

# The Road to Recovery Report

An Update for Supporters of the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes

Volume 51 ★ April 2015

*Providing Emergency Aid  
to Troops Severely Disabled  
in the War on Terror*



“I would like to say thank you to the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes. If it wasn't for organizations like this one there would be a lot of veterans without food and help. My family and I are very grateful.”

— Cesar T., disabled veteran

## How will *you* honor a hero this Memorial Day?

Memorial Day is an important day for the Coalition – and for all patriotic Americans. Because it's a day for remembering the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice preserving our families' safety and freedom.

At the Coalition we work day in and day out to help those who *did* come home from war ... but came home broken. Because it's unthinkable that on Memorial Day of all days, *even one* disabled hero should go without food ... should have his car repossessed ... or

should live in fear of becoming homeless.

Inside your exclusive *Road to Recovery Report* you'll read stories of heroes you've already helped. I hope you're excited and encouraged to see how your faithful support, patriotic spirit, and generous giving are making a difference every day in the lives of American heroes.

And I hope you'll consider honoring a hero this Memorial Day in a very practical way – with a special gift to help a severely disabled veteran who needs a helping hand ... but fears his sacrifice has been forgotten.

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# Letter from President David Walker

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Dear Friend of Our Wounded Heroes,

On Memorial Day I, with other Americans across the country, will pause to remember with gratitude the heroes who gave their lives in the service of our great nation.

While Memorial Day is a patriotic and fun-filled day of barbecues and parades, it's also a sobering day. I'm reminded that while the heroic troops the Coalition helps *did* return home from war, in many ways they too lost their lives; at least the lives they had before they left.

Their old jobs, their old friends, sometimes even their old families and their old personalities are gone. The lives they return to often bear little resemblance to the lives they left behind.

That's why the work we're doing together is so important.

The men and women who served in the war on terror and returned home severely disabled need our help. They need us to stand alongside them as they rebuild. They need us to tell them their sacrifice has not been forgotten. They need our financial assistance as they pick up the pieces of their shattered lives.

It is my honor to serve these American heroes, side-by-side with our faithful friends and supporters.

Time and time again I have heard these grateful heroes say, "The aid I received from the Coalition saved my family – and it let me know that my service hasn't been forgotten."

This Memorial Day, I'm honored to have by my side friends like you, patriotic Americans, who could never let a hero's service go forgotten on this day of remembrance.

Your faithful generosity tells me you believe in our mission as wholeheartedly as I do – and I'm so grateful for that. And I hope you'll take the special opportunity of Memorial Day to share the Coalition's message with a family member or friend. The work we're doing is so important – we need to share it with as many patriotic Americans as we can, so we can help as many American heroes as possible.

With gratitude,

David Walker  
President & CEO





## Your generosity gave disabled veteran “the best thing we’ve had in 12 years”



**D**ennis Wikoff is a disabled veteran who attended the 2014 Road to Recovery Conference with his wife, Kristen, and their three daughters – Jessica (11), Kaitlyn (8), and Alexis (5). As they shared their story, tears flowed freely ... but their message is one of joy and gratitude to you, our faithful donors. I hope you’re encouraged to hear their story.

Service in Iraq exacerbated Dennis Wikoff’s old back and shoulder injuries from a service-related parachute jump, and left him with PTSD, depression, and anxiety.

“This PTSD’s impacted every aspect of our marriage, our family, kids, myself as well,” says Kristen. “There’s been times where I feel like [Dennis has] completely locked out and I take it personal thinking that it’s my fault. But it’s just because that’s how he copes. He blocks things off ... that’s what the military has taught him, to just kind of put everything back, don’t deal with it, act like it doesn’t exist. He kind of zones out.”

When Dennis was medically retired from the Army transitioning from Fort Hood, Texas back home to California, their family suddenly faced a lapse in pay. “We kind of ... fell behind,” he says. They filed for bankruptcy, and faced the repossession of their car.

“It’s been very hard,” Kristen tearfully describes. “We’ve had to go to food banks. We pretty much get [a] cutoff notice every month and it’s like ok, pray we can make a payment arrangement on this and they’ll extend it. Right now we’re kind of sinking and we’re sinking quick.”

Then the Wikoff’s heard about the Coalition from a

friend. They received emergency aid for food and rent and, even better, were invited to attend the 2014 Road to Recovery Conference.

Dennis and Kristen say, attending the conference in sunny California was a dream come true.

“This is the best thing we’ve had in 12 years,” Dennis says. “That’s been the only thing we’ve been able to look forward to – an escape from everything at home.” The trip was the first family vacation for a couple who never even had a honeymoon.

“We just can’t afford to do things like this so being able to be here is a huge blessing,” Kristen says. “And our kids, this is a big chance to be here with our kids, too, for much needed family time.”

