

# PROFILES OF RESILIENCE

Collaboration between



**KENNESAW STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT  
OF MILITARY AND EMERGENCY  
SERVICES RESEARCH

ROSALYNN **FOR**  
CARTER **CAREGIVERS**  
INSTITUTE 

 **Arthur M. Blank  
Family Foundation**







# Profiles of Resilience



## The Baggenstoss Family

Melissa and Vern met at an Army recruiting station in Minnesota. Vern was an E-7, and served for 18 years before being medically discharged. He was in the Infantry and also as a recruiter. Vern and Melissa have been married for 30 years, and have raised three children together.

## Challenges

In 1980, Vern sustained a head injury during a field training exercise. After being deemed fit for duty, he began working as a recruiter in Minnesota. Only years after his injury, he began experiencing symptoms that would later be found to be associated with his head injury. Melissa was told by doctors that he would not be the same anymore and would pass away soon. She struggled to find the resources they needed to finance his care, while she was also going through a high-risk pregnancy.

*I believe our relationship is a definition of resilience, we have consistently overcome all the setbacks that have come upon us and learned from them. With each one we are stronger together, because we always "got this" ..even when I don't .... I know that my wife has my six, and I'm eternally grateful for her and what we have.*

## Overcoming Challenges

After dealing with the struggle of not receiving the support they expected from the military, Melissa found meaning and strength to go through this challenge in her faith. She said that in this hard moment of their story they leaned on each other and put their family first. The primary source of social support they had was each other.

Because of the symptoms of his injury, Vern has had to adapt his routine and lifestyle. He mentioned that this initially was a challenge for him, but today Vern and Melissa today enjoy spending time together and also training Jack Russell Terriers.

## Becoming Resilient

Through all these challenges, Melissa and Vern are known to work as a team. They have overcome each challenge they experienced by working through each day at a time. Melissa even said that this has been almost a blessing in disguise. Even through all the hardships, this helped them keep in mind what really mattered – their family.

The piece of advice they would like to share with other couples is to always communicate because each couple is a team. They define resilience as an ability to fight against the odds, or as Melissa said, "to not give in to that little voice inside that ... tells us we can't do something."





# Profiles of Resilience



## The Taylor Family

Dawn and James met when they were teenagers at a retail store they worked at. Years later, they met again and got married in 2003. Dawn worked in marketing, while James was serving in the Army initially as a military police officer and later as a corrections officer. He was deployed in support of Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

## Challenges

In 2004, James sustained injuries from the blast of an RPG while he was deployed to Iraq. After being hospitalized for a week, he returned to duty. However, he was sent to Germany for further medical care. He was sent back to the U.S. and found out he had a TBI and early onset of Huntington's disease. Dawn recalls that the hardest part of this process has been the toll the symptoms of this injury have taken on his lifestyle.

*James said that what keeps him going is Dawn's love for him. He also finds meaning in a story about his friend, Fernando who he lost in Iraq. James mentioned that Fernando would tell him that even though the U.S. was not his homeland, he did not mind losing his life in service of this country. His family and life story are what drive James to keep fighting each day.*

## Overcoming Challenges

When she heard the news of her husband's diagnosis, she remembers the shock both of them felt in that moment. Dawn mentioned that journaling and her relationship with James and their family have helped her overcome all these challenges.

These challenges began during their first year of marriage, but the support she has received through the Elizabeth Dole Foundation has also been key in helping her throughout this time.

Even though this has led to many changes in their lifestyle, Dawn said it is worth the sacrifice and that as long as James is fighting, she will fight for him.

## Becoming Resilient

Dawn's advice for other families going through similar challenges is that caregivers need to think about their capacity and fully understand what it means to be a caregiver. She said that caregivers need to use the resources that are available to help care for themselves and their family members. Finally, Dawn mentioned that these families need to reach out for help.

Today, Dawn and James live in Florida. They enjoy spending time with each other and their sons and daughters, including their four grandchildren.





