



OHF INTEL

2nd Quarter 2023

A Quarterly Report from Operation Healing Forces

Fostering Hope for Healing Families.

Dear Friends and Supporters of Operation Healing Forces,

Childhood is difficult in active duty and veteran combat families, including mine as a son of Commander Jeremiah and Jane Denton. For nearly eight years, our father was a senior Navy POW in North Vietnam while our mother raised seven children on her own. As a senior ranking POW, the Code of Conduct obligated him to lead POW resistance under severe conditions with extreme risk. Our deep worries were later confirmed – his leadership included constant abuse, periodic torture and four years of solitary confinement in a 4x9 foot cell. At the same time, our mother was a founding leader of the National League of Families promoting and eventually achieving public awareness, humane treatment and diplomatic action. Their story is well told in several books and in the highly awarded PBS documentary “Jeremiah”. And, I am acutely aware of how painful national defense can feel inside the walls of your own home when everyone else is living a ‘normal’ life.

Throughout our ordeal, the Navy, close neighbors, local parishes and a few civic organizations informally supported us the best they could. Our favorite such experiences were two simple camping retreats at rough-hewn cabins in the woods surrounding Yorktown Naval Weapons Station. It was wonderful for us, but a far cry from the powerful benefits provided today by Operation Healing Forces (OHF). During that war, my youth somewhat protected me from the full reality, but after dad’s “return with honor”, we each dealt with the truth of it all – his long-term assimilation into our home and a radically different American society. Relaying this with evident passion a few years ago to friends including the indomitable Tony Markel, he suggested I carefully consider OHF’s work supporting the unique needs of Special Operations Forces (SOF) families.

I was very impressed with the OHF mission, strategy, efficiency and effectiveness healing the physical, psychological and family wounds uniquely faced by the SOF community. As Tony anticipated, I soon accepted an invitation to join the distinguished OHF Board, whose personal contributions cover all non-program administrative costs. Beyond my own eventual national defense service as a commissioned U.S. Naval officer, I felt an obligation to support families bearing an enduring combat burden.

It is important to understand that nearly all SOF families carry the immense burden of past, current or imminent combat service. No other military community comes close to SOF operational frequency and secrecy right now in the moment you are comfortably reading this article. Even when at home base not deployed, another call might come at any time 24/7/365 involving high potential lethal danger. The good news is that SOF action often saves thousands of lives by avoiding conventional war tactics, but the cost paid those families is very high. So please generously support Operation Healing Forces in whatever way you can.

*With Gratitude,
Michael C. Denton
Member of the Board
Operation Healing Forces*



Building a Support Network for SOF Caregivers

Did you know the majority of post-9/11 military caregivers are service member or veteran spouses? According to research from the RAND Corporation, only 47% of military caregiver spouses have a support network.

The OHF Caregiver Therapeutic Retreat program is designed to foster long-lasting relationships among the caregivers of our nation’s SOF warriors by offering resilience-based retreats that promote respite and connection.

“As a military spouse, I don’t often think about the sacrifices I make every in support of my husband. I do what I do for my family. To feel appreciated as I have on this trip is so valuable to me.”
– OHF Caregiver Alumni

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NO DISTRACTIONS

"We won't let so much time go by before we prioritize our marriage and spending time together with no distractions."

The last few years for Louie and Nancy Cruz have not been easy. While assigned to 7th Special Forces Group and deployed to Afghanistan in 2020, Louie's team was ambushed by a surprise attack from an Afghan Policeman in Sherzad District, Nangarhar. Two of Louie's teammates were killed and he was severely injured, suffering a bullet wound to the shoulder, ricochet rounds to his legs, and shrapnel embedded in his groin.

"We have been dealing with not just the physical injuries, but the emotional challenges a traumatic event brings," explains his wife, Nancy.

Although Louie has physically recovered from his injuries, the strain of this life-altering event took a toll on the Cruz's marriage. The couple share a two-year old son, and both serve as



Louie and Nancy Cruz

active-duty service members. It has been difficult to navigate both of their careers while caring for their toddler son. There was never an opportunity for them to spend time together to nurture and restore their relationship. OHF's therapeutic couple's retreat came at the perfect time. The retreat was also conveniently located in Florida, allowing Louie's sister who resides in the state to care for their son and allow them the opportunity to attend a therapeutic retreat at a time when they needed it most. "It was nice... to get childcare for him," Nancy explained, "and focus on just us."

During their deep-sea fishing excursion, it became clear how much Louie and Nancy had been neglecting time as a couple. "It was the moment I realized we had forgotten what it's like to just be us two, with no distractions," Nancy shares. "The trip has reminded us how important it is to put each other first in order to build a strong foundation for our family."



