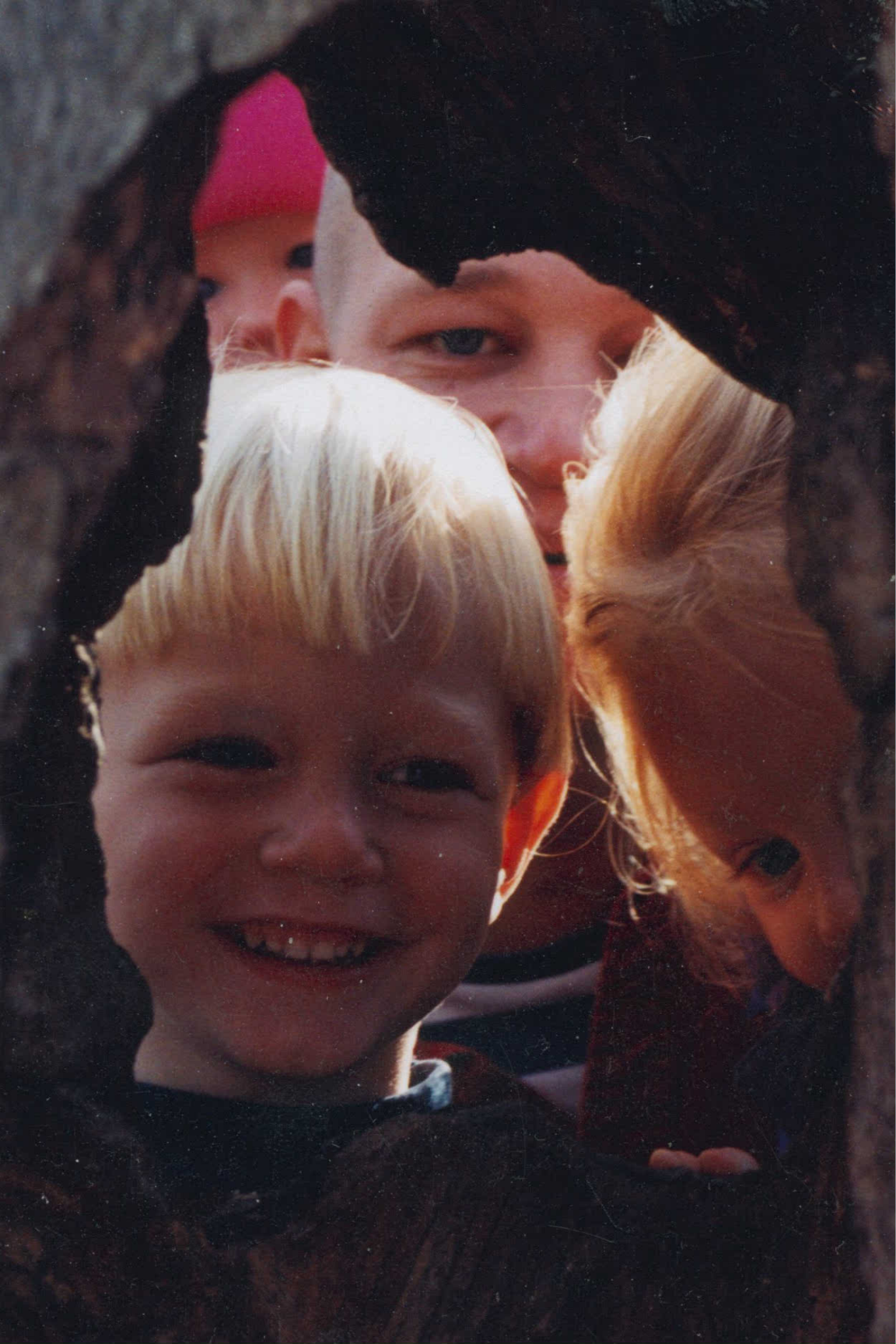
I ended up having a series of seizures in the chow hall.

I was Med Evac’d with patients I had just taken care of.

They didn’t even tell my husband that I was Med Evac’d... No one knew.







I started having seizures in Tallil.

Kuwait.

More seizures -- try to stabilize me.

Landstul.

I had to get stabilized again.

Walter Reed, Washington D.C.

Pleading to be sent on to North Carolina.

D.C. to Fort Bragg.

(Flying on morphine and a stretcher makes the flight incredibly pleasant).



I have little snap shots of events in my head, but
I can't remember very much of it.

I remember seeing the patients in Germany that
I had Evac'd out with just days before.



From Walter Reed to Fort Bragg.

There again, they screwed up. In the ambulance transport from the plane to the hospital, there were two of us patients on stretchers. I had been on morphine for weeks by now. I was clueless. They literally opened the ambulance doors, and said, OK go sit and wait in the ER.



There are so many instances like that during my time in the military. I wonder, what the hell was I thinking? What the hell were they thinking?

How did I end up here?

I had several heat strokes, two brain strokes, a heart attack, my kidneys starting to shut down, serious CNS (central nervous system) damage. Six surgeries. PTSD, depression, the list goes on...

