

**Jackie Walston**

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**From:** <Gimp3500@aol.com>  
**To:** <jawston@charter.net>  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 09, 2008 10:58 AM  
**Subject:** letter

Ladies and Gentlemen

My name is Amy Oonk and I am writing on behalf of my family which includes my husband Jeff, myself, and my two sons Ryan (3 1/2) and Joshua (1 1/2), who are Jared's nephews. Jeff is Nicole Krutke's brother and she is my sister-in-law. We live in Sparta, MI where I am a stay-at-home mom and my husband works as a civil engineer. Our address is 11718 Echo Ridge Dr NE; Sparta, MI 49345. We have known Jared since he and Nicole were dating in high school. We visit Wisconsin as often as we are able and we came to know Jared easily because he was with Nicole often.

The night of hearing of Jared's passing often plays back in my mind as vividly as if I were watching it on television. We had wrapped up a busy day at work and home just as usual and we were enjoying the peace and rest that we always look forward to. The phone rang and it took awhile for us to realize what the noise was since we were in such a deep slumber. When I realized it was the phone I felt a sting in my gut because I knew that nobody calls in the middle of the night unless something terrible has happened. Jeff sat up in bed and kept calmly repeating "yea...ok...yea...ok." I was certain that one of our grandparents had passed away since we have two grandparents dealing with illnesses. Jeff was remaining calm, and not knowing what was going on I was sitting up in bed trying to get any hint I could of the situation but all I could gather was that Jeff was being told information and was simply taking it in. He finally said "ok...bye" and slowly put the phone down. I immediately asked if it was news about Grandpa. The call was from Jeff's mother. He slumped over and muttered "Jared has been shot." I remember thinking— Jared? What? I mean...how? Was he sent into combat and not able to disclose it? He is in Guam, not Iraq! Every time we heard anything about Guam it was compared to Hawaii in its climate and that overall it was a neat place. Questions filled my mind and I wanted answers. Jeff said that all we know is that he has been shot. The military would call his mother with more information as it became known. I remember sitting there crying, not knowing what to do or think. I prayed to my heavenly Father that Jared's life could be spared, that He would comfort Nicole and Jared's family and friends, and that more than anything His will would be done. Later the phone rang again. Jeff's mother informed us that Jared was in very grave condition and we needed to pray hard...it didn't look like he was going to make it. We wept. We sat there in bed and just wept. Why? How can this be? Anyone who has ever loved someone knows that the pain of someone you love hurts more than your own pain. Knowing that our family was suffering was the most helpless feeling. It is a feeling Jeff and I have felt often for his family. Hardship is no stranger in their lives. Nicole has suffered greatly in her life with a terrible car accident, and then watching her father struggle with leukemia and eventually die. She has been through far too much in her young life. We thought of Elizabeth. Our dear niece is special to us even though we are separated by so many miles. She has beautiful curls and a smile that lights up any room. Elizabeth lost her daddy. At such a young age she will not understand what is going on, but to grow up without her daddy is a life sentence of "whys". The phone rang for the third time. Jeff answered it and dropped his head. It was over. Jared had died. Filled with sorrow, all we could do was weep. We were filled with questions but the exhaustion and sorrow prevented us from talking further. We tried to rest until the morning. As soon as the clock struck 7am, I called my mother-in-law. I needed to know if she had heard more. She knew enough to tell me that it appeared another sailor had taken Jared's life and critically injured another. I asked questions but there were no more answers. She promised she would call as soon as she knew more. I was so lost and broken, I called my pastor. The assistant pastor answered the phone and through weeping I just said "I need to talk to someone. Our brother-in-law just died." As he asked the details it hit me that not only did Jared die—he was murdered. Murder. It is something that you hear about on the news but never imagine it affecting your life. The pastor assured me of God's sovereignty and that he would comfort those who mourn. He prayed over the phone for Nicole, her family, Jared's family, friends, and little Elizabeth and that God would hold them close in this huge time of need. I remember calling my family and hearing their shock and endless questions. Jeff went to work that day as a means to cope. He didn't want to talk about it at work for fear that he would break down. On Sunday I went to church with just my son Joshua since Jeff didn't feel like he could go and face the questions yet. I needed my church family's support so I decided to go. The pastor announced the tragedy in front of the congregation and I was unable to keep my composure. I was crying so hard that I left in the middle of the service, got Joshua from the nursery and headed home, crying the whole way home. My church family has been very supportive and asks about Nicole and Elizabeth every week, even a year after the tragedy. We all cope in different ways. My husband internalizes his pain. I talk about it. I love art and photography and one way I was able to grieve was to compile all the pictures of the memorial services and put them into a hardcover book for Nicole and Elizabeth. I searched for songs and poems

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of comfort because I felt that God wanted me to remind Nicole that even when life hurts, God is good. That even if nobody on earth understands her pain, Jesus has been there. He suffered the loss of loved ones, He wept, He suffered, and He died. He has been there, and He was there with her, loving her and holding her in her time of need.

Jared will be remembered as always smiling, with a joyful, youthful heart. He was so young in spirit and he loved to have fun. He loved to show others that he was thinking of them. Whenever we saw him he was always proud to wear his Navy uniform to church. He loved the attention that he received from it and he was very proud of his country. He would always bring us knick-knacks from different ports that he visited. He thought of others and wanted to show others that he was thinking of them. We will always have a very visual reminder of Jared when we look at Elizabeth. She resembles her father so much. She has his signature cheeks and smile. Since Jared has passed away we have seen Elizabeth grow and watched her beam brightly as she points at pictures of Daddy and says "Da Da!" We smile but inside our heart aches at the fact that she will never remember her Daddy. Elizabeth is blessed with a family that loves her, but nobody deserves to lose their Daddy in such a senseless way.

Many hearts have been broken by this tragedy. Hearts around the world were broken. Jared knew many people and many people mourned his loss. Our hearts also ache for the man who committed this crime. We are called by God to love all people. We think of how in the Bible, Saul hated Christians and murdered them. He sought to destroy anyone who believed in Christ. But Jesus loved him and met him on the road to Damascus. He gave him the new name, Paul, invited him to change his life. Paul began to lead others to Christ. We have all done wrong in our lives, but God meets us where we are at and invites us experience full forgiveness if we love and accept him. We will all be affected for the rest of our lives by the terrible crime that has been committed. And we hope that justice is served but that more importantly, that this man will someday come to know the peace that only Jesus provides.

Jeff and Amy Oonk and family

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