

# Why Hire Military Heroes?

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The best way to determine if hiring military heroes makes sense to you is to take a moment to learn their stories. Stop “wishing you could help” and start by assisting these courageous families and thousands like them to rebuild their lives through employment.



Baby Zeppelin, pictured here, is a prime example of how our wounded warriors and their families move forward with their lives. His parents, Elise and Kevin are a wonderful example of courage, determination and perseverance. Zeppelin, now 3 months old, has added new light to this family’s life and new purpose to their goals for the future.

## Elise & Kevin R.

Elise grew up in Oklahoma and moved to Magnolia, TX when she was in high school. She met her husband Kevin after he returned from his deployment with the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division where he worked in OIS. Kevin was driving a Humvee and was injured in an IED blast. He broke his fibula head, tore his meniscus, and injured his back and his foot. He has recovered from most of his physical injuries (although running is still a problem) but Kevin suffers from PTSD which affects his memory, a frustrating situation for a young man who wants to be a police officer. He’s applied for a position with the San Antonio Police Department and passed the written test with flying colors. He didn’t pass the physical test but has been working hard to be physically ready to re-take the test in the near future. Kevin possesses a valid security clearance and is very interested in a position in law enforcement. He plans to pursue a degree in Criminal Psychology and work for the FBI, CIA, or the DEA in the future.

Elise and Kevin were married a year ago (Sept. 14, 2007) and are the proud parents of a three month old son, Zeppelin. Kevin is 23 and Elise is 21. They met at a country bar after Kevin’s injury, fell in love, and have built a wonderful partnership despite the adversities they face. They plan to stay in San Antonio because of the support system. As Kevin jokes “this is a place that understands retirement for young people.”

Kevin was discharged from the military on June 29, 2008. He has a very positive outlook – “I’m alive, I have no visible scars and have all my parts.” He is frustrated by the fact that the military is “good to people who can do their job. If you are unable to accomplish the same tasks, they get rid of you.” Now that Kevin is discharged, he is still eligible for VA benefits although he must pay for services and the family income is very limited. Elise admitted that once the bills are paid, they have \$100 income left for

the rest of the month. They are both seeking employment but Elise knows it's up to her to get a job first.

Elise is a trained, experienced Dental Assistant and also has worked in the restaurant industry. She loves to make people laugh, especially those who "fear the dentist." She's a people pleaser and excels at customer service. She is seeking a work at home position and is willing to start work immediately. She wants to avoid childcare and transportation costs and be available to ensure Kevin remembers his medical appointments...because his PTSD affects his memory. Elise volunteered that she'd work for \$5.00 an hour because "anything is better than nothing."

She, Kevin, and Zeppelin deserve so much more! (Kate Midden, MSCCN)

### **Issac S. & Rain M.**

Isaac joined the military in 1998 straight out of high school. The Army was his life and he excelled at his career. In March of 2005, Isaac's life changed drastically. His team was sent to help another group pinned down in a firefight and they were ambushed. Isaac's buddy was injured and Isaac dragged him to shelter in a nearby building. A bullet hit the wall close to his buddy's head so Isaac took off his protective plate, put it between the wall and his buddy and left to rejoin the skirmish.

Isaac was hit in the back with a bullet and his military career was over.



Isaac was treated in the hospital for six months before he was mistakenly dropped from the military roll. His mother received a letter stating Isaac was AWOL (absent without leave). A few days later his mother received another letter – Isaac was listed as a deserter. Isaac was taken from his hospital bed by MPs (military police) and flown

to Ft. Knox, KY to be put on trial as a deserter. Isaac believes that this horrible mistake was made because his company commander was killed and somehow the paperwork got mixed up. His name was finally cleared with the help of his social worker and his doctors.

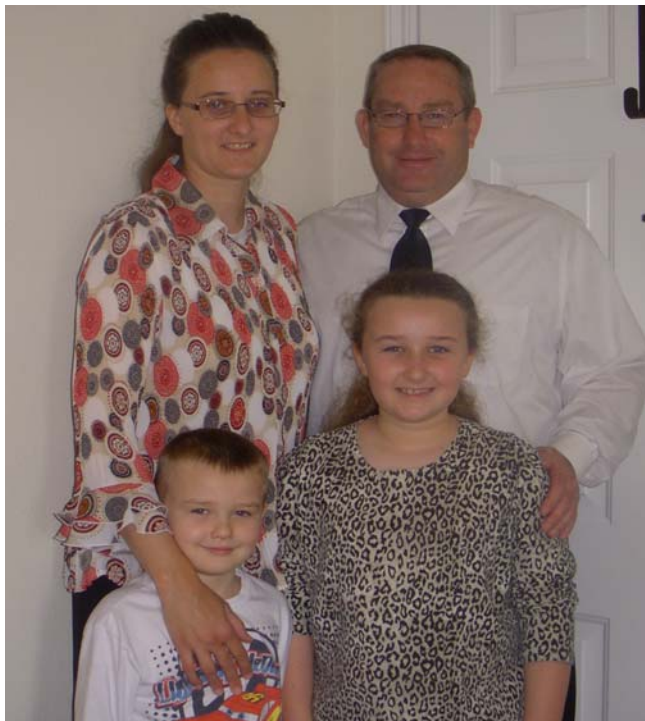
Isaac is currently in a wheelchair, suffering from paralysis on his left side. He is taking so many medications that he constantly falls asleep in his chair. His doctors and the VA have said for the foreseeable future, Isaac can't work because he takes too many medications for it to be safe.