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# Profiles of Resilience



## The Blascyk Family

Dee and Joe met through good friends and got married in 2008. Dee had served in the Navy as a Construction Mechanic, and Joe served in the Army as an Abrams Mechanic. Joe left the service after 16 years of service. They have been married for 15 years, raised 4 children together, and currently live in Texas.

## Challenges

Joe had been deployed prior to their relationship and sustained injuries in combat, including a traumatic brain injury. After multiple deployments and repeated injuries, Dee noticed a change in her husband. Not having the support they needed created challenges for their family. However, they fought for their family, relationship, and Joe's health for years, and they were able to find the resources and help they needed.

*[Resilience is] waking up to try again another day, like self-care, its practice. You can't get there overnight, but it will click eventually. Everything you do when you don't give up leads to that resilience and you become stronger for it in the end.*

## Overcoming Challenges

The support from their family (i.e., children and parents) and close friends has been essential in helping the Blascyk family work through their challenges. They spent over a decade trying to find answers to their questions and concerns and were finally able to do so when Joe left active duty in 2016. Dee recalls that the care and support they received from the VA changed their lives.

In this process, Dee found herself taking on many demands that often challenged her ability to take care of herself. However, through her involvement with the Elizabeth Dole Fellowship program (EDF), and eventually the Rosalynn Carter Institute (RCI), she found the education and support she needed to also learn how to adapt to her new lifestyle.

## Becoming Resilient

Dee recalls that during this time when she could not find the support she needed, she created a space for other spouses of soldiers going through similar challenges to share their advice, concerns, and support for each other.

She recommends that other couples going through similar circumstances "Don't stop finding help ... the community really wants to be supportive. They just don't know how. So ask the question, "Hey, this is my situation, this is what I think I need. Where would you go?" And you'll get pointed in so many positive directions."

Today, Dee continues to support efforts for families and caregivers across the nation.





# Profiles of Resilience



## The Faucher Family

Mary is the mother of 3 children. One of her sons, Rand, is an Army veteran who was deployed to Iraq in between 2008 and 2009. He was an E-5 and worked as a forward observer. Rand was exposed to blasts while in Iraq and potentially traumatic events. He returned home dealing with challenging behavioral health symptoms.

## Challenges

In 2012, Rand was shot at a bank during an interaction with police officers due to him being intoxicated. The injuries he sustained, in addition to the symptoms he was already experiencing from posttraumatic stress disorder, contributed to impulsivity and memory loss. Today, Mary is Rand's primary caregiver and dedicates her time to caring for him and fighting for other veterans.

*Mary said that resilience is to adapt and overcome, and in her life that means being a mom. Her role as a mother is her resilience. She also mentioned "[Veterans] deserve the very best ... I'm going to fight till the day I die to be an advocate for veterans."*

## Overcoming Challenges

Mary said that the support that has carried through all these challenging times is her relationship with Jesus. Even though caregiving can be challenging on relationships with friends and family members, this support has helped her face each challenge in her story.

Mary is full of hope and dreams to be a strong advocate for other caregivers and help them find the resources and services they require and deserve. She is involved with many organizations fighting to improve the lives of veterans.

She finds purpose in where her story has taken her and in her role as a mother.

## Becoming Resilient

In these challenges, Mary has found herself surrounded by a supportive community which is her network of veterans and their families, and caregiving organizations.

Her piece of advice for other families going through similar circumstances is to take one day at a time. Caregiving is challenging, but being present in the moment is key to work through these challenges. Mary also thinks it is very important for caregivers to be educated on topics such as financial literacy and technology so that they can better manage the demands from day to day.





# Profiles of Resilience



## The Stigers Family

Kat and Jason met in 2011 at Eastern Connecticut State University during a health class. After this, they became friends and got to know each other. Jason had left the service in 2009 as an E-5, after serving six years in the Army. They have been together for twelve years and have one son named Theo. Kat is an advocate for caregivers and a stay-at-home mom. They currently live in Texas.

## Challenges

From the multiple deployments Jason experienced, including to Iraq and Kuwait, he was exposed to blasts and various stressors throughout his deployments. Later on, he began to develop symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which worsened after the birth of his son. Both Jason and Kat developed postpartum depression. All of this contributed to an incident between Jason and a coworker that contributed to him losing his job in 2019.



