

On the day Miles was deployed to Iraq, Terry helped me pack up his things in his pickup which she drove back to Texas to wait for Miles's return. When he did come home, it was not the way we expected, but with an escort and an honor guard. Terry told me that when the notifying soldier came to her door, she wouldn't let him speak. "Stop", she said and held up a hand, "Just tell me if my son is alive."

"No ma'am, he's not." I couldn't imagine that kind of backbone; I had listened silently through my own notification. But later, I realized her reaction felt right. Miles was the best of her. He had her face, her build, her Texas twang. As much as he was to me, he was more to her, more viscerally hers.

1. visceral-something related to the body as opposed to the mind. Why did the author think Terry was connected more "viscerally" to Miles?
2. Is your connection to your children stronger than your connection to your spouse?
3. notifying soldier- to notify is to announce. When a soldier dies, another soldier is sent to notify the spouse and the parents. Would you be willing to do that job?
4. To say someone has "backbone" means they have strength and bravery.
5. Texas twang is the peculiar accent that most native Texans (especially west Texans) speak with. It is also called a drawl. A drawl is a slow way of speaking in which the words are stretched out. Do you find the Texas accent more difficult to understand than others? Do you notice the Texas accent? Can you identify it someone from Texas when you hear it?
6. What different accents exist in your country? Can you tell everyone's regional area after listening to them talk?

After a few months, Terry came to help me sort through Miles things sent back from Iraq. Two black bins were filled with Miles's possessions, carefully labeled and organized and still covered with a fine dusting of Iraqi sand. Although they were legally mine, as next of kin, it didn't feel right that I should have sole access to them. We sat in my garage sifting through Miles's life in the desert. Terry pulled one of Miles's t-shirts out of the pile, raised it to her face and breathed deeply, searching for some trace of Miles. She did not know what I knew, for I had already done the same: The army had laundered his clothes, and this, too, was lost.

1. Do you label and organize your things?
2. Who is your next of kin?
3. "Sole access" means she alone would own them and control them. Why did she feel it was wrong to have sole access of Miles's possessions?
4. A pile of t-shirts is the same as a heap or a stack. You can pile things up or you can make a pile.
5. She breathed in his shirt hoping for a trace (hint) of his smell. Can you imagine doing this?
6. Were the women happy that the Army had laundered Miles's clothes?

What remained was the space created by Miles's absence, thick and palpable with our grief. In the months after Miles's death, Terry and I struggled to reorient our own lives, and in that search, we found each other. We began to bridge the distance that had been between us, bringing our shared love for Miles into the middle ground. At the military briefing following Miles's death, Terry stood behind me pressing her small hands into my shoulders.

I have heard people say that you should never marry a man who does not love his mother. I was lucky: Miles loved his mother fiercely. He love me too. In losing him, Terry and I have not divvied up his love, as we have with his things. We have discovered that there is more than enough to share.

1. palpable: capable of being felt.
2. How have Terry and the author dealt with Miles's death?
3. divvy up: divide up to share EX: We divvied up the profits of the lemonade stand. Each child earned \$10.00.

4. Have you heard the saying, "You shouldn't marry a man who doesn't love his mother."? Do you believe it's true? Is the same true of a woman? How does your relationship with your parents effect your relationship with your spouse?
5. Do you raise your children in the same way that you were raised?
6. What compromises have you had to make to stay married?
7. What kind of relationship do you have with your spouse's parents?
8. What did you like about this story?
9. Do you like reading stories as part of the lesson?