

## Assessment

### Patriotism: Your Response

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Read the following article and discuss with your fellow cadets the questions that follow. Then, follow your commandant's directions to either write out some or all of your responses.



### *The Neighbor Next Door*



We come from all over this great land, and others have adopted our country as theirs from far beyond. As the song goes we live from sea to shining sea, above the fruited plains and in view of mountains of purple majesty. We come from all walks of life. Our roles in society are many. We're business men and women, we serve our communities, we work with and for others and some are enjoying the fruits of their labor in retirement. We own homes, farms, and businesses and have favorite getaways. We've pursued the American Dream. To most we're the neighbor next door.

So what sets us apart? Why are we different? Our hearts are pained; we've learned to survive each day, to carry an unspeakable yoke, to embrace this place in life we've been given... We are the families of America's Fallen Heroes. We are Gold Star families, carrying a burden many don't wish upon another . . . Our sons and daughters at the height of their lives gave the ultimate sacrifice for their fellow man. They had hearts of gold! They understood the risk; and yet, they accepted the responsibility of serving our nation in time of war. Some look at it as duty to God, duty to our flag, to their community and to a nation that had given them so much. Some wanted to make an impact in the lives of others, to give them a taste of the freedoms we so enjoy and to make a difference. Others went to defend crimes against humanity, to right unspeakable wrongs, to answer the call of our leaders. They put aside self, to honor us, and yes they were the neighbor next door.

If you sat with us at the local coffee shop, you'd begin to understand just a little. You'd see a distant look of the unknown, pride for the person our child became. Almost without thinking you'd say you're sorry, and than not know what else to say. Small talk seems so trite. We'd pickup the conversation, in part to squelch the silence, in part to share that unknown, to share that Fallen Hero you did not know. They were everyday people, willing to step out to do the extraordinary. Growing up they loved superheroes, they were athletes, intellectuals, difference makers amongst their peers. They had challenges, but through all odds overcame those challenges. They could have been you or I, or even the neighbor next door.

In the prime of their lives they understood the meaning of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They understood the true meaning of freedom and the need to be counted as one who protected that freedom. They did not know the pain that would endure through their loss, they could not know. For if it was so easy to foretell the future they may not have gone, they may not have risked all for you or I.

As parents we keep they're memories alive. Through our pain we speak on their behalf. Some in support of the effort they supported, and others against. That is our right, a right that they and generations before and generations to come will and have fought for. We honor them in other ways too, through causes for youth, to support changes in laws, by writing or speaking about them or in names to buildings or streets. We cannot and must not forget, because to do so would mean that what they gave was of no significance. And, they gave it all, in life and now in death. After all they could be or were the neighbor next door.

In closing consider this, do you know that neighbor? Have you reached out your hand, raised it in a wave or even just said a quick hello? In this "fast food" society are we in such a race to get from point A to point B that we don't know those in our neighborhood? Consider reaching out; don't wait until a moment in time that you hear about the son or daughter of a neighbor who gave their all, regardless of religious, political or socio-economic standing. They dared to be men and women, amongst men and women. To be a cut above, to risk all . . . and yes they may have been the neighbor next door.

By Stacey Holley  
Copyright 2007  
All Rights Reserved

About Author:

Stacey is the proud Gold Star mom of Spc. Matthew John Holley, Combat Medic – 101st Airborne, who was killed in action on November 15, 2005 while serving in Iraq.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What are "gold star" families?
2. Do you know any?
3. What could or would you say to a "gold star" family member whom you meet?
4. Why do people treat these families with such caution?
5. What could or should the California Cadet Corps do for these families?

