

My Son's Gone – But Heroes Fight On

January 14, 2007 -- *Marine Cpl. Jason Dunham, 22, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor by President Bush on Thursday for saving several men in his unit when he jumped on a grenade in Iraq. His mother, Deb Dunham, a teacher in upstate Scio, tells her memories of him.*

By Deb Dunham

I'll leave it to others to debate the politics of the war in Iraq. I'm a mother, not a politician. For me, discussing my son is personal, not political. I want to remember Jason and to offer some thoughts to other parents whose sons and daughters are in combat serving this country.

There were so many facets to Jason's personality, you can't lock into any one thing. He had a mischievous sparkle in his eye. You could play a joke on him and he would roll with it, but you could be pretty sure that he would come back with something when you weren't expecting it.

He was competitive and sports were often the way that he channeled that spirit. Jay played soccer, basketball and baseball - he still holds his high school's record in baseball. Jason's teams often won. When he won, he wouldn't make the other team feel bad. He would congratulate his teammates and then go shake hands with the other team.

But it was his quiet sense of kindness that I remember most. He would always want to help out the little guy, the underdog, even when he was young.

Jason received the Medal of Honor for sacrificing himself to save others. What he did is great. But my son would have said, "Oo-rah! Let's go have a beer." There was always one more challenge for him to find and meet in his life. Like many families across America, my husband Dan and I would not have been able to afford college for our four children. Jason knew that and in the summer of his junior year in high school, we would sit in the living room and talk about what he wanted to do.

My husband was in the Air Force and he believes that everyone should serve a few years in the military, because it polishes you. So Jay went into the Marine Corps - because it's the toughest training and something he could hold over his father's head. He'd say, "I work in the men's department of the military."

Jason joined the Corps before 9/11, but he believed in what he was doing in Iraq. His sense of right and wrong was keen. He thought that when someone has a lot of

power and a lot of strength, you have a responsibility to help the little brother. I just miss him.

For those parents who still have children in Iraq, I say, support your child. This is a volunteer military that we have - these men and women have more courage, more dignity and more patriotism than I have seen in years. Take the phone calls, send the letters and the care packages. They know you are scared, but they don't need to go through two types of war.

It's not a political issue when it's your child. They are doing what they believe is right.

Jason may be gone, but we've gained thousands of new sons. That has helped the healing for us.