If you don't have a sense of humor, this will kill you.

They can pinpoint the location of the damage, but they will never pinpoint when I got the brain injury.

I wish I knew the exact moment. When did this happen?

After the brain injury, it all just kind of steamrolled with its own momentum. I'm not delusional; I know that I am not going to be able to fix what happened. But it would be so nice to just know.



It would have almost been easier if I had just been shot. Because then you can say, “Here is the hole. Here’s where it happened. And here’s how to fix it.” But with a brain injury you can’t do that.

I can’t go back, and I can’t come up with the thing that would fix it. I work with those symptoms all the time now.

My family works with those symptoms all the time.





I get tired and have headaches very easily.
When I get the headaches the stroke's affects
come back two-fold. Meaning, my speech is
slurred, my left side droops, my tremors return.

Vision -- Glasses

Hearing -- Hearing Aides

Walking -- Physical Therapy (Do I use my
cane?)

Speech -- Speech Therapy

Falling Down All Over The Place -- More
Physical Therapy

Nightmares -- Counseling

Jumpy, nervous, stressed...

SCARED...











If you just knew what I was like. I was so active. And so confident. I remembered all kinds of things. I graduated from college with a 3.98. I was smart. Now I am lucky if I remember what I wore yesterday.



I want the kids to know that I understand that
they are hurt too.



We used to have so much fun. We used to go fishing and camping and hiking. I was the roll-around-on-the-floor mom. We were always doing something.







I can't go back, and I can't come up with the thing that would fix it. I have to work with these symptoms all the time now.

My family has to work with these things every moment of every day.



I don't even know if they remember all that we
used to do. But I remember.

Maybe by remembering, we can find a new way
to work around this, to move on.



 **AVON BREAST CANCER**

We had so much fun together. We still do.

When the kids were little we made a puppet theater.

Whenever Peter deployed, I would jump in the car with the kids and go on a 20-hour drive.

At one point I had to home school them, because we had moved around so much that I had to catch them up. We lived in Georgia at the time. As we were driving, I pulled over totally out of our way, and we had this amazing afternoon focused on this civil war statue.

There are so many things. We made playdough. I took them kayaking. I used to kayak rapids.

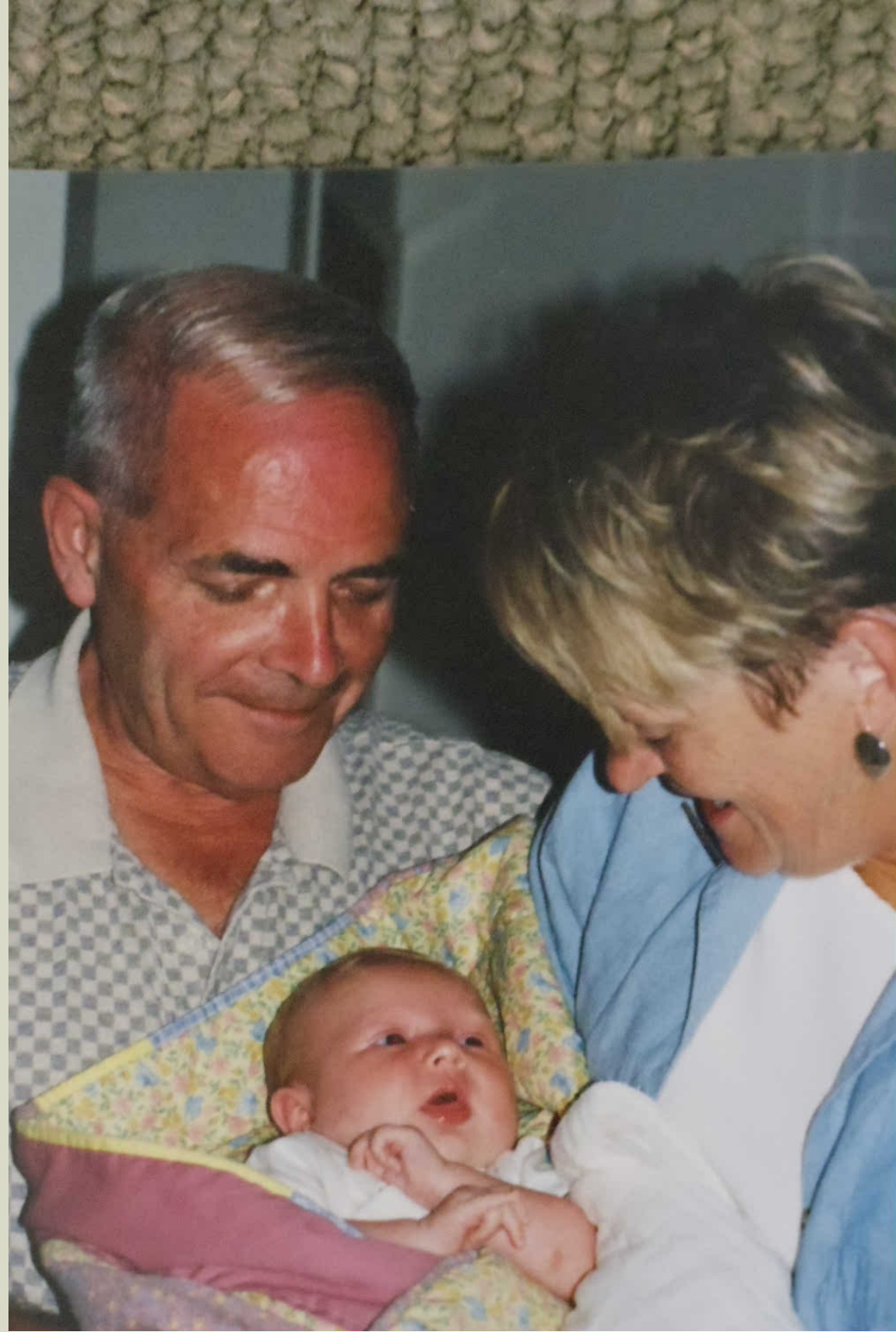
We had many games; if you see an airplane, where do you think it's going? If you could get on it, where would you take it?

