

Good Morning,

My name is Valerie Pallotta.

People say our son Joshua was a hero. His last words on Facebook-were "I see death in every thought. They taught me how to put this uniform on; I just can't get it off". These are lyrics from "A Soldier's Memoir" by Mitch Rossell. Our son's last text to his father was a link to this song. He sent this song to all of his friends and his loved ones. He wanted everyone to have a better understanding of what he was going through. This song describes what PTSD was like for him.

At 3:37 on the morning of September 23, 2014 my husband and I were awakened by a loud knocking at the door. As I looked out the window to see who was knocking at that hour, I saw two Burlington Police officers. My heart started to race as I knew it had to have something to do with Josh. 'He's been arrested' was my first thought. My head started pounding and my ears started ringing. I felt like I was going to pass out. I opened the door and one of them said: "Valerie Pallotta?"

"Yes". I heard myself say through the ringing of my ears.

"Is your husband here?"

“Yes.”

“Gregory Pallotta?”

“Yes”, I vaguely heard my husband said.

“May we come in?” ‘NO, NO, NO’ I wanted to say.

“I’m very sorry to tell you that your son is deceased.”

‘NO! This can’t be true. I thought he had been arrested. His PTSD was bound to get him arrested at some point. He had so much anger; so much pain. He’s in jail. He’s not dead. This can’t be.’

I knew in my gut that my son had ended his life before I had asked the question.

Our son was pronounced dead from a self-inflicted wound at 2:17 AM, September 23, 2014 at the age of 25. His death certificate should have stated the cause of death as PTSD/TBI. Not from a self-inflicted wound.

Joshua Rodney Pallotta left behind a childless mother and father, countless friends and loved ones and his brothers in arms, with whom he had trusted his life.

The sleepless nights, headaches, physical pain, anger, not eating, nightmares; these are all signs of PTSD. Not only has PTSD taken the life of our son but it has taken the life out of us. Our spirit left the day our son died. We lost our only child to something that should have been prevented. We used to have so much spirit. The light, that love, that spirit is gone and will be

gone forever in us. We cry Every.Single.Day. We are wracked with guilt Every.Single.Day. It takes all that we have to get out of bed, after another night of not sleeping, because our minds race with thoughts of how we could have done things differently. Driving and doing everyday tasks are a challenge. We struggle to get through a shower without breaking down. We force ourselves to eat and go to work. We just go through the motions.

I forget which road I normally drive down. I haven't cooked a meal since our son died. My husband went through a traffic light and didn't know what color it was when he went through. Just this past Saturday night, he was coming home and as he drove down our street it didn't look familiar. He thought he was on the wrong street. He didn't recognize it. We have been living on our street since 1998.

This is our life. Our minds are at the funeral home, crying on our son's body as it lays cold. We are kissing him and hugging him and trying to wake ourselves up from this awful, horrible nightmare. Our minds are at the Veterans' cemetery in Randolph Vermont, the place our son was laid to rest, a place we haven't yet been able to visit. Our minds are in Afghanistan wishing we could have been there to protect him, to shelter him from the pain he endured for years. How can our son be dead from a self-inflicted wound; a wound caused by PTSD. Invisible wounds nobody could heal.

Our son was deployed to a combat out post in Afghanistan, COP Herrera.

We hadn't realized how dangerous a location it was until August 22, 2010. I received a call from our son. "Mom, I'm ok but I can't talk. You'll find out soon enough. I just want you to know that I'm ok. We're shutting down communications for now." Then I received a call from my friend, another Mom from my son's unit, two Soldiers have been killed in action; SSG Steven Deluzio and SGT Tristan Southworth. Our son was standing right next to Tristan when he was killed. Our son's life, the lives of his brothers in arms and the lives of our families changed that day.

Our son was awarded the Army Commendation Medal with "Valor" that day. He was awarded this medal for valorous achievement while assigned as a mortar assistant gunner for 3rd Platoon, Alpha Company. His selfless service and dedication to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service.

On August 22, 2012, our son posted the following on his Facebook page:

"I don't know where to start... Southy and D were loved by all people that knew them. It didn't matter what happened, those two would always have a smile on their face. When they walked into a room, they had the power to make everyone's day just a little better just with their presence. They were truly the best people that I have ever known, and they paid the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom that so many people take for granted nowadays. Not a day goes by that I don't replay this horrible day in my head...always thinking what I could have done differently, always thinking about why I am here and these two guys aren't. Why am I so

special to make it home, they had a hell of a lot more going for them when they got back...2 years ago today, the world lost two amazing men that can never be replaced. Gone but never forgotten. R.I.P SSG Steven Deluzio and SGT Tristan Southworth,

He then wrote: "Always wishing it was me instead of them".

He lived with pain every single day; emotional, physical and spiritual pain. He saw their faces every day. What our son and his brothers endured that year of deployment is something you would never wish on your worst enemy. The things they saw on deployment are burned into their heads; visuals that aren't going away. Suicide bombers, seeing their limbs, scalps and a head just lying on the ground with the eyes open. A young boy who was doing yard work hit a Russian land mine. He was missing his face, an arm, and some fingers on one hand...this boy choked to death on his blood in a med evac. One of our son's best friends was his escort; a little girl who came in for treatment because her father and uncle had burned her feet so badly that she almost lost them.

Our son was a casualty of war just like Tristan and Steven who were killed in Afghanistan.

There were over 900 people at our son's funeral. If that is the number of people affected by just one Veteran's suicide, imagine the number affected by 23 Veteran suicides every day.

Our son lost his battle with PTSD and so did the rest of his family and friends. For the rest of our lives we will wonder if we could have done something different.

Everyone always says, if there is anything you need, let me know. The only thing we need and wish for is to have our son back and we don't have the heart to tell them that that is not something they can give us. Please make this a priority to end the battle our Veterans face with bureaucracy in getting the benefits and support they deserve so that their only focus can be on healing themselves and their families. 23 Veterans committing suicide a day, is 23 too many.

Thank you for this opportunity.

With utmost respect,

Valerie J. Pallotta