## Overcoming Challenges

In these challenges, Kat found herself struggling to find the right support her husband needed. After years of not having access to the right treatments, Jason's health was declining. Kat stepped in and started looking for answers and once Jason started a new treatment recently, their lives changed. He had experienced suicidal ideations and attempted suicide multiple times.

Jason is now progressing in his treatments and as Kat said, "the best he has ever been in the last 12 years". They are finding their way and defying the challenges they face each day.

## Becoming Resilient

Kat said that seeking professional help helped her during this time. She also found a supportive community through organizations oriented toward helping caregivers. Kat mentioned that other families going through similar challenges should seek help and find battle buddies. Finding a support system and faith is helpful when going through these circumstances. She defines resilience as "living and walking in love, not all the trauma".

Kat is now working on a book to share her family's story with others to support the veteran community.





# Profiles of Resilience



## The Torres Family

Josh and Alicia have been married for 7 years. They met while they were working as corrections officers. Josh was an E-5 in the Army, he served for 12 years. Alicia was also a Special Education teacher shortly before returning to graduate school for a Masters in Mental Health and Wellness. They have raised two daughters together, and currently live in Texas.

## Challenges

Josh sustained injuries in combat which contributed to the onset of various addictions, and complications from a traumatic brain injury. Over time the symptoms began affecting his relationship and quality of life, and he and Alicia sought out care in 2020.



## Overcoming Challenges

Alicia recalls that it was difficult to make sense of what they were going through as a family early on, but once they started getting answers about Josh's health things began to change. Josh recalls that navigating relationships with friends and family was challenging. However, finding the support he needed in a community of veterans who were also seeking help was essential in helping him in his journey.

They also found support through veteran organizations such as Wounded Warrior Foundation (i.e., going on odysseys). Alicia found comfort in seeing that she was not alone and that there were other wives that understood her experiences.

## Becoming Resilient

If they knew other couples going through similar circumstances, they recommend that others should trust the process, take care of themselves, and show grace to themselves and their spouse.

Josh defines resilience as the "ability to get up after a really hard day". Alicia perceives that resilience is developed through early life experiences, and mainly consists of an individual's ability to take what they have learned from challenges and apply that to whatever they are experiencing in the present.

Each day, Alicia and Josh find ways to support each other as they fight for their family and marriage.





# Profiles of Resilience

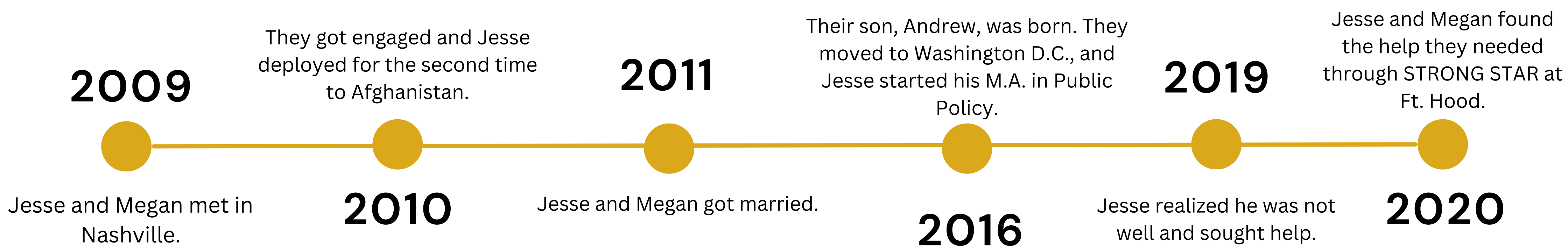


## The Powell Family

Megan and Jesse met in Nashville in 2009. Megan worked covering NASCAR for almost ten years, while Jesse was serving in the Army. Later on, they got engaged and Jesse was deployed. He was a Captain (O-3) and served for 14 years. He had many roles during his time in the Army, which included serving on the personal staff of the U.S. Army Secretary. They have been married for 12 years and have one son.