It never goes to the Middle East -- ever.



If I am a sliver of a mom that my mother was to me, my kids will be OK.

We are lucky to have such supportive families.







Probably one thing that Iraq took away from
our entire family is the ability to enjoy right
now.

We are so busy putting out fires -- my medical
issues, logistics, distance from our family, and
time.

Let us focus on today.
on now.
on life.



I've
wish I
sometimes
I don't.
drag. The
control.
graces of



In our family you have to have a sense of humor... It might just save your life.

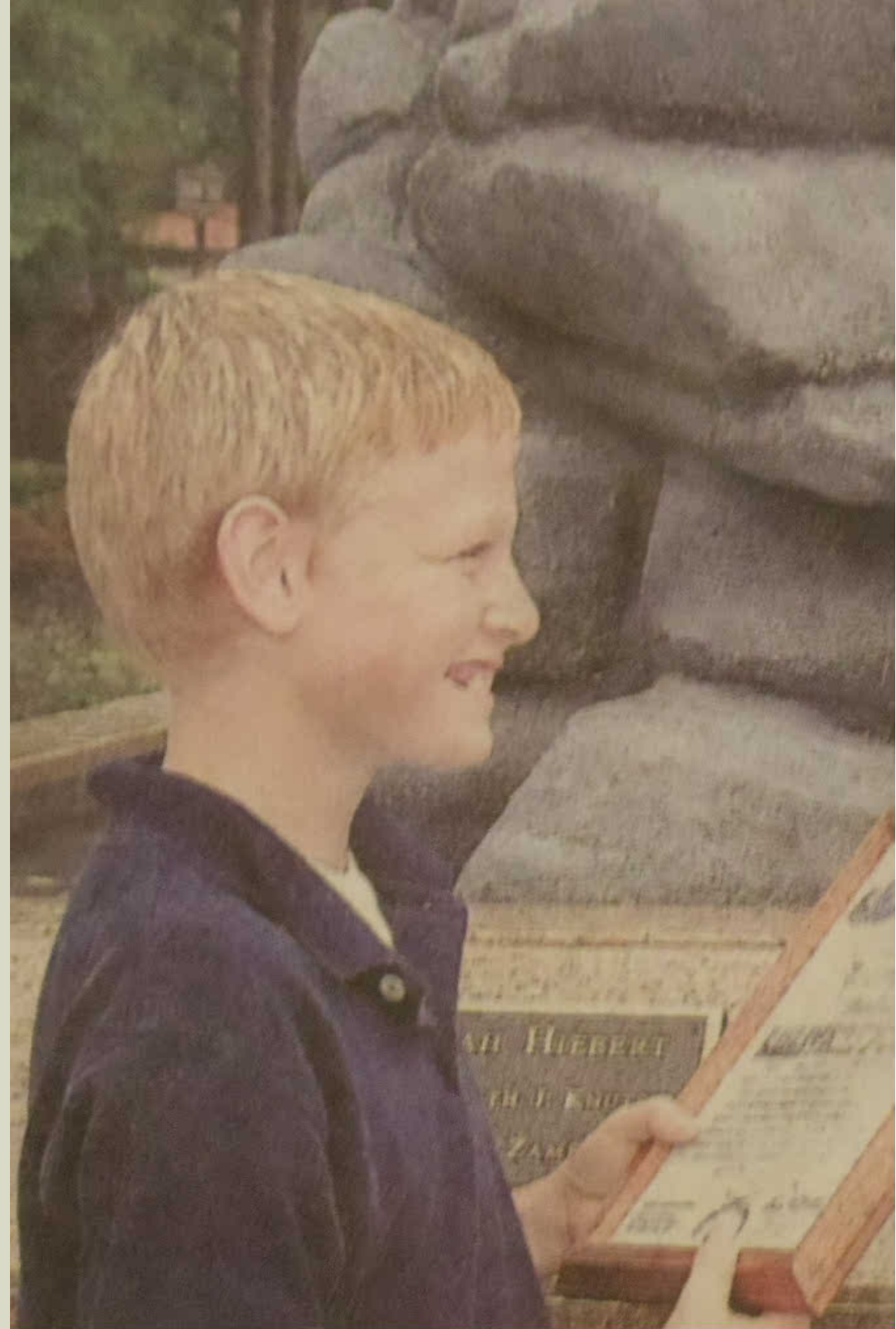


My kids have been through so much and lived in so many places; they know the world is round. I wouldn't want to expose them to more.