The couple reconnects while spending time together, just the two of them.

A LIFE-ALTERING ACCIDENT



Austin and Jessica in the hospital on Christmas Day

Austin and Jessica Youngblood of Peyton, Colorado were heading to midnight mass on Christmas Eve with their nine children when an unexpected accident forever altered their lives. A severely intoxicated driver struck the family's vehicle head-on while traveling over 65 miles per hour. Jessica, who was expecting, and the couple's nine children suffered head traumas and additional minor injuries, but Austin's injuries were much more devastating.

"There's really no good reason why I'm here today to be honest," Austin explained. The collision shattered his right leg, lacerated three organs in his abdomen, fractured eight vertebrae, and caused a severe head injury. The impact was so powerful that the driver's seat dislodged from the vehicle's frame, projecting Austin through the windshield. He says the accident, "turned our lives all the way upside down."

Austin, A Green Beret who had been serving in the Army for 22 years, took part in numerous crucial missions during his career. However, all his professional military aspirations came to an abrupt halt as a result of this accident. "These effects really take a toll on someone, no matter how

strong they are mentally, how resilient, or how much training they have," says Austin.

The family is grateful for an attentive support network and especially appreciative of Operation Healing Forces. The family credits OHF with not only caring for the service member, but their family as well. "Jessica leans on them very hard for the support she needs," Austin explains, "Because my injuries were so grievous, often times the focus is on me and my treatment. But my family was also there and suffered."

OHF was able to help the family purchase medical equipment and a specialized bed to aid in Austin's pain management and recovery. OHF also stepped in to provide short-term financial assistance until insurance claims could be settled. "That bed is the only place I can go and not have pain," Austin explains, "standing, walking... even sitting is extremely painful. The bed gets in a special position where I can let my body relax... it's my sanctuary!"

With a strong support system, his faith, and OHF's signature determination to support SOF community members, Austin said he has been able to maintain his resolve and strong will to recover – all key ingredients to healing



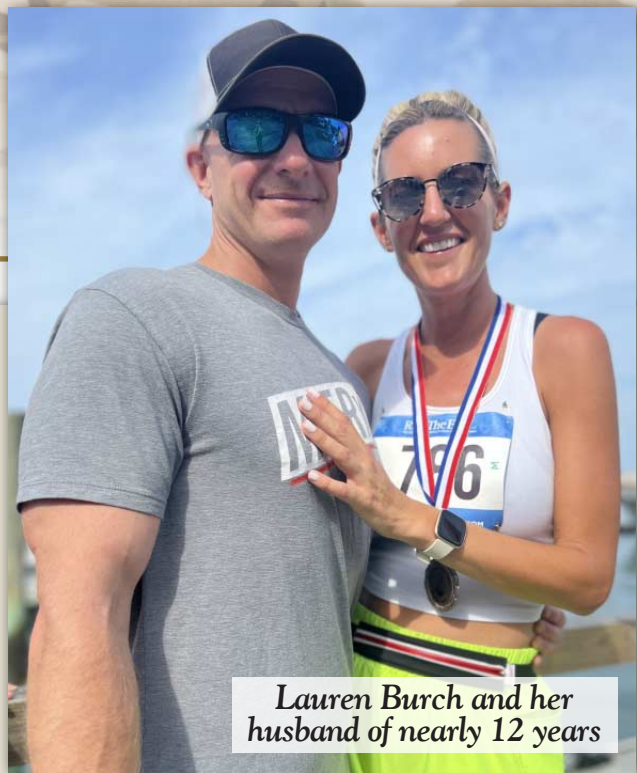
The Youngblood family at their home in Colorado

HITTING THE RESET BUTTON

Lauren Burch, mother of three, Police Officer of 17 years, and a Marine Spouse, is very familiar with meeting the needs of others. Although her husband has deployed “too many times to count,” his last deployment brought exceptional challenges. In addition to caring for their children, managing the household, and fulfilling her professional obligations, Lauren also accomplished a huge personal goal, earning a Master’s Degree in Criminal Justice this past December.

When her husband returned home from deployment in February, Lauren applied to attend an OHF Caregiver Therapeutic Retreat. “I really wanted to do something for myself, to hit the reset button,” she said.

Seagrove Beach, Florida was the perfect escape from Lauren’s daily grind and tireless service to others. Lauren, along with retreat lead Tiers Arnts, and two fellow military caregivers, spent the week kayaking, taking a dolphin sight-seeing tour, enjoying a spa day, and visiting



Lauren Burch and her husband of nearly 12 years

Crab Island. A yoga class on the beach also provided peace and rest from life’s daily stressors and parasailing added spontaneity and adventure to the week.