## Challenges

Despite the challenges of relocating and dealing with high-stress jobs in the military as a family, Megan and Jesse recall that their lives changed when the symptoms of posttraumatic stress and a traumatic brain injury (TBI) began to impact Jesse's well-being, work, and his relationship with his family.



## Overcoming Challenges

Jesse and Megan recall that the symptoms of the TBI and posttraumatic stress led to many challenges in their family. Megan fought to find the right resources and treatments for Jesse. However, she found it difficult to navigate the healthcare system, all while Jesse was fighting to do his best in his roles as a husband, father, and soldier.

Megan recalls that what helped them the most was their involvement with the STRONG STAR initiative at Ft. Hood. They were able to find the appropriate professional support for them as a couple and individually. Their family, relationship with each other, and community of faith were essential in helping them overcome these challenges.

## Becoming Resilient

Jesse recommends that other couples going through similar circumstances tackle whatever problem they are facing. Similarly, Megan's advice is that other families should use the resources available to them and know that they are not fighting a person, but rather the symptoms of the psychological or physical concern their family member is dealing with.

They define resilience as the ability to not give up, and that to develop resilience individuals and families need to face challenges and lean on each other.

Today, Jesse and Megan help other families going through similar challenges by sharing the lessons they have learned in this process.





# Profiles of Resilience



## The Oberg Family

Vera Oberg is the daughter of Vernon, an Air Force veteran who served between 1964–1967. Vernon was an E-3 and worked as a Data Specialist. Vera is a passionate advocate for caregivers and elder care, and her experiences as a caregiver inspired her to become a program coordinator at an adult day health center. Today, Vera, her husband and Vernon live in Georgia.

## Challenges

When Vera was 21, she decided she would move in with her father to assist him with house management and daily tasks. Sadly, a few months later during the COVID-19 Pandemic, Vernon suffered a stroke. Vera recalls that suddenly she had to take on various responsibilities she was not aware of, but over time she was able to learn how to navigate caregiving.

*Vera defines resilience as "you keep going... You realize the hard, you understand the hard, but you still put one foot in front of the other ... People develop resilience through challenge and opportunity... the result is dependent on how you define the circumstance."*

## Overcoming Challenges

Because of complications from the stroke, Vernon experiences aphasia and uses a wheelchair. Vera, who at the time was getting her Masters in Public Administration and Policy, had to find a way to adapt to her circumstances all while the restrictions due to the COVID-19 Pandemic were in effect.

This challenge led Vernon and Vera to develop a closer and more meaningful relationship as a father and daughter. Vera was able to find the support she needed through her faith and an online group for caregivers through her church. She also had the opportunity to visit the Philippines for a few months. All these resources and experiences helped her find strength and guidance to move forward.

## Becoming Resilient

She recommends that others going through similar challenges should ask for help and the questions they have. Vera also mentioned that other caregivers should not be ashamed of relying on other people. They should be encouraged to seek support and guidance.

Vera mentioned that "as a society ... we don't necessarily address or talk about ... elder care ... We have such a large population that is underserved and ... do not always get the care they deserve or the quality of care they deserve. ... that reflects on our caregivers and that's why it's so hard to be a caregiver, not because of the tasks responsibilities, but because of the lack of response and resources granted to both older adults, disabled adults, aging adults."





# Profiles of Resilience



## The Barr Family

Mandy and Charles met in 2010 through a group of friends. Charles was an E-5 in the Army and he worked as a squad leader. Mandy had been working as a teacher, but was transitioning to make a career change at the time they met. Today, she is a caregiver coach through the Rosalynn Carter Institute. They got married in 2011 and have three children.

## Challenges

Charles was shot through the lung on a patrol during his second deployment to Iraq. This led to a series of respiratory complications. A combination of his experiences from two deployments and losing several friends in combat contributed to the onset of posttraumatic stress symptoms.