My kids have PTSD as much as I do.

My husband, Peter, is the love of my life. If he wasn't a combat vet, we wouldn't have made it this long.

War is brutal on family.



My babies have seen the world differently than other kids their ages.

Tyler, the oldest, has an old soul. She loves people and seeing new places. She turns inward and rages against the world quietly. It doesn't do her justice -- she is absolutely incredible and her voice should be heard.

Joshua, my middle man, is absolutely brilliant. He is extremely artistic and gifted. He thinks that I hate him. He has ever since Iraq. I let him down, and it may take a while to make it up to him. He is not afraid to share his views of the world. He awes me in so many ways.

Erin, the youngest, is a shiny young soul. She is young enough to not remember me before Iraq. Peter says she is "goodness and light." I agree.

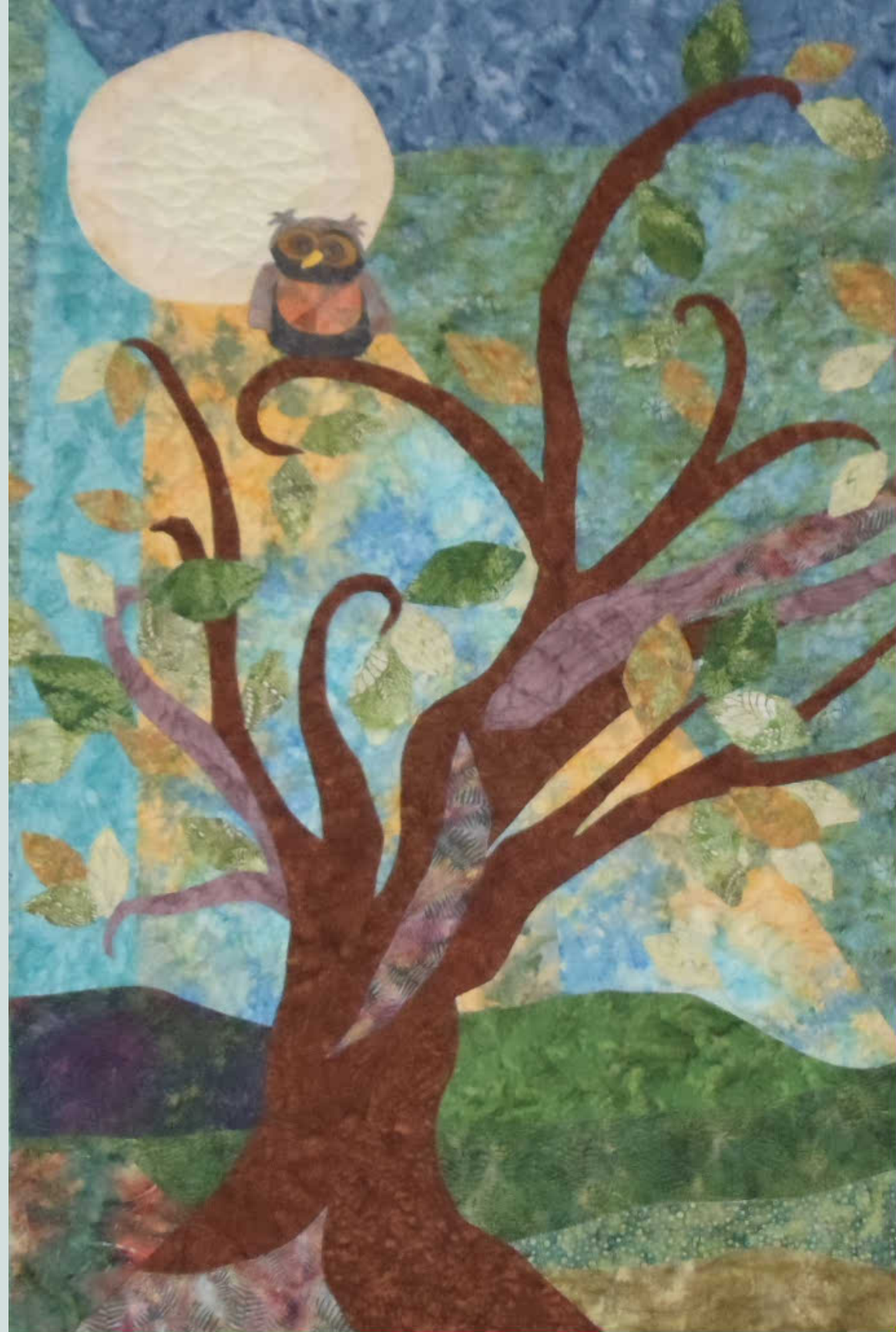
She and the others lit the way home.



