

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

story by Christmas McCaughey

Dawn Rowe: Young mother loses her husband in Iraq

When Dawn Rowe runs, she thinks about Jesus and how her husband, Alan, is with Him in heaven. Knowing she could see them both very soon upon Christ's return helps the upbeat mom keep running her race, one step at a time.

Marine Corps Major Alan Rowe, from Joshua Springs Calvary Chapel, died in September 2004 with several other Marines in a roadside bomb in Iraq. Within hours, a chaplain and another officer came to Dawn's Yucca Valley, CA, home with the news.

"They didn't even tell me; they didn't need to," said Dawn, age 37. She called in each of her children: Blake, then age 5, and Caitlin, 3. "I told my son that his dad had gone to be with God." Blake seemed to understand about God and heaven. "I told him all the clouds we see up in the sky, all the funny shapes, are probably his father's trails of him four-wheeling in heaven." At first, Blake was excited that his dad was in heaven, then the realization hit that he would no longer see his dad here. The questions began—questions that the children still ask and that Dawn prays for wisdom to answer.

"He wanted to know how he was killed and if the bad guys knew it was his dad," she recalled, pulling out a list she's written down over the past 15 months. "Did it hurt? How long did it take him to get to heaven? Can he fly now? Can he see us? Are you still married? Will I ever have another dad?"

Younger Caitlin has questions, too, but her mourning is different. "Sometimes I'll just see sadness in her eyes and ask if she's okay. She'll say, 'Sure.' Then I'll ask, 'Are you missing your dad?' and she'll just start to cry," Dawn said. At night the children listen to a tape of their dad "singing songs, telling stories, sharing about the Iraqi people. Caitlin gets to hear his voice, which is a great comfort for her."

Initially there was shock, grief and confusion, but now God has brought them to a season of rejoicing. "I miss my husband," she said, "but we like to remember the fun things—



Dawn with Blake, 6, and Caitlin, 4, at their father's grave.

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like at Thanksgiving I told them he never liked sweet stuff with meat, no cranberry sauce with his turkey. Things kids crave to know—all the nuances of a person."

They're thankful for his legacy of following Christ. She describes Alan as a humble and adventurous man who had a "strong presence but was very quiet." He was devoted to his family, his country and to the Lord. Many have asked how she's been able to hang onto her faith in God and even help other widows of war.

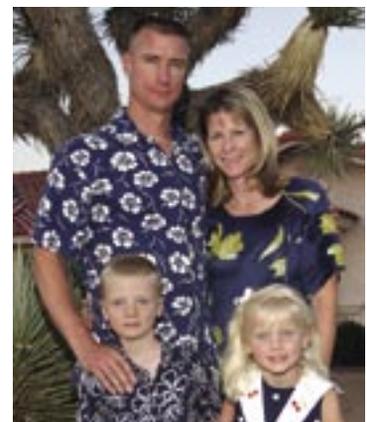
"A lot of people kept waiting for me to snap or lose it," she said, "and I didn't understand that because, as a Christian, I'm sad for my loss, but I'm excited for Alan." Facing grief has challenged her to live by God's Word. "Paul said to die is to gain, so why wouldn't we rejoice in that?" She has her own questions, too, but she knows "answers

come in time. You don't do it all by yourself." She's thankful she and her children were deeply involved at Joshua Springs CC before Alan's death. "You can turn to someone for help when you haven't slept for days and the kids are still asking questions."

One tough question Blake asked was why God didn't answer their prayers to keep Alan safe in Iraq. "It's changed how we pray. I didn't want to teach my son that God didn't answer his prayers," she said. "Now we pray for an understanding of God's will and how it fits into the bigger pictures of our lives." And they focus on Christ's return and seeing their dad in heaven. "He's looking forward to it. He wants to know, 'When, when, when?'" she said laughing. "Me, too."

Until then, she keeps running the race God has set before her, looking to Jesus. "Everybody has trials," she said. "I think that if you put the focus back on God rather than on yourself, the answers become clear. That's what gives me the most peace." Endurance comes by steadily moving ahead. "I just ran a marathon. When I first started training, I thought, 'There's no way I can run 26 miles.' But it's just one day at a time, one step at a time, one mile at a time." She added, "We will take each season as it comes." 🏃

"...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..." Hebrews 12:1-2a



Maj. Alan Rowe with his family.