He was discharged from the military on November 28, 2007. Once again Isaac was penalized by a mistake in paperwork. All of his benefits were stopped, including his retirement pay. His finances were in disarray and his family was located too far away to assist with the fight to fix the mistake or help with his recovery efforts. Thanks to the perseverance of his social worker, Isaac's benefits were finally re-instated. He also received assistance from Operation Homefront, a non-profit organization that helped him find a place to live in a community of other wounded warriors. Isaac is proud that his finances are straight once again but says it's a shame that servicemen and women have to fight for everything they get. His biggest frustration is that nothing is straight-forward and trying to get a straight answer is maddening.

Isaac faces major surgery on Sept. 26 to remove the bullet lodged in his spine. He hopes that with the bullet gone, his condition will improve. If not, "he'll just keep on living life as he does now." His new dream is to become a social worker and his VA benefits should cover the cost of his education.

Isaac met his fiancé Rain when she relocated from Atlanta, GA and moved into the complex where Isaac resides. They met and they clicked. After much discussion, Rain quit her job to stay home and take care of Isaac, who wasn't supposed to be left alone because of his heavy medication. She says she doesn't worry anymore and she loves being Isaac's caregiver. Isaac and Rain are moving ahead with their lives despite the challenges they both face. They just got a new puppy and are look forward to their future together – whatever it may bring.

I'm honored to know this proud wounded warrior and his fiancée. (Kate Midden, MSCCN)



### **The M. Family**

"If someone told me that I would have the strength to face the adversity that my family has faced, I would have thought they were crazy," stated Audra M., a military spouse currently living at Ft. Sam Houston, TX. "My world is upside down right now but I've learned to turn it right side up," she continued. "I never dreamed that my life would change so drastically but I truly believe God has given me the strength to face the difficult road ahead with dignity and grace. I've learned so much and I'm ready to help others."

Audra is from Arkansas, but for the past nine months she has called Ft. Sam Houston near Corpus Christi, TX home. She, her husband and their two young children Duke, who just started kindergarten and Sara Jane who is four, have faced adversities that no family should face.

Her husband served proudly in the military for twenty-five years but in 2005, he started experiencing a decline in his health and by August of 2007, he faced a serious health issue – chronic pain. The nerves in his neck affect his grip and because of lower back problems, his legs go numb after sitting in one place for 30 minutes. These were the two issues that the military determined affected his career, but Audra actually had a list of eighteen separate medical problems that kept her husband from performing his military duties.

Audra currently home schools her children and takes care of her husband but she is seeking opportunities for employment so that her family can afford to stay in the Corpus Christi area. As her husband told the children recently, “this is home now.”

Audra worked for Fleet Communications for several years in the foreclosure department. When Regions Bank purchased Fleet, she handled payroll for their human resources department. She’s outgoing, loves people and has found that staying busy and learning new things keep her from dwelling on her current situation. She spends her days schooling her children, assisting her husband, and learning to fight for the benefits that he and other soldiers have earned and deserve. “I’ve learned to fight for everything,” she commented. “I’ve written Congressmen and talked to numerous departments in the military to assist my husband to obtain the benefits he deserves.”

Audra worries about the young injured soldiers getting treatment without support from a spouse or parent. Too often they make poor decisions based on their need to “get out of here”. “They don’t realize that the \$30,000 they receive won’t last for their lifetime and won’t cover their medical expenses and future needs, especially if they can’t find a job.” They are blessed to have someone with Audra’s talents, knowledge, and compassion looking out for them.

### **Bridget and Nekia W.**

Bridget is very proud of her warrior husband Nekia. He recently pinned on the rank of Staff Sergeant (E-7) and is wonderful father to their three children and a devoted husband.

They were stationed at Ft. Carson, CO when Nekia deployed to Iraq. Their lives changed drastically a year ago when Nekia was wounded, receiving two gunshot wounds to his left leg. He was sent to Ft. Sam Houston for recovery while Bridget remained in Colorado to keep the children in school. Nekia’s mother became his primary caretaker and Bridget traveled back and forth between Colorado and Texas, torn between duties.