My fine motor skills are drastically different than before Iraq. To strengthen my fine motor skills I went back to quilting.

I think the quilts are important because they're kind of like life – there are so many pieces. It's important to see all the pieces and how they fit together.

For me, quilting is as much therapy as going to counseling and all of my doctor appointments.







I want my kids to know why I'm compelled to make these quilts. Why I need to keep working on them.

The freedom of making them lets me work through whatever is in my head at the time. Hopefully, they'll have something like that in their lives when they get older -- a way to work through their mind's questions.

You labor over tiny frayed pieces, and then eventually it all comes together. This is the same as life; you work and work and at the end of the day you look back and say, "This is who I am."

For better or for worse.
Faded fabric or not.











I give almost all of my quilts away.

I love it. Quilting is something I can still do to be a productive member of society. I can still give back the kindnesses that have been given to me.

I recently made a quilt for a woman whose husband was in the Army and a Vietnam veteran. He killed himself a few years ago. Her son, in the Navy, killed himself a few months ago. She works for the VA Medical Center. How much can one person give?







I have been lucky enough to share my quilts with so many wonderful people. But the ones that I really love are the ones that I use to work through my own problems.

I have quilts all over the country and supporters from Australia, Germany, England, Canada, and throughout the United States.

Quilting is not like working in the medical field, but for me it is medicine.

Thank you for being my heart, soul,
my reason for being.



I am treated at the Denver VA Medical Center.
They have been wonderful to me, but being
female I still run into odd questions:

Who are you? Are you looking for your
husband? Are you a veteran? Have you ever
been in a war?

thinking

Should the answer be yes? Should the answer
be no? Should I ask if they have the same
question for the man sitting beside me?



My experiences with the VA would be a whole other book. The first question they always ask you is, "Have you ever considered suicide?" And of course the answer is, "Yes."

Have you ever been to war? Of course I've thought of it. There are many questions that would be much more challenging.

Hell, I think, "What's for dinner?" would be a more challenging question some days.

My mom always says, "This, too, shall pass."

The thing about suicide is that you lose tomorrow. I don't want to miss out on tomorrow; you never know what it will bring.

This is one lesson I've learned.

Here are other facts I've observed:

ONE

Civilians do not necessarily think that a female should be in the military, but even more than that they do not believe a mother should leave her children to go off to fight in a war.

TWO

When bad things have happened to our family, I have been told that they would not have happened if I had been home where I belonged as a mother and wife.

THREE

I have seen what people are like in the best and worst of experiences and you never really know how you will react until you are there.

LAST

I am so very thankful to be alive and to have the gifts in my life that I do. It takes my breath away every single day.









I'm training for a triathlon in May. As long as I don't have my next surgery before then, I think I can do it. In addition to doing it for myself, I'm hoping to show my kids that there is a little piece of me that is still there. That wants to be there. That needs to be there.