And this struggling military family was “blown away” when they received the surprise \$500 check given to each family attending the conference. “We actually have to pay some bills,” Dennis says, “but we’re going to try to spend some time with the kids at SeaWorld tomorrow and give them a keepsake. But it’s a huge kind of relief because I know that we’ll actually have money for Christmas this year.”

So despite the tears, the Wikoff’s final words were again of gratitude. “We just want to thank the donors so much,” Dennis said. “Without this opportunity we would never have been able to take a vacation like this with our family – ever. This is something special our kids will remember for a long, long time.”



Your Coalition is committed to doing all we can to change the lives of our nation's severely disabled war on terror veterans. To further that mission we're constantly working to raise awareness about the issues they face and reaching out to help them in the community.

### Coalition supports outing with Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing

During the first weekend of December, the Coalition along with Project Healing Waters, brought together disabled veterans for fishing, food, fun and friendship. The theme of the weekend was camaraderie for a common cause – support of wounded vets through a bit of “nature therapy.” Your generosity helps make memorable events like this possible for our deserving wounded warriors. Thank you!



### Coalition sends holiday cheer to overseas troops

This past holiday season, the Coalition teamed up with *The Washington Times* to create an opportunity for Americans to communicate with the men and women currently serving overseas. Participants could watch videos from the troops and sign a virtual card for a hero. Much like the THANK YOU and GET WELL cards we often ask our supporters to sign, these virtual cards – acknowledging our wounded warriors' sacrifices – can make a real difference to a hero struggling to recover and rebuild.



### Coalition presents Chef Richard Sharpe Hometown Heroes Award

Chef Richard Sharpe is pictured with Coalition representative Raymond Brown receiving the much deserved Hometown Heroes Award. Richard donates his time, organizes meal kits with his church, and cooks meals for many Concord, NH veteran families in need. The Hometown Heroes Award recognizes the selfless and extraordinary service of everyday Americans who give generously of themselves to support our efforts to serve the brave men and women who sacrificed so much in the war on terror.



### Middle School students give Coalition a special gift

A big “Thank you!” to the faculty and students at East Alexander Middle School in North Carolina, who raised \$500 in less than two weeks, one dollar at a time. The school began fundraising by having students donate \$1.00 to wear jeans or have an extra recess. Faculty encouraged students to see the importance of recognizing our brave veterans every day, not just on Veterans Day. Coalition representative, Chuck Stewart (left), was on hand to accept the generous gift.



### Marana, Arizona designated a “Purple Heart Town”

The Coalition's Mary Jessie Herrera and Martin Badegian, pictured right, were on hand to present Marana, AZ Mayor Ed Honea with a special copy of the Coalition's coffee table book, *Profiles in Character*. The “Purple Heart Town” honor recognizes cities and towns that go above and beyond to support veterans.

“The Town of Marana is proud to receive this designation,” said Mayor Ed Honea, a U.S. Navy veteran. “The military plays a vital role in our community and the Town is always willing to support these men and women in every way possible.”



### Coalition attends Veterans Affairs Christmas party

Coalition representative Brandon Boyd, pictured left, distributed gifts to veterans at the Washington DC Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs Open House/Christmas Party. The presents were donated by the Coalition and were made possible by you, our valued supporters and donors!



### We asked ... you answered ... we listened!

The Coalition strongly believes that you, our generous supporters, are the lifeblood of this organization. We value your feedback on our programs and are eager to learn more about you and your thoughts on the work we are doing. With this in mind, we try to regularly reach out to our supporters via email and through our direct mail program to offer you the opportunity to interact with us. Below is a sampling of recent survey results.

- ★ 100% of Coalition supporters who returned their surveys think it is **unfair and outrageous** that scores of veterans have died while waiting for medical treatment ... that Al Qaeda terrorists are getting far better medical treatment than many of our disabled veterans ... and that it takes ten months on average for a disabled veteran to get his or her first disability check after separating from service.
- ★ 15% of you think these outrageous facts are the result of bureaucratic incompetence ... 15% say it's because politicians' #1 priority is reelection ... and 70% of you blame both those factors, combined with the fact that our wounded heroes can't afford high-priced lawyers and lobbyists to fight for their rights.
- ★ It is important to 100% of the Coalition supporters surveyed that America's disabled troops receive the care they deserve ... and 95% of you think your Congressional representative needs to give a full accounting of his or her actions to protect and defend our heroes.

