

I Knew a Soldier

By Karen Ehman of St. Johns

I knew a Soldier. He was born March 31, 1987 in the small Midwestern town of St. Johns, Michigan, the oldest child of Alan and Tami Nelson.

I knew a Soldier. One who, as a young child, was a blond-haired little spitfire. But more importantly, he was a brother, a grandson, a nephew, a cousin and friend.

I knew a soldier. A soldier who, as a little boy, loved to play army. In his make believe world of plastic guns and camouflage, he'd sneak quietly up on the enemy, defending both family and flag. Just as quickly he'd switch gears, no longer playing hero. He turned back into a boy when he'd hop up on my lap for yet another reading of his favorite book, Uncle Wiggly.

I knew a Soldier. A Soldier who as an elementary school child knew every word to Lee Greenwood's God Bless the U.S.A. He'd belt it out at the top of his lungs, making everyone within earshot attentively listen. He'd become so serious when he reached the part, "And I won't forget the men who died who gave that right to me. And I'll gladly stand up next to you and defend her still today. 'Cause there ain't no doubt I love this land. God bless the U.S.A." He meant it then. He lived it at the end.

I knew a Soldier. A dedicated member of the St. Johns High School Swim Team. He won ribbons and medals and four varsity letters while he made his team cheer and his parents and relatives proud.

I knew a Soldier. A handsome young man who one day became smitten by a beautiful young girl. Then, on a fall November day in 2005, he made Kristi Rewerts not only his high school sweetheart, but also his wife.

I knew a Soldier. A brave young man who, as soon as it was possible, enlisted in the United States Army. He answered freedom's call to journey abroad and try to win for others what he himself had enjoyed throughout his entire young life.

I knew a Soldier. He never wrote a book, yet his life spoke volumes of the love of country. He never led a formal class on the virtues of freedom but he modeled for many just what freedom's high price really is. He never preached a sermon, yet his wordless example taught others of love, loyalty, commitment and bravery. He never sought the spotlight, yet his life lessons will shine on for years to come in the lives of his wife, his parents, his sisters and family, as well as those of us who were fortunate enough to know, love and learn from him.

I knew a Soldier. His name was Andrew. He died doing what he was created to do. Many, who will never know him, owe him their gratitude. We give him our honor.

Our small town's soldier is now heaven's hero.