“This retreat helped me to focus on myself, relax, and realize that doing these things are important,” Lauren says. She values the connections made with her retreat lead and the other SOF caregivers “It was good to talk about the way we view different things, being a military wife. One was Navy, one Army, and me being Marine, I was a little nervous at first... but we all just clicked!”



“We really are there to support our husbands, but we have to take care of ourselves too.”

Lauren paddle boarding at Crab Island



Shannon McLimans and his bike group leader

For Retired Army Sgt. 1st Class Shannon McLimans from Irmo, South Carolina, keeping an active lifestyle is a priority, but due to several injuries he incurred while serving our country, complications resulting from the surgeries, and heart issues, the types of recreational activities Shannon can engage in safely are limited.

Understanding the importance of continuing to exercise as a part of his rehabilitation, while acknowledging that the type of physical activity he was accustomed to would necessarily need to change, Shannon turned to the sport of cycling. “I had gotten into the sport of cycling before they discharged me,” Shannon explains. Shannon went on to compete in the 2019 Department of Defense Warrior Games. The Warrior Games is an adaptive sports competition for wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans. Shannon participated in upright cycling, swimming, wheel-chair rugby, and seated volleyball.

Unfortunately, after competing in the 2019 games, more health obstacles arose for Shannon to overcome. After medically retiring in 2020, he underwent shoulder replacement surgery. “I have okay mobility now, but we haven’t gotten past the pain.” In addition to the recovery from the surgical procedure, he experienced additional medical

CYCLING WARRIOR

issues when an artery ruptured in his arm, causing extreme swelling and pain. It was time for Shannon to reevaluate his active life-style.

Switching from a standard upright bicycle to a recumbent bicycle was the best option to keep Shannon mobile and mitigate his pain. OHF helped to provide Shannon with a Catrike 700. Cycling as a mode of therapy for Shannon has enhanced not only his physical well-being, but also his mental wellness as it allows him speed, freedom, and peace. “And it’s even crazier on the recumbent, that little thing will do 32mph downhill without me even pedaling!” he exclaimed.

Shannon is looking forward to a positive future with his new bride, Monica, and their dogs. He appreciates Operation Healing Forces, not just for the Catrike, but for the care he received from the team. “They are always for the benefit of the soldier. They’re there to promote a better lifestyle. I will always be thankful.”



Shannon on a joyride with his dog, Mush

ENHANCING WELLNESS DURING TREATMENT

Steve and Lauren Flemming have gone through many trials and tribulations during their nearly 17 years of marriage and over 17 years in the Navy, but nothing compared with receiving the devastating news of a cancer diagnosis. While Steve was serving in the Middle East and working at Marine Corps Forces Central Command (MARCENT) as the senior enlisted advisor for medical support, he was diagnosed with stage four cancer.

“It’s wild what you start thinking about when you get that kind of diagnosis,” Steve explains. The devastating news changed the direction of their lives. Although Steve is currently going through critical treatments, Lauren shared that the treatments are, “Not only focused on the medicinal side of his treatment, but overall wellness and decreasing his stress load.”

The couple had a unique opportunity to focus on both of their overall well-being and de-stress on a therapeutic couple retreat hosted by Operation Healing Forces in Wintergreen, Virginia. Steve and Lauren, along with other participating SOF couples, went horseback riding, attended a class on glass blowing, and

visited the oldest winery in Virginia. Most of all, the couple especially appreciated the opportunity to truly relax and unwind. “We would talk and play games into the evening. It was nice just to be around adults and not have to worry about work or bills, or what our kids were doing,” Lauren says.

Lauren particularly loved observing her husband feel so at ease with the group



Steve and Lauren on their debut horseback ride together

and watching him laugh and enjoy himself in a stress-free environment. She noted that seeing him so comfortable, allowed her to enjoy herself and freed her from frequent crippling anxiety.

Doing different things and creating memories together” Lauren said will be a primary focus for their family moving forward. “Putting an intentional emphasis on strengthening the most important part of our lives – our family”.

CONNECT WITH OHF

Help expand OHF's impact – Please share this newsletter.

Help spread the word about Operation Healing Forces and the battles faced by our nation's special operations forces. Forward this newsletter to a friend, relative, or colleague today. You may end up connecting OHF with its next donor, supporter, or recipient family.