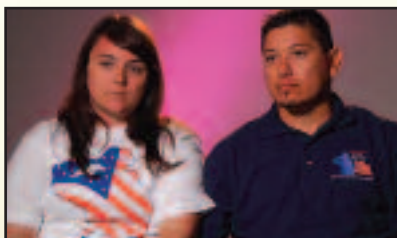
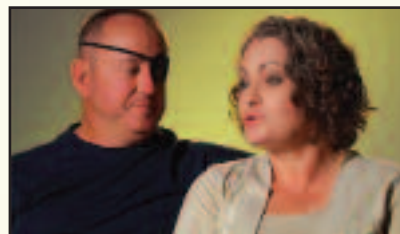


## Here's what your generosity meant to a disabled hero

*If you ever needed a reminder about why the Coalition exists – and why your giving is so important – all you need to do is read the testimonials below. You'll be grateful, you'll be proud and you'll be energized to keep up the fight. I encourage you to share them with everyone you know – friends, family, prospective donors, the media, elected officials, and fellow veterans. Together we're helping American heroes – and we must never lose sight of that.*

“The Coalition was able to step in and help us when we needed it the most, when [Don] was leaving the Army but not yet in the VA. They covered that gap for us financially and kept the lights on and a roof over our head and food in our stomachs. That to me is an incredible gesture of thanks.”

— Retired Staff Sgt. Dan Shannon and wife Torrey

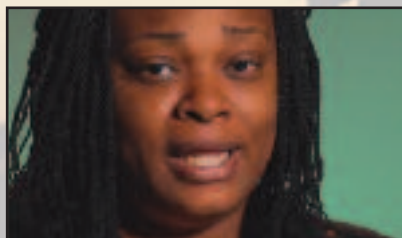


“In the beginning it was really, really hard, but the Coalition has really helped [Juan] focus his attention and give him a purpose and make him feel like he's still a productive member of society.”

— Army veteran Juan Perez and wife Christy

“I know [the Road to Recovery Conference] is very helpful. It's given me hope. It showed me that you can do anything, it just takes a lot of hard work.”

— Retired Army Staff Sgt. Dennis Cabanting

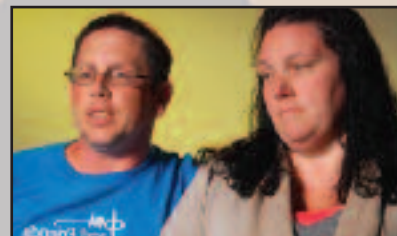


“At the end of the day when I lay down and I have no one to turn to I can pick up the phone and call somebody from the Coalition and say, ‘Hey, this is what's going on. I need help.’”

— Quintellea Grant, retired Army Specialist

“Great Americans come together to form these great nonprofits like the Coalition that will step in to do what the government should be doing. And they step in instead and pick up the slack and help wounded warriors and are there for wounded warriors.”

— Retired Staff Sgt. Kevin Snow and wife Adrienne



[YouTube.com/user/SaluteHeroes:](http://YouTube.com/user/SaluteHeroes)

Tune into our YouTube channel to watch emotional and inspirational firsthand accounts from veterans, their wives, and their children, sharing how your generosity changed their lives. Stories like these are what keep us working, day in and day out, to support America's disabled heroes – so I hope you enjoyed reading them. (You can see more from this video at <http://youtu.be/4jukVQmFPn4>.)



## This hero lost an eye in Iraq ... and his battle was just beginning

**O**ur emergency financial aid program is at the heart of our mission to serve America's heroes. But another way we help our veterans is the **Heroes Thanking Heroes (HTH)** program – one of our most innovative projects.

HTH provides wounded veterans and their spouses with part-time, flexible employment, employing them to make phone calls from their homes thanking another set of heroes – our wonderful supporters!

HTH was created for situations just like the story I'm about to share – to help a family in unique, difficult circumstances, struggling just to get by.

Retired Army Specialist Donald Urbany's military career began when he joined the Army in 2003. He deployed to Baghdad, Iraq on February 5, 2005.

On May 10, after being on radio guard for 36 hours, Donald's Sergeant released him from any work for 24 hours. Half an hour later, a Lieutenant from a different Platoon woke him and asked Donald to join him on a mission – one that took them to an elementary school on a route the Platoon had never traveled before. Donald's job was to stand out of the back of the vehicle and look for snipers or anything out of the ordinary. About 15 minutes into the drive, on a narrow road on the east side of the Tigris River, Donald noticed one debris-filled vehicle that didn't look right.

As the military vehicle passed the suspicious car, Donald heard an explosion and then fell into the back of the vehicle.

When Donald looked down he saw blood covering the front of his uniform. Moments later his Commander and Lieutenant boarded the vehicle and started giving him medical attention and dressing his wounds – the entire right side of his body was filled with shrapnel. They lightly wrapped gauze around his eye as to protect it but they didn't apply any pressure to stop his bleeding, so Donald tried to apply pressure to stop the bleeding himself – not realizing there was an 8-inch piece of metal lodged into his right eye. His Sergeant had to knock Donald unconscious to keep him from trying to apply pressure to his face and further damaging his eye.

Donald was transported to Landstuhl, Germany, where he was later presented a Purple Heart by former Army Chief of Staff General Schoomaker.