Nekia was eventually PCS’d to Ft. Sam Houston and the family moved to join him. Nekia spent most of his first year in recovery with a halo on his leg, because he’d lost 4 ½ inches of bone in

his leg and it needed to be protected so the bone could grow back. His halo was recently removed and Nekia is dedicated to his physical therapy, determined to fully recover and get back to “the way he was”. He’s thrilled to have moved from a wheelchair, to a walker to a cane and although his doctors say it will be another year before he’s able to return to duty, Nekia is counting down the days. Nekia also suffers from TBI and experiences sporadic bouts of depression. Bridget said he’s going crazy being away from his “military team” and wants nothing more than to rejoin them in Iraq.

Living at Ft. Sam Houston has been challenging for the family. Bridget typically leaves home with Nekia at 7:00 AM and doesn’t return until after 4:30 PM. A normal day is six to seven appointments and now she is also taking care of Nekia’s mother, who is fighting cancer. Their children, A/B students in Ft. Carson had difficulty adjusting to the Texas school system and the challenging test they faced the day they entered school. Bridget has been an amazing support system for her family, but she’s ready to move forward with her life too.

Bridget is frustrated because she’s been out of work for almost a year – and she loves to work. Her previous positions include early childcare development, culinary arts, and customer service. She thrives on being busy and has even worked two jobs. She’s been unable to find employment in Texas and she believes that employers don’t think she’ll be able to devote herself fully to a job with all her other responsibilities. She spends her spare time (between doctor’s appointments) volunteering and has built a wonderful network of friends. One day, she wants to own her own daycare; for now, she’d love to have the opportunity to earn additional income and utilize her many talents. (Kate Midden, MSCCN)

### **Simon and Paula H.**

Every once in a while you meet someone who fills you with wonder. I just did, an incredible woman with an amazing survival story. Being in her presence allows me to be a better person. I am in awe of the grace and courage she has displayed during her struggle. It is astounding to me, a fellow spouse. Her strength and story compelled me to put my pen to paper so that other families could share in her story.



Paula’s journey begins similar to other military families, a stay at home mom taking care of four young children, counting down the days until her husband returns home. Her husband, Simon, is on his third tour in Iraq when Paula receives the dreaded phone call. Her husband is injured and returning home for treatment. Unsure of the injury, Paula quickly prepares herself and children for the return of their

father. For Paula the relief of finding her husband whole at the airport starts to fade, as the reality of his condition begins to set in.

Simon's injuries were on the inside and much harder to heal. Paula watched Simon struggle to get better and agonized with him as they fought an illness that none could see. As days stretched into weeks it became clear to Paula that she had "lost the guy she knew before" and that a little bit of rest and support from his family was not bringing him back. It soon became clear to everyone that Simon was no longer fit for duty and that he would be medically discharged.

Paula quickly had to shift into a new role, caregiver for a soldier with severe PTSD better known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Her husband's PTSD was so severe that he could no longer leave the house and would require intense personal treatment. With little help, no place to live and no income, Paula realized the family did not have enough in savings. The family was approaching a crisis, so she turned to the internet to search for the help that she desperately needed. I asked Paula what kept her going during this challenging time she quietly said "prayer."

Paula was determined to help her husband get better and to take care of her family. She spent hours researching organizations and calling for help. And through her dogged pursuit, she stumbled onto a few that have changed the course of her family. Through the Military Spouse Corporate Career Network ([www.msccn.org](http://www.msccn.org)) Paula found a career as a virtual administrative assistant. She volunteered her way into a paying virtual position. Operation Homefront ([www.operationhomefront.org](http://www.operationhomefront.org)) provided a place for Paula's family to live while her husband gets the care that he needs. When I asked her about the organizations she said she felt "Blessed and thankful, just knowing there are people out there willing to help."

At this point in the interview I finally built the courage to ask the one question that I needed to know, *why?* - what gave her the staying power when so many others would give up? She said "As a wife and Army spouse it is my duty to be a strong person and deal with what came our way, not let it get in our way!" For me this summed up the true essence of a military spouse, a willingness to keep going no matter what.

Writing this story was difficult for me, but Paula's courage kept me at the keyboard for hours. As a fellow spouse and wife of a soldier who is currently in Afghanistan, I had to face my biggest fear and become immersed in a world that is secretly hidden away. A nightmare called *what if?* A place that I often go late at night after the house is quiet and I am alone. Facing this terror with Paula helped me lessen the constant anxiety I feel. During our conversations I found a tranquility that I feel down to my core. There is a peace that comes from inside Paula and it draws you into her remarkable being, just knowing her I realize that like her, my family will overcome our challenges, together. (Amy Rossi, MSCCN)

**All Americans must stand up and help our wounded warriors and their families in any way that we can. At MSCCN, we've found the secret to a fresh start is employment. Jobs provide hope for a better future, a brighter tomorrow. Please hire our heroes!**