"I read an article online about Operation Healing Forces a couple of years ago and as a U.S. Marine Corps veteran myself, I felt compelled to get involved."

— OHF Supporter David T. Maccagnone,
CEO Multi-Bank Securities Inc.

Helping SOF SOAR

Now more than ever, SOF service members and SOF families need your assistance. OHF continues to expand its support for crisis needs and the long-term fiscal stability of SOF families in areas such as career transition, employment, caregiver and spouse support, and financial planning. To contribute or learn more about these programs, please contact SOAR Program Manager *Tiers Arnts* at Tiers.Arnts@ophf.org or (253) 241-7271.

SOAR (Special Operations Additional Resources) Program

OHF's SOAR Offers:

- Immediate Needs and Crisis Support
- Military to Civilian Transition Assistance
- Professional Referral and Resource Network
- Robust Alumni Support Network
- Financial Planning Assistance
- Tax Preparation Assistance

A Home for Healing:

The phenomenal response to OHF's Therapeutic Retreat Program allows more members of the special operations community to access our life-changing therapeutic retreat program. This growth also means that Operation Healing Forces is in need of homes to house our retreat couples and our caregivers.

Please consider providing access to a home for an OHF therapeutic retreat. It is a truly meaningful gift and an extremely rewarding way to support SOF families.

OUR NEED:

5-bedroom, 5-bathroom homes located throughout North America.

TIMING:

Retreats take place over 5 days. We have needs for retreat locations in 2023 and beyond

LEARN MORE:

Contact *Kerry Irvin* at kerry.irvin@ophf.org to learn more about opening your home to our nation's Special Operators and their spouses or selfless SOF caregivers.





Mutually Beneficial

Aside from helping support a worthy cause, stock donations can maximize the value of a gift to both the charitable recipient and the donor. Compared with selling appreciated securities and donating the after-tax net proceeds, a direct gift of stock has the potential to increase the net proceeds to the charity and maximize a donor's tax deduction.

When donating appreciated securities (e.g., stocks, bonds, mutual funds, etc.) with long-term holding periods of one year or more, the amount of the donor's tax deduction is equal to the average value of the high and low price of the securities on the date of the gift. You may generally deduct up to 30% of your Adjusted Gross Income for contributions of appreciated securities held more than one year.

Donating stock to charity is as easy as calling your financial advisor and providing transfer instructions. To learn how to make a stock donation for Operation Healing Forces, visit <https://OperationHealingForces.org/Donate> or contact **Kerry Irvin** at kerry.irvin@ophf.org.

Giving to Operation Healing Forces is Easier Than Ever!

Simply scan or click on the
OHF QR Code to make a
contribution right away!



More Ways You Can Help!



Cash contributions.*

100% goes to program costs thanks to our board of directors covering all overhead expenses.



Host an in-home reception.*

Introduce OHF's mission to your friends and neighbors.



Donate your airline miles.

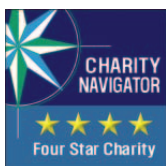
It's easy. Call or email Desiree Holley to find out how, (813) 480-6078 desiree.holley@ophf.org.

***Contact Kerry Irvin, kerry.irvin@ophf.org to learn more.**

OHF's Therapeutic Retreat Program and Resource Program are especially meaningful and healing to the Special Operations Forces community because this support is offered at no cost to participants. By alleviating the burden of financial stress, America's elite warriors and their families can access much-needed vital resources and tools and focus on restoring and strengthening relationships and Creating Bonds that Cure.

OHF's transformative programs are only possible thanks to our partnership with dedicated donors like you. As you consider making a tax-deductible donation to OHF to aid the Special Operations Community, do so with the confidence that **100% of your donation** will go toward supporting our programs. This unique assurance is possible because of the committed support of our board of directors, who personally cover every penny of OHF's overhead expenses. *That means every dollar you give will go directly toward special operators and their families.*

Thank you for your support!



OHF has achieved Charity Navigator's top ranking of Four Stars. Described as "Exceptional" - Exceeds industry standards and outperforms most charities in its cause.



OHF has achieved the GuideStar Platinum Seal of Transparency Rating, the top 0.1% of the nation's non-profit organizations in terms of transparency.



OHF received the "Top Rated" rating by Great Nonprofits. Rated highly by people who experience their work firsthand - clients served, volunteers and donors.

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Thank you for supporting Operation Healing Forces

Comments? Questions?

Please tell us what you think about our quarterly newsletter. Direct questions, comments, or to unsubscribe, e-mail us at: info@ophf.org or by mail to:

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Creating Bonds That Cure

www.operationhealingforces.org

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