*"It's really important to find ways to, you know, laugh together and find moments when you can be in the present moment together and enjoy life... Because there are hurdles that are gonna feel like mountains. But if you really take the time to talk, you know, and regulate your emotions, put effort into stepping back, breathing for a minute or two, letting each other cool down and give them space that they need, then you can come back and really talk through something."*

## Overcoming Challenges

Mandy had been exposed to aspects of military culture and caregiving throughout her early life experiences. During the first years of her relationship with Charles, she learned how to support him while also understanding how to effectively communicate with him.

Their third child was born with a rare genetic disorder that compromised his motor skills. Mandy has a strong supportive community and also family members who have stepped in to help them in this season.

Charles and Mandy face each day at a time and learn through each challenge how to discuss their feelings and perspectives with one another.

## Becoming Resilient

Mandy recommends that couples navigating similar challenges learn to take a step back to understand their spouse's perspective, to be patient, and happy together. Finding the right resources and taking advantage of those opportunities is important for couples involved in caregiving.

She defines resilience as "being brave enough to know ... when you need to step back and rest instead of pushing through everything."

Through her experiences as a daughter, wife, and mother, Mandy has learned invaluable lessons which she strives to share through her work with caregivers.





# Profiles of Resilience

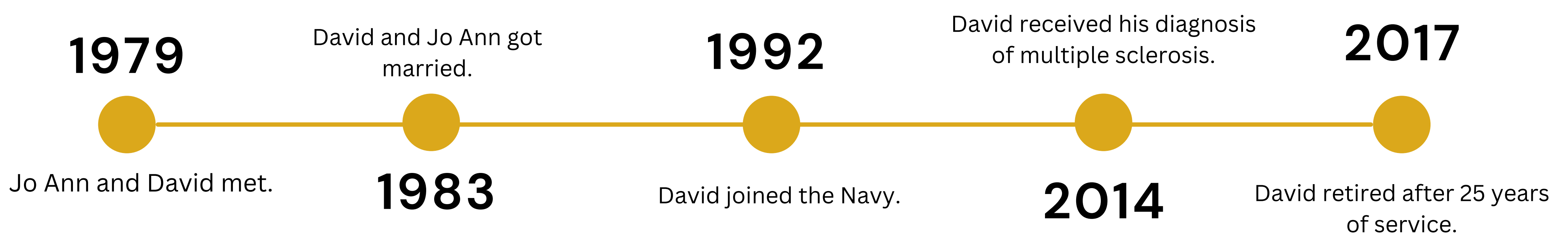


## The Bachand Family

Jo Ann and David have been married for 40 years. She was an accountant and David served as a healthcare provider during his time in the Navy. He served for 25 years, including a deployment to Iraq. They currently live in Florida and have two children, one daughter-in-law, and one grandson.

## Challenges

In 2013, David began noticing symptoms of primary progressive multiple sclerosis. After a series of exams, he received his diagnosis. This has led to a series of changes in their lifestyle, due to the progression of the symptoms and challenges dealing with environments lacking resources that support individuals with disabilities.



## Overcoming Challenges

Jo Ann said that what keeps them going is the desire to see their grandson grow up and experience new things such as traveling to new destinations. The kindness of strangers has been essential in helping them overcome these challenges.

Jo Ann also found support through the Rosalyn Carter Institute and the Elizabeth Dole Foundation.

David is continuously fighting to slow down the progression of his condition. He does so by staying active (i.e., swimming) and following treatments (i.e., physical therapy).

## Becoming Resilient

Jo Ann mentioned that resilience to her is "sticking to the vows that we made 40 years ago ... in sickness and in health. We had a lot of healthy years. Now this is the sickness years, but you know [we are] still sticking together, still helping each other "get through it."

One piece of advice that she would like to share with other families going through similar challenges is that caregivers need to find moments and ways to care for themselves. Jo Ann finds that walks, uplifting quotes, and exercise help her cope.





# Profiles of Resilience



## The Engle Family

Jessica lives in California and overcame many obstacles throughout her childhood and teenage years. Today, she works in county child welfare and she is also a caregiver for her older brother, Jeremiah. He is a father to two children and served in the Army for 14 years, including four tours of duty overseas.