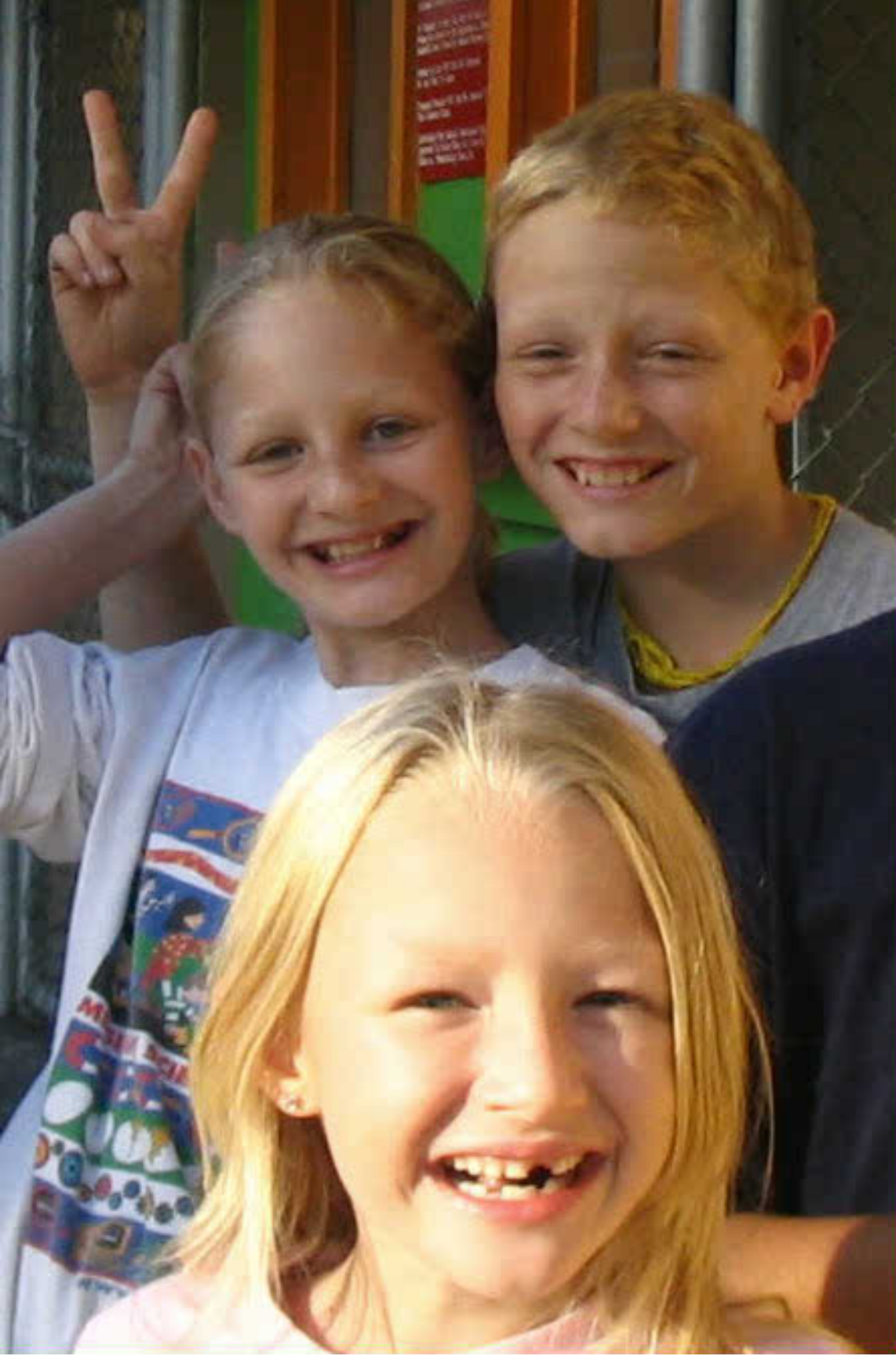
I am still here.

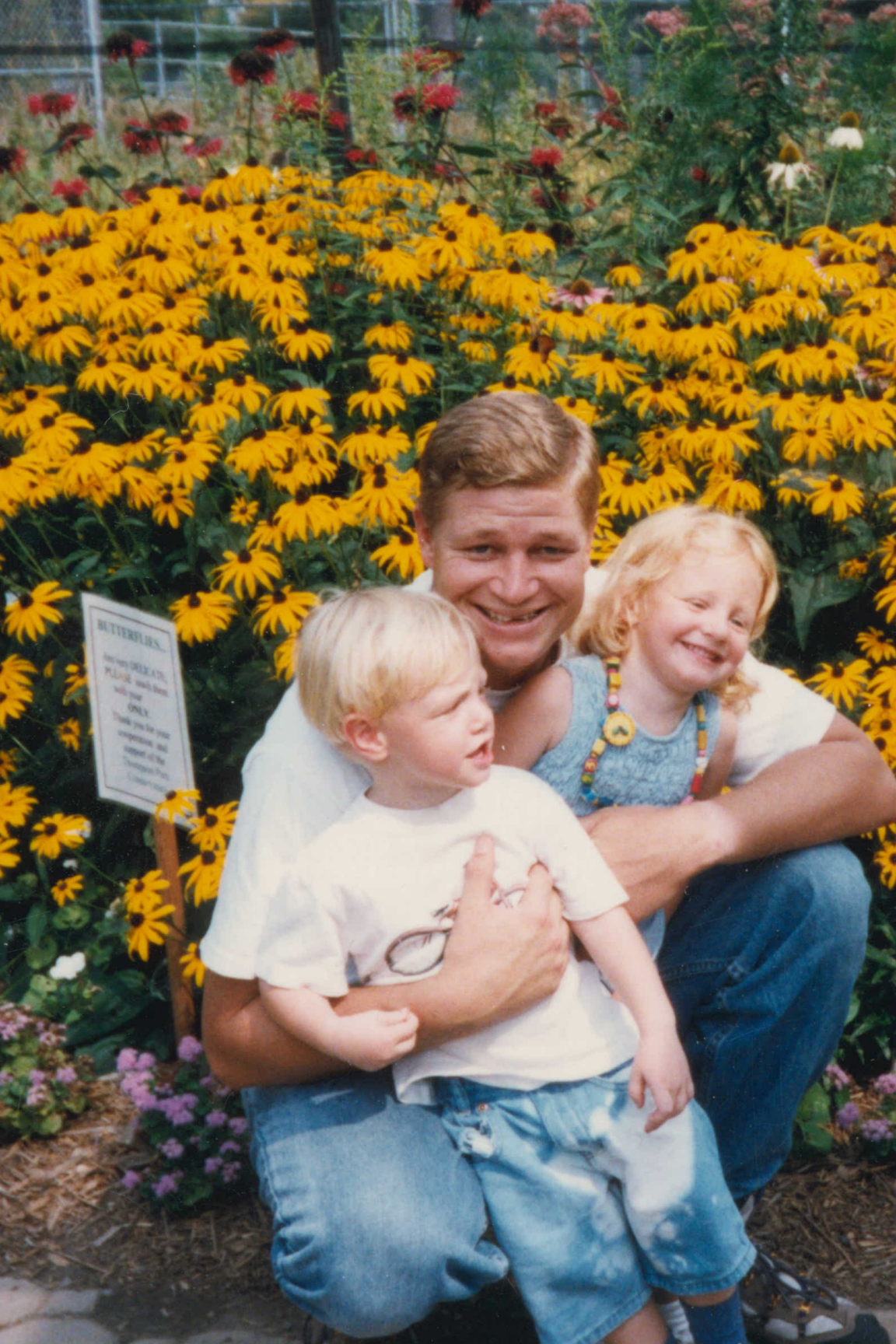
I may not be who I was, but I am becoming someone new. With time and support I may just surprise everyone.