Donald was sent to recover at Walter Reed Army

Medical Center in Washington DC, where he met his wife Jennifer. "He was lonely and needed a friend," Jennifer remembers. "None of his family bothered to come visit him, stay with him, or support him so I wanted to be his friend and be there for him. Friendship turned into compassion and compassion turned into love."

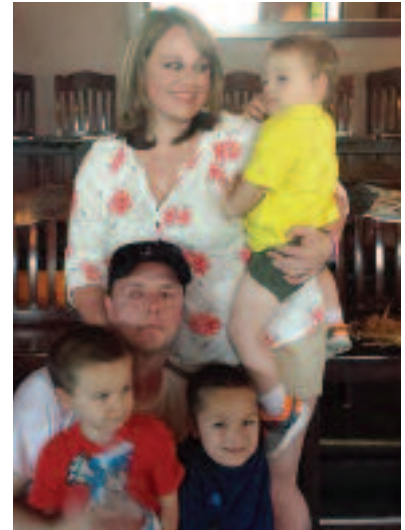
Today Donald and Jennifer have three little boys – Bennett (5), Quinn (3), and Reagan (2). Combined with Donald's 90% disability rating, Jennifer's hands are full caring for her husband and children.

Disaster struck in September 2012 when Jennifer suffered two grand mal seizures within 45 minutes of each other. A year later she was diagnosed with a brain tumor and Multiple Sclerosis.

Overwhelmed with medical bills and struggling to care for her family, Jennifer learned of the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes from a dear family friend who works for the Coalition. Her friend told the directors of the **Heroes Thanking Heroes** program about the Urbany family's situation and they promptly hired Jennifer. "The extra income has been a blessing," she says. "It has enabled us to pay off my medical bills and keep on keeping on." Today Jennifer continues working for HTH, making phone calls to thank generous donors just like you!

"What a blessing the Coalition and the Heroes Thanking Heroes program has been to my family," Jennifer Urbany says.

It's amazing the difference a little flexibility and the ability to provide makes to a struggling caregiver, like Jennifer, or a disabled veteran who couldn't otherwise work! *Thank you* for your generosity that has helped this young family survive disaster.



**Ret. Army Specialist Donald Urbany with his wife, Jennifer, and their three children.**



## Heroes thank YOU for sending holiday meals

*This past holiday season, your generosity allowed us to send \$60 gift cards for holiday meals to disabled veterans around the country. And the grateful “thank yous” have been pouring in from heroes whose lives your giving touched. I hope your heart is warmed as you read these notes from struggling heroes whose holidays were made brighter because of you.*

“We just wanted to say thank you soooo much for the \$60.00 gift card. It helped buy our Thanksgiving dinner. I was sitting here wondering how we were gonna do it but this came in the mail, like God knew we needed it. I’m so blessed. Thank you once again for this awesome blessing.”

— The Evans Family

“I would like to express my gratitude for the Thanksgiving gift. **My wife and I were just discussing how were we going to be able to afford a nice Thanksgiving dinner and along comes this special gift from Coalition to Salute America’s Heroes.** I have struggled with various types of hardships upon returning from Iraq, and I still have hills to climb but I am so thankful for gifts like this, because it allows me to know I am not in this struggle alone.”

— Sgt. Edward B. Wingate, North Carolina

“As I began to write this email I am in tears! I am simply just writing to say ‘Thank You’ from the bottom of our hearts for the gift check and gift card. Our family of 6 is now going to be able to enjoy a big Christmas dinner. You have brought so much joy to our family this Christmas!”

— The T. Family

“The \$60.00 gift card was used for our family Christmas dinner. We appreciate being remembered during the holidays. Christmas is difficult since I was wounded and lost friends on Christmas 2003 in Iraq. Thanks for your kindness.”

— SSG Joe T., U.S. Army (Ret.)

“Thank you for a very much needed gift. **Myself and my family would not be having a Thanksgiving meal if we had not received that. Unexpected emergencies have left us with no money, food or vehicle at this time.** My wife has cancer and has to go for chemo treatment daily. We have tried so hard to make it and to give our children what they need. This gift card is doing more than just giving us a Thanksgiving meal it is actually giving them a few meals as we will make it stretch into more than just the one meal.”

— Mark W.

“After the year we had fighting my cancer and my warrior’s coma and many surgeries, this Thanksgiving help is a breath of fresh air. **At this time we are going on fumes til payday.** We got our gift card in the mail today and were able to sit down with the kids and let them know we are able to do Thanksgiving this year. The kids are going to go through the easy cookbook today and each be in charge of something. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.”

— The Esco Family

### Please consider sharing your e-mail address

By providing your e-mail address on your enclosed newsletter reply form you’ll start receiving thank you notes, photos and updates about how your continued generosity is improving the lives of our disabled heroes and their families.