## Challenges

In 2010, Jeremiah was deployed to Afghanistan. During this deployment he sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI) due to blast exposure. He did not receive any treatments at the time, but began noticing the symptoms of the TBI. After other deployments and complications resulting from the symptoms of the TBI, he sought help by reconnecting with his sister.



## Overcoming Challenges

Jessica noticed that her brother was not well and stepped in to assist him. She became his caregiver to help support his recovery. Jessica found is support in her boyfriend and also caregiving organizations that guided her to find the appropriate resources to help Jeremiah.

Despite the challenges of navigating how to schedule appointments and finding resources, Jessica was able to learn how to find a way to help her brother.

An important piece of advice she would like to share with caregivers is that they should find little things to be happy about and celebrate each day.

## Becoming Resilient

To Jessica, resilience is the ability to continuously get up and push through challenges. She recalls that the challenges her brother dealt with alone, made her reflect on how he kept on fighting and trying to find help.

Today, Jeremiah has access to the care he needs. Jessica mentioned that learning more about the symptoms of a TBI helped her better understand how she could support him.

While both have overcome many challenges throughout their own lives, today Jeremiah and Jessica are finding their way towards recovery.





# Profiles of Resilience



## The Green Family

Joan and Dalton Green were married for 34 years. They met in Statesboro in 1985 and started dating shortly after that. They got married in 1987. Dalton had previously served in the Air Force from 1978 to 1983. Joan is passionate about education and worked as an elementary school teacher for many years. They adopted and raised a son together.

## Challenges

One of the most challenging moments in their marriage was dealing with infertility early in their marriage. Later in their marriage, Joan and Dalton faced many health-related issues. Dalton was diagnosed with glioma and at the same time, Joan had to go through heart surgery due to a pre-existing condition she had since her childhood.

***Joan and Dalton met shortly after she had joined a club in college. He was a photographer and passionate about capturing moments through photos. Here is a selection of pictures showing their story.***



## Overcoming Challenges

Joan and Dalton faced many challenges together throughout their marriage, but through it all, they were a team. The hardest thing Joan faced was the loss of her husband. Dalton passed away in 2021.

Through all of this, Joan recalls that she had a wonderful support system and today, her support system is stronger than before.

She said that counseling helped her deal with many of these challenges. Dalton and Joan had the dream of renewing their vows in Maui during their 40th anniversary. Sadly, Dalton's condition was worsening rapidly. They were able to find support through an organization called, Dreams for Veterans, which granted him his last wish to go to Maui.

## Becoming Resilient

Joan said, "if you don't know how to get through a storm, you don't know how to appreciate the good stuff ... and there's always good stuff, even in the middle of the story. Come on we went to Maui."

Her advice to other families going through similar challenges is that they need to stay together and work as a team.

Joan defines resilience as dealing with challenges as they come. She uses art and writing to cope. Some of her writing and art are shared through a nonprofit organization called Community Building Art Works (CBAW).





# Profiles of Resilience



## The Malin Family

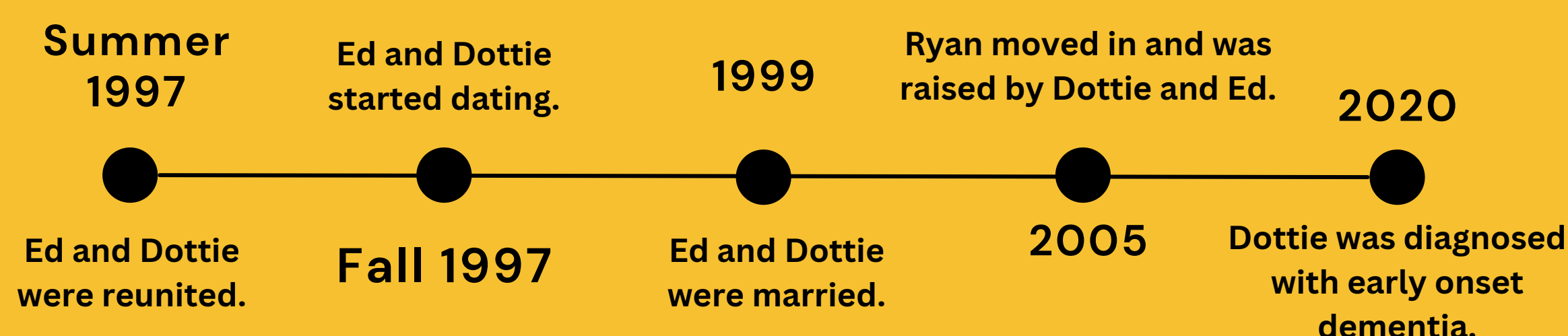
Ed and Dottie met during third grade. They grew up in the Panama Canal Zone and went to the same high school. Ed and Dottie were good friends through their adolescence. Eventually, they parted ways and were reunited at their 25th high school graduation in 1997. They got married in 1999 and raised two boys together.

