

Army Wife Clings to Psalm 119 After Her Soldier's Death

I have always loved the fireworks on the Fourth of July. As a child growing up in southwest Florida, we went to the beach and watched the show as it launched from the Naples Pier. That venue offered a double treat as the pyrotechnics burst in the sky and reflected upon the warm water of the Gulf. With an unwavering patriotism running steadily through my veins, every year since my youth, I have always found a place to observe the fireworks and celebrate our nation's independence. Never has it been as painful as it was in 2007.

Six weeks before Independence Day that year, I had buried my husband, the love of my life, the father of our children. Major Larry Bauguess was serving with the 82nd Airborne Division in Afghanistan and had been shot and killed following a peace meeting in Pakistan. A wicked sucker-punch took him from us and left us with the insurmountable challenge of learning how to live without him. Despite our broken hearts, our tiny daughters and I remained wildly patriotic. We lived on Fort Bragg and wanted to celebrate July Fourth alongside our neighbors, no matter how painful it would be.

That morning, we went to the community pool, which was beautifully decorated in red, white and blue. I did my best to compartmentalize my emotions as I saw the happy families playing in the water. Little ones hanging on their dads, being tossed out of the water and back down with a splash, amused me for a moment until I realized Ryann and Ellie would never again enjoy a carefree pool day with their daddy.

That afternoon, a sweet neighbor came over to pamper the girls. She knew it had already been an emotional holiday for us. With incredible precision, Robin Jones painted their big toes and thumbnails blue with little white stars. She painted

every other finger and toe alternating shades of red and white. Once their nails were dry, Ryann and Ellie danced around the living room and stared at their hands and feet. It was a priceless gesture from a true friend.

That evening, we re-joined our neighbors in an open field to watch the incredibly patriotic Fort Bragg firework display. The children enjoyed lighting and waving sparklers as they waited for the show to begin. As the start time approached, we spread out a blanket for the kids to lie on and positioned our chairs to watch from behind.

The first explosion startled me, but the brightly colored fire in the sky certainly captured my attention. I was excited to watch the show. Surprisingly, the second explosion shook me. By the third and fourth boom, I was trembling. Never had the sound of fireworks rattled me the way they did that year. Sounding less like a celebration and more like a battlefield, I couldn't help but feel frightened. That moment became less and less festive, more and more horrifying with each boom.

Confused and betrayed by my own emotions, I looked at the children lying on their bellies gazing joyfully at the firework display. They were so innocent, so pure. I glanced at my neighbors. Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves. Why was I falling apart?

Each boom sounded louder and louder. My ears and my heart hurt. My eyes began to sting as they filled with tears. I thought about Larry and his last moments on earth. Had it been this loud? Did he feel this out of control?

In that moment, I sought comfort from the only one who could provide it. My heart was broken, my nerves were exposed and my world had been shattered. Only God could help me. Only God could restore my faith and, in that moment, my sanity.

"This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word revives me" (Ps. 119:50).

The fireworks show lasted nearly 30 minutes. In that time, I experienced a wide array of emotions, but by the finale, God provided the comfort I needed. He restored my patriotism and my love of country. He warmed my heart and gave me strength.

Over the past 10 years, I have had many moments of trouble and trial, but in every single one, I have leaned on God to see me through. As a family, we remain incredibly proud of our country, and thankful for the freedom for which Larry gave his life. We continue to participate in Fourth of July celebrations to honor him and so many others who have given that last full measure of devotion. Every day, we remember that freedom doesn't come without suffering. {eo}

Wesley Bauguess is an Army veteran and widow. Her book, *"God, Country, Golf: Reflections of an Army Widow,"* released from Westbow Press on May 14, 2017, the 10th anniversary of her husband Larry's courageous sacrifice in service.