

Standing outside with all the students at North Elementary and Bernotas Middle Schools, we were part of an silent honor guard when the motorcade that brought home fallen soldier Jason McLeod drove by. As a substitute teacher, I was responsible for an autistic 4th grader and was very mindful of the possibility that he might become agitated or noisy with curious questions that could disturb the respectful quiet. I didn't really know this child and was just being careful to make sure he didn't have a meltdown or anything. The youngster was just fine through the whole thing. But I had a meltdown.

The fallen soldier, Jason, had gone to the elementary school where I was working yesterday which is why they drove past us like that, and why we brought all the schoolchildren out to pay their respects. He was 22 years old and a mechanic of humvees. He liked to fix things. He went to high school a year behind my youngest son and joined the army just as my oldest son had joined the navy after graduating from the same school. They weren't pals that I know of or anything; just in the same high school community at the same time. Identifying with their experience was a going to be a given. I wasn't prepared for how powerful that would be. When the car carrying his mom drove by, she looked out her window at us and her emotions were - how can I explain this? There was a volume to her emotions even though there wasn't any sound, and that volume was one of the loudest things I have ever heard. For a moment I had something like an out of body experience, but not exactly. I stayed conscious of my connection to the sidewalk and aware that I was in a sea of other children and their teachers; I never let go of the sense of responsibility for the one 4th grader - but it was as though all that was rather in the way back of my mind, while the entire rest of my being was instantly and totally aware of a connection to Jason's mother. I was right there with her and in her, looking into her eyes and out of her eyes at the same time. Her car went by and then there were others, and the moment of connection with her was gone. The impact is with me still. Silent tears fell while the cars went by in their procession. The third or fourth car had a yellow lab hanging out the window looking at us, for all the world just being its happy dog self, and I am still devastated by the memory of that scene.

My sons are living and whole, and for this I am tremendously grateful. They are well and pursuing their dreams. As is my daughter. I do not miss communicating via emails to Operation Enduring Freedom or whatever they are calling it now. I would not trade my good fortune. But there is a piece of me that feels guilty for it. I know that my sense of devastation yesterday is completely insignificant in the face of life-long grief over there on the other side of my town. My sense of well-being is completely insignificant in the face of generations long war there on the other side of an ocean.

Night before last my president (and I do feel that he is mine) announced that we are sending an additional 30,000 soldiers into Afghanistan to support the troops already there. My neighbors have kids over there in harm's way. My friend has a son over there. One of my nephews is over there. I know it's important that they get all the support they need, but we cannot wait until

2011 to start bringing this war to an end.

Where are the tens of thousands bolstering the diplomatic corps? I want to drop what I'm doing, put on a burka if that's what works, go over there, and fix this thing myself.