## Challenges

A few years after they were married, Dottie and Ed took in their nephew, Ryan. He was thirteen years old at the time and had recently lost his mother. Dottie and Ed raised Ryan shortly after Dottie's son, Jody, left for college. Sadly, Dottie today battles with early onset dementia. However, the lessons learned from these experiences help them overcome the hardships they face today.



*Dottie and a friend in the Texas State Guard*



*Ed and Dottie on their wedding day*

## Overcoming Challenges

Ed and Dottie were raised around a government and military culture since their parents worked in those environments. During college, Dottie also joined the Texas State Guard. She became an educator helping improve various low-performing schools, while Ed worked as an electrical engineer developing antennas for outer space.

Dottie faced many challenges while managing her career and raising Ryan. They received support from Dottie's coworkers and from each other. Ed and Dottie worked together as a team throughout this process. They were motivated they could help their nephew and raise him well.

## Becoming Resilient

Ed perceives his resilience as a learned behavior observed from parents, but he perceives Dottie's resilience developed as she went through challenging experiences. He said, "resilience can be developed many different ways ... and while we are both resilient, it was arrived at differently."

Ed recommends that other couples going through similar circumstances and support one another and their decisions. Despite all the challenges they faced, Ryan graduated high school and shortly after joined the Marine Corps. He was a Sergeant and served as a Communications Specialist for 8 years. He is now a technician at a medical equipment company.





# Profiles of Resilience



## The Carey Family

Bob Carey is a combat veteran who served for 32 years in the Navy. He served 10 years on active duty and 22 in the Reserves. He was recalled four times during his time in the Reserves. He was deployed overseas in various roles and sent on various assignments domestically as an emergency liaison officer.

## Challenges

Bob became a caregiver for his mother and his father in early 2000s. He took care of his parents for many years, until they passed away. Today, Bob cares for his uncle, who is also a retired Navy veteran. Throughout this time, Bob also had to navigate being in the military, getting married, becoming a father, and dealing with his own health challenges.

*Bob recalls that caregiving is full of joyful moments. He said "you get to share some very special moments with the people of whom your caregiving that you wouldn't otherwise .... I [...] remember, you know, the times that like I made dinner for my mom and she and I sat around and talked or played cards with my dad."*

## Overcoming Challenges

Bob went through various challenges as he began his journey as a caregiver. Some of the most challenging aspects of this process were the frustration of dealing with the healthcare system and becoming an advocate for someone's care, and being reminder of his own limitations as a veteran who has disabilities.

His faith, humor, and opportunities to serve others have helped him find meaning amidst these challenges and continue moving forward.

He said "sometimes the purpose of our lives has absolutely nothing to do with ourselves", he later added "we're supposed to be served by others, not we serve ourselves, which also means that then we're there to serve others."

## Becoming Resilient

Bob defines resilience as the ability to recognize an individual's limitations and seek support. He perceives that the development of resilience occurs when someone engages in self-awareness and a social support network.

If he met other families or veterans going through similar challenges, the most important piece of advice he would like to share is "don't do this alone. .. take advantage of all the help you can whether it be supportive help for for your caregiving or supportive help for your own mental health."

Today, Bob lives in Washington DC and works at a non-profit supporting other veterans.