

A Father Honors his Son and Asks Us Not to Forget the Cost of War

Before You Read

Do you know people who have lost loved ones in a war? How did they find out?

Think of some ways people channel their feelings when a loved one dies at war or from violence. Some ways might be personal; some might be very public.

Have you heard anything in the news about family members who honor and remember their lost loved ones in a public fashion?

When three Marines came to tell Carlos Arredondo that his son, Lance Corporal Alexander Arredondo, was killed while fighting in Iraq, he set their van on fire, and he severely burned himself in the process.

It was August 25, 2004. The story made headlines around the world. Was this a protest? A suicide attempt? With the passage of time, Mr. Arredondo has been able to channel his anger and grief into privately and publicly memorializing Alex, while working for peace.

Mr. Arredondo joined public demonstrations and actions for peace. He would drive in his pick-up truck, which became a “traveling memorial” to honor Alex. In the bed of the truck he created an installation of Alex’s uniform, boots, dog tags, medals, and other special objects. You can see a photo of his installation on the next page.



The scene at the entry way to Mr. Arredondo’s home a year after Alex’s death

Mr. Arredondo disagreed with former President Bush's policy of forbidding media coverage of soldiers returning home from Iraq in coffins. "These soldiers are heroes. They died for their country. They should be seen by everyone!" he believed. When someone donated a wooden coffin to him, Mr. Arredondo created a display to honor and recognize the death of his son — and all soldiers killed in Iraq. He installed the display on Newbury Street, Boston, on July 4, 2006, where crowds on the way to watch the fireworks stopped to view it.



The traveling memorial to Alex in the bed of Mr. Arredondo's truck.



The coffin memorial display on Newbury Street



Mr. Arredondo reaches to touch the photos, and make sure they are secure on the side of the “memorial.”



Mr. Arredondo holds photos of his two sons, Alex and Brian, as he marches in a demonstration for peace. The text underneath the photographs of his sons reads “My American Dream.” Mr. Arredondo left his homeland, Costa Rica, in 1979 for the USA, in search of opportunity for a better life.

Carlos Arredondo continues to drive his public memorial all over the country. His story has been covered by scores of newspapers and media outlets. In this photo (on the right), he talks with a reporter, discussing the symbolism and design of his “traveling memorial” pick-up truck.



Mr. Arredondo showing a photo of his son, Alex. Photo from Gold Star Families Speak Out <www.gsfsf.org>.



Janice Rogovin is an award-winning photographer and filmmaker who lives in Boston. Most of her work focuses on ordinary peoples' stories; her favorite saying is, “Every man is a book if you know how to read him.” Photos in this essay are stills taken from a video by Janice Rogovin. Carlos Arredondo lives in Boston with his wife Melida and their two dogs. He spends time with his son, Brian, and is active in the peace movement. He continues to take his traveling memorial for Alex to demonstrations and public events.

The Human Cost of the War in Iraq

As of February 2010, 4375 American soldiers have been killed in the current Iraq War. About 100,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed due to violence; many more than that are dead due to lack of health care, food, and medicine brought on by the war.

What do you think of Mr. Arredondo's way of honoring and remembering his son?

Write to Mr. Arredondo in English or Spanish. You may send the letter to him in care of *The Change Agent*.

Look at the people in the photo on p. 15. What do you think they are thinking?

What would you say to Carlos if you saw him on the street with his public memorial to his son, Alex?



Memorials to Alex dotted Carlos's front yard.

Make a memorial either independently or with others. Reflect on the ways that different cultures, societies, and families remember those who have passed.

Sources: <www.icasualties.org/oef/>, <www.iraqbodycount.org>