



I'm a native of Kansas City. I married Dave in October of 2004, and now I am the mother of 3 children, 3 step-children, and I have 2 grandchildren. I presently live just south of the Kansas City, MO area in a sleepy but growing little town called Belton; home to what used to be the Richard's-Gabaur Air Force Base and is now a Marine base and an Army Reserve station.

I have spent the bulk of my adult life working in some capacity in a "front desk" or administrative position in some kind of medical office, primarily chiropractic and psychiatric. I have also managed and consulted for small chiropractic offices. I have a great knowledge of insurance companies, credentialing, billing, and collections.

I have also worked as a medical employment staffer, as a private school secretary, and taught medical administration and billing in a local accredited vocational/technical school. When my second son Richard was deployed to Baghdad in October of '05, I left a position of office manager in an office I helped open for a chiropractor.

Professionally, I have developed what I would consider to be a rather impressive tool box with a full range of resources and skills. Along the road, life experiences of raising two very athletic and vibrant sons and one comedienne daughter, losing both parents within a few months of each other, and being the primary care-giver to my mother in law who passed away last April with the help of Hospice, has rounded off some professional edge and put me squarely into a position of being a homemaker and managing a small consulting business from our home.

In addition to this, I have taken up sewing again, making "fashion wraps" or blankets for nearly anyone who needs to be "Wrapped in a Hug". I found this a much better use of my time and it has served as a better therapy than seeing a Psychologist with my worries and concerns about my son being in the middle of a war.

Little did I know what an impact those 18 months of Richard's deployment would have on me. I had even less ability to understand the incomprehensible conditions and traumas that my son was experiencing. There is no rule book for such things. I did not receive a special memo from the Army. There was no information that was forthcoming about the truth of what was happening in and around Baghdad at that time.

Richard came home on leave in April of '06. The first true test of my intuition was at dinner – in Applebees – in Branson, MO. He and his wife and my husband and I all sat at a booth toward the back. It was late and not during a rush time, so my husband Dave threw his leather jacket onto the seat of the booth directly to his left, Richard's right. The waiter came and everyone ordered their drinks and we began to visit about some of his experiences. He was about ½ way through his first Long Island Iced Tea (just enough to relax a bit) when he glanced up and to his right and in one fell swoop, nearly cleared the table with his hands as he took a defensive position of protection in front of his wife.

Dave caught on right away to what was going on and immediately began talking him down, reminding him and showing him carefully, that the jacket was not a bomb and that he was in a safe place, not in Iraq; he was with family, not with soldiers, and that he was safe.

Richard locked eyes with me like he did when he was little, begging silently for understanding and explanation and acceptance, with full knowledge of what he had just done and with absolutely no ability to explain why he did. He wouldn't allow tears to spill out over his eyelashes and the moisture just added confusion to the glazed over brown eyes seeking answers. The tension was as thick as debris after a building collapse but we never broke eye contact. I just began breathing in a rather exaggerated way hoping he would follow the pattern out of reflex, which he did.

Once the levels calmed to alleviate fear of immediate danger, he locked eyes with Dave for another few minutes, listening but not hearing, but not losing eye contact. Dave has one of those Bing Crosby soothing voices that sort of vibrates softly right through you, and once Richard really connected to the voice, things started making sense again.

His beautiful petite bride of 5 years was huddled in the corner of the booth across the table from me looking like a terrified animal, unsure of what she just witnessed and I'm certain, questioning every thing about her own life at this point.

After apologizing more than 20 times and being reassured he was with family and that we loved him, we continued with reasonable conversation and our meal. By the end of dinner and after sharing several more stories, he admitted to being in close proximity to seventeen IED blasts during his first 9 months in Baghdad (we later found out it was twenty eight concussive blasts), one of which occurred when the vehicle he was following that had 7 of his closest buddies in it, drove over a road-side bomb, launching the vehicle into the air 30+ feet, welding the doors closed and burning while the rest of the soldiers could do absolutely nothing due to the extreme heat and their exposure to the blast which rendered them temporarily dazed. He didn't sleep for nearly 4 months after that.

Thunderstorms, fireworks, slamming doors, sudden movement, traffic situations, and a number of otherwise every-day occurrences leave him feeling lost, frightened, looped to a different time and place, terribly angry, and usually reaching for his choice of alcohol to soothe the raging inside his head.

Ultimately I would like to be involved in building teams or networks of teams with the kinds of groups of tools that can address and entire “village worth” of resources and assets for these soldiers. I have a very difficult time believing that their only life option should be complying with military protocols so they can head back to war and risk not returning.

At some point I would like to write a book about the experiences we’ve had as individuals and as a family and how this has had an impact on all of us. My daughter actually began writing last July when she went to live with her brother in Colorado. That move lasted one week. Traumatized in her own rite by the changes to her big brother and her complete lack of emotional tools to deal with such changes, she returned home. Right now, her book ideas are just a bit too close. She has told me repeatedly that she’s afraid that if anything further is to be reflected back on to Richard, there is just too little of who he was left to be able to cope. She’s convinced that if he’s redeployed he’ll either be killed or whatever comes home won’t have any part of the Richard we know. She’s living her own hell and is too scared to say much to anyone.