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Gold Star widow finds strength in friendship with battle buddy

By Heather Graham
Sentinel Living Editor

In the circle of life, Katie Moshier has her battle buddy. Katie's husband, Capt. Timothy Moshier, was killed April 1 when his Apache helicopter was shot down southwest of Baghdad leaving Katie widowed at 26 and alone with the couples' 10 month-old daughter, Natalie.

Alone, except for Maria Williams.

It has been Maria who has been the rock for Katie and helped her find the strength to handle the last three months.

Katie and Maria met through their Family Readiness Group. Katie was the FRG leader.

They became close after Natalie's birth. With their husbands busy with pre-deployment preparations, the women met for weekly lunch dates.

Natalie was born June 3, 2005, a few months before Tim deployed. Maria stopped by the hospital in Temple to see her and Katie.

The bond between Maria and Katie grew from weekly lunches to daily conversations and visits.

The women knew an Apache had been shot down April 1 after Katie saw the headline on her computer. She called Maria and they waited, as they had before when word was received of other aviation incidents. The two called each other back and forth anxiously awaiting news.

An unusual silence followed and Katie became apprehensive. "She was so much more worked up about it this time," Maria said of Katie.

Still, Katie never imagined it was Tim's Apache. "I just didn't feel like it was him," she said.

April 2 came and still no word. Katie called Maria and told her, 'I just feel like we should be together.'

Fifteen minutes later, Katie received a knock on her door that changed her life and cemented her friendship with Maria forever.

Maria, whose husband is also deployed to Iraq with Tim's unit, was the first person Katie called when she got the news.

The notification team was sitting in her living room and Katie quietly told Maria she needed her there. Ten minutes later, Maria was in Katie's living room willing to do whatever to help and absorb whatever pain she could.

"There is this sense of urgency," Maria said. "'Protect' is not a strong enough word."

Tim was buried in New York April 12, and Maria was there to support Katie as she had been all along.

St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Delmar, N.Y., was where Tim was baptized and confirmed. He and Katie were married there and Natalie was also baptized there. It is the same church where they held Tim's funeral. Katie and Tim attended high school together in Delmar, New York. Their pictures were next to each other in the yearbook, yet the two did not know



Katie Moshier (left) with battle buddy Maria Williams (Photos by Ali McKee, Sentinel Sports Editor)

each other. "We ran with different crowds," Katie said.

They met at a New Year's party in 2001 and became pen pals. Katie was attending Moravian College in Bethlehem, Penn., and Tim was at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

Their long-distance relationship grew after meeting during their junior years of college. Katie was going to study in Spain. She drove to West Point to say goodbye to Tim the night before she left.

Katie left, then changed her mind and came back to hug Tim. That was the moment Tim knew they would be together, he later told her.

They married July 5, 2003, and ended up at Fort Rucker, Ala., then, eventually Fort Hood.

The hardest part for Katie right now is the fact Tim should be home for his mid-tour break. He would have been home for Natalie's first birthday and the couple's third wedding anniversary July 5.

Instead, Katie spent their anniversary signing the final papers on the house she purchased in New York, near both of their families and Tim's final resting place.

"I just feel like this is a good move, like Tim is looking down," Katie said. "I think this is what he wants."

Katie is not ready to pack up and move yet. Maria is due to deliver her second child July 30. Katie wants to stay here for the birth and to help Maria. Right now, she and Natalie are planning to move, although when has not exactly been determined. Her friendship with Maria and desire to return the support she has received from her steadfast battle buddy has made it difficult for Katie to set a definite date to leave.

Their move will put them within ten minutes of Katie's family and Tim's family. In New York, they will be surrounded by friends and family and through them, Natalie will know her father through their stories and memories.

The stories of Tim helped Katie in the beginning and continue to sustain her.

Another pilot flying near Tim April 1 gave Katie a crucial bit of information.

"He told me (Tim) had done everything right," she said.

Maria was also able to relate some information she got from her husband who had spent time with Tim shortly before he was killed. For Katie, even the most seemingly mundane, trivial information helped. "It was just the little things," she said. "That's what the family members need."

All of the stories let Katie know Tim and his sacrifice has not been forgotten. "It's so important to us that they (fallen Soldiers) were not alone," Katie said. It has been the out-pouring of support from family, friends and even complete strangers that has touched them both deeply.

"It gives a peace of mind to the family to have so many people pulling for the Soldiers," Maria added.

On April 17, Katie, her sister, parents, Natalie and Tim's parents, sister and brother-in-law celebrated Tim's birthday with a dinner at Cheeves Brothers' restaurant in Temple. The family-owned restaurant provided a cake at no charge when the manager discovered the reason for their visit.

Katie attended the South Texas funeral of Pfc. Kristian Menchaca, another Soldier killed in Iraq because of the support she received when Tim was killed. "I was looking for some way to give back," she said. "I went to pay my respects because so many we didn't know came to Tim's funeral."

She took the family some 4th Inf. Div. bracelets her FRG had been selling as a fund-raiser. The bracelets are appropriately adorned with the phrase, "Freedom isn't free."

Although she never met Menchaca, Katie felt a tie to him and his family because she knew Tim's unit was flying overhead when Menchaca's body was recovered.

She wanted to show her support, especially given her own circumstances. Katie knew there would be trials with being an Army wife. She also knew Tim loved his family and was proud to do his job. "They (Soldiers) are protecting our children," she said. "Nobody ever said it was going to be an easy job."

Whether she meant the job of an Army wife, Gold Star family member, a Soldier or a member of the Army community in general, Katie was right.