

*For the Love of Rex*

*by Frederick Wickert*

This is the story of Jamie, and her dog Rex. Jamie was a K-9 handler with the Air Force 21st Security Forces Squadron. She was patrolling in Baghdad with her dog, Rex on June 25th, 2005. Jamie and Rex were searching for IED's, or improvised explosive devices. After the completion of her assigned patrol, Jamie and Rex were returning to base in a Humvee.

Jamie drove the Humvee over a hidden IED. The explosion flung her out in the street where she lay unconscious. Her lungs had collapsed, her pelvis shattered, and three vertebrae in her spine were fractured. She had internal bleeding and her spleen was ruptured.

Rex, the German Sheppard was found near the blast site. Other than for a singed nose, he was unharmed.

Mike, an army medic with the 1159th Medical Company was the first to reach her. He had an important and instant decision to make. Should he try to save her, or should he leave her to help others whose injuries gave them a better chance to survive?

Luckily there was a new medic helping that day, the extra medic giving him more time. The chopper that took Mike and other soldiers to the scene was ready to depart immediately, so he got to her quicker. Had those factors been otherwise, he might have been forced to leave her to die.

Mike did what he could for her and when he left her side, had no reason to think he was ever going to see her again. Fate had other intentions.

As she recovered at Walter Reid hospital in Washington, D.C. Jamie believed that Rex had been killed. She came to learn that he had survived. Filled with joy at his survival, she wanted to get him released by the Air Force and be allowed to adopt him.

However, under U.S. Government regulations, the Air Force could not release Rex as long as he was still young and healthy enough to work, and Rex was.

Jamie decided to fight that law. She went public with her story and begged the government to reconsider. Learning of the story, this writer, a former Air Force Security Policeman, knowing from personal experience the bond between K-9's and their handlers, wrote a personal plea to President Bush on her behalf, as did thousands of others.

Soon, newspapers and TV stations all over the country carried the story. Some members of Congress, and even the Air Force Chief of Staff, General T. Michael Mosley backed her request. They knew it was the right thing to do.

On December 30, 2005 President George Bush signed a bill into law, allowing working dogs to be adopted by their handlers after a traumatic event. Jamie was able to take Rex home, and together, Jamie and Rex were the personal guests of First Lady Laura Bush in the House Gallery as President Bush delivered the 2006 State of the Union address.

It is quite a story for sure, but the story does not end there. Mike, the army medic who treated her on the streets of Baghdad had returned home from Kirkuk in Iraq. Mike read about Jamie's battle to bring Rex home. From the photos, he instantly recognized her face.

By that time, Jamie was back at Peterson Air Force base in Colorado. A friend of Mike was an officer at the base. He sent Mike pictures of the ceremony when she was awarded the Purple Heart. The friend encouraged Mike to call her, and he did.

He told her who he was. There was a long silence and Mike believed he had really blown it. Jamie was stunned. She was trying to piece together exactly what happened after the explosion. She explained to him that she had no meaningful memories for a month after the IED went off.

They talked for forty-five minutes and Jamie ended the conversation saying, "Thank you for saving my life." Mike told her not to say that to him on the phone, and then added that he wanted to meet her.

For the next three months the two e-mailed and talked on the phone. Mike was then stationed at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. In August of 2006 Mike took a trip to Colorado to visit her.

Jamie's injuries did not allow her to stay in uniform and she was medically retired from the Air Force. Mike flew to Peterson Air Force Base for the retirement ceremony and they began dating. Jamie moved to her hometown of Smethport, Pa. to be closer to her family.

Mike retired from the Army and moved to Pa. He got a job working as a registered nurse. In November 2006, four months after they started dating, Mike and Jamie got married in a small ceremony.

It hasn't been easy for them. Jamie suffers a lot of pain from her injuries. There are days when she is in so much pain that she can't sleep and her mind is unable to concentrate. She will probably never be able to bear children.

Jamie is employed as an investigator of child abuse cases as a social worker. She volunteers as an emergency medical technician for the town fire department, where her father is the Chief.

What Jamie finds helps her most is working with Rex and her five horses. She finds just brushing them is very soothing. Unfortunately Jamie may soon lose her horses because she won't be able to afford them. The Veterans Affairs recently reduced her disability rating from 100% to 70%, cutting her monthly disability payment from \$2500 to \$1100.

Jamie says the hardest part of recovery is knowing that she survived, while so many who had wives and children died from IED explosions. She didn't have a spouse or children to depend on her and she doesn't understand why she survived and they did not. It will always haunt her.

If you ever read this story Jamie, please understand that there is a reason. You have provided love and companionship to your husband, Mike. You are doing a great service to abused children, whose cases you investigate and bring to light. You save lives as an emergency medical technician. Don't forget that you caused a law to pass, allowing others to adopt their K-9 partners, which could not have happened without you, and the survival of both you and Rex.

You probably saved the life of Rex. You certainly gave him a better life than he might have had. You have given love and comfort, not only to Rex, but to those five horses as well. Remember, each of God's creatures is important. Not just people.

You have survived because you have much to give and have already given so much. There are many in your future whose well being and perhaps even their lives are depending on you. That is why you have survived. You are needed and wanted and God has much for you to do. You have nothing to feel guilty about. Others are surviving because you did.