"Sometimes, something is familiar to me.
Most times there is no recognition of the
fabric of my life.
Only frayed remnants of who I once was."
-Unknown

Dedicated to my father and Alzheimer patients
everywhere.

The letters that follow are for my family, but
they're important for everyone to see so that we
don't forget that the families go through as
much as the soldiers do.

My babies, I love you more than the sun and the
moon and the stars up above.



My Dear Sweet Love,

This letter is hard because there is so much to say to you. So many tears and moments in our almost twenty years together... Twenty years... We have been to so many places and through so many things both positive and negative. Sometimes it seemed the negative would bury us alive... I only got through it because of you. You are my anchor.

Peter YOU are the love of my life. I do not deserve your love but am so grateful to have you in my life. I tried to do the right thing by going back into the Army and providing for the family -- taking the stress off of you. That backfired didn't it? I have made so many mistakes and you were put under such incredible stresses. How do I ever make up for all the pain that you have endured and continue to endure because of me? I love you.

How did I get so lucky to have you as my defender, hero, champion, best friend, lover, father of my babies, my other half, and my confidant? I marvel at the man you are and the family you have created with me. I am blessed.

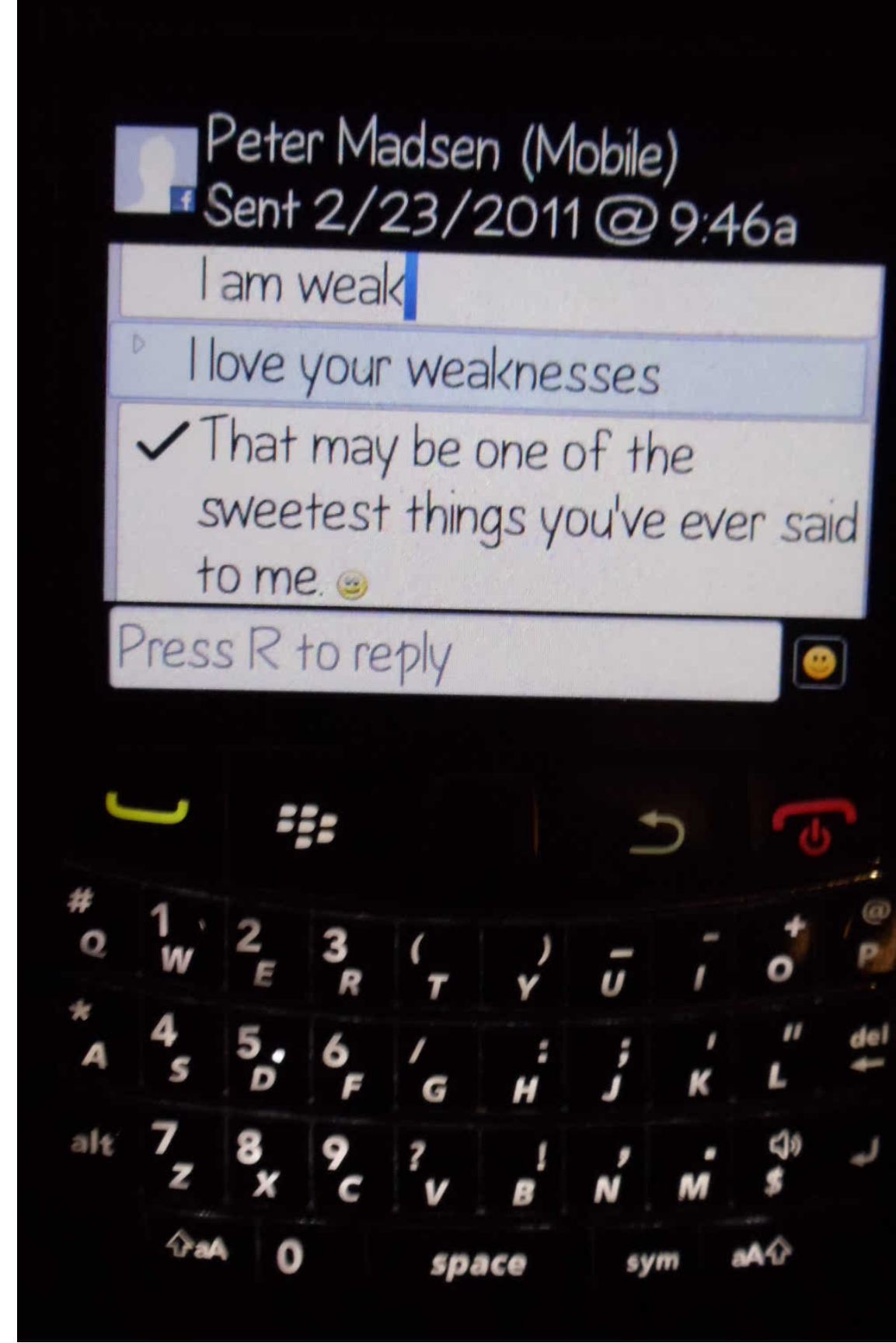
I love you my dear husband, thank you for loving me.

Love Always,

Juliet

PS. You still take my breath away.
QUACK!

Thank you for the following text, giving me your unconditional love and loving my many weaknesses.





Dear Joshua,

#1. I love you so much more than you will ever know. You have had me under your spell since the moment you were born.

#2. I am so sorry for the pain that you have had because of me. I never meant to hurt you or destroy your childhood.

#3. You are so incredibly talented and wonderful; I am honored to be your mother.

#4. I am sorry for trying to kill you. Although I don't remember it the way you remember it, I hate that I would make you think I don't love you. I would be devastated if anything ever happened to you, I hope one day you will understand that.

#5. Always go back to number one!

Love,
Mom



Dear Tyler,

You have grown up so much from that little girl who drew on the sidewalk with chalk, "I love you Daddy," while Daddy was stationed in South and Central America. You have always been so strong and determined. I wish I had been there for you over the last few years. I am sorry I came home so different. I am sorry it cost you so much. I am sorry you had to grow up so quickly, that was not fair. You don't need to be the adult you always fight to be, you just need to find a place in the world to be happy... You deserve wonderful things and even when you don't know where you are going, I know you will go far.

I love you.

Mamma



Dear Erin,

My sidekick, mini-me, peanut... You care for me very well. I know you work hard to take care of me but you need not worry about me. You need to smile, laugh and enjoy your life. Thank you for watching over me and protecting me but I want you to be able to play and be Erin, not Mommy's keeper. I cherish our time together. Thank you for being my baby.

I love you.

Mommy



Dear Juliet,

You are allowed to grieve for the person you once were. You are allowed to become someone new. Iraq is a part of you. Saudia Arabia is a part of you. These events do not define you. Sometimes the path we start is not the path we find ourselves on down the road but that does not mean that we are not where we belong.

Remember to find joy in what you have and the places this path will take you.

Have faith,

Juliet

COLOPHON

A PROJECT BY
Monica Haller

BOOK BY
Juliet Madsen

PHOTOS
Juliet Madsen

TEXT
Juliet Madsen

COPY EDITING
Lisa Kundrat

TEMPLATE DESIGN
Matthew Rezac
Monica Haller

SOFTWARE DESIGN
Mark Fox

PRINTING
Lulu.com

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT

Bush Foundation

John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation

McKnight Foundation

Harrell Fletcher and IDEA at Colorado College



This book is the result of the author's courage and focus at the Veterans Book Workshop, where we work to make manageable and material personal archives of images, words and memories from the current wars.

This book is one of many made in the Veterans Book Workshop. Each emerged from different circumstances and each finds its own unique use. One veteran may reference this book regularly, while another may set it aside in order to move on.

Regardless of the ways they are used, no dust settles on these archives. This book contains a powerful living collection of data, memory, and experience that is so relevant it trembles. You must pay very close attention to hear its call.

We made this book for listening. Please accept our invitation. We made this book for deployment. Please pass it along and invite someone else to listen.

Thank you,
Monica Haller

If you would like to purchase your own copy of this book please order online at lulu.com.

Go to veteransbookproject.com to share your thoughts and questions about this book, or to see other books from the compilation.

We have worked to credit the images in this book, as well as the texts that have influenced the authors here. Please contact the Veterans Book Project about any unintentionally omitted credits.

©2011 Veterans Book Project & Monica Haller



Juliet Madsen joined the Army in 1988 when she was 17, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her military jobs included Pharmacy Technician, Patient Administration and Combat Medic (EMT-B, EMT-I, EMT-P). She was also a lead Paramedic and trained military EMTs. Juliet has served at military bases in many states and in Saudi Arabia in Desert Storm/Shield as well as Operation Iraqi Freedom. During Juliet's last deployment to Iraq with the 82nd Airborne she was injured and retired from the United States Army after 17 years of service. She and her husband and children live in Colorado. Juliet continues to serve the veteran communities with her charity quilts that she uses to raise money for disabled veterans all over the world.

