

Missing you so...

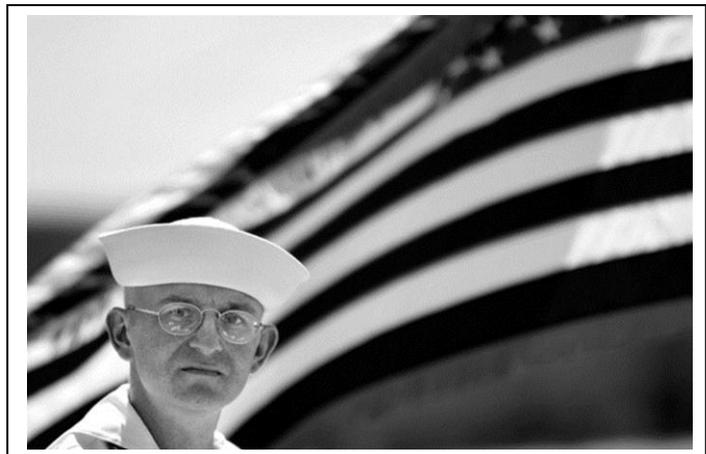
From John

This is a particularly difficult week here on the farm. Not for the farm work per se, though we are getting ready for our organic certification audit this Friday. It is an emotional difficulty. Our returning members will surely remember last year I lost my big brother Eric to a rare cancer. This Friday will mark the 1 year anniversary of his death. Not a day passes where I don't think about him many times. Leading up to this week, he weighs on my heart and mind even more than usual. Loss and heart break are surely a part of life just as love and joy are as well but the sting of loss can often linger much longer. One year down the road I find myself still struggling at times to accept this loss. While intellectually I know it's a truth as certain as the sun that shall set at night, but my heart yet recoils at this reality. As I have mentioned before, my brother was the family anthropologist, able to recount in the finest detail the dates, facts and context of almost every family event going back to the early 1980's. We have countless stories and memories we always loved reminiscing about. When I recall a half memory I still find myself expecting to be able to call my brother to have him tell me the whole story and laugh and joke like we always had before. Even as I flew into Virginia over a Navy shipyard on my way to his funeral I thought 'I will have to ask Bub what that ship is.'

Throughout the past few weeks it has been more difficult not to face the reality of this loss and it has a way of creeping up on you at interesting times. A couple of weekends ago I was out tying tomatoes while Lidia was at market and that song 'Keep your Heart Young' by Brandi Carlisle came on the radio and caught me way off guard. One of the opening lines is about Wheat Pennies (the old pennies from before the Lincoln Memorial in DC was built). My brother and I used to collect them and that memory caused great emotion to well up. I generally keep my emotions checked but I was surely a sight that morning; alone in the field, weaving the string in, out and around the tomatoes at lightning speed all the while sobbing nearly uncontrollably. Remembering myriad goofy little memories we shared, the laughs along with all the times he beat the crap out of me, the pride he felt when I finally landed a solid punch causing

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his left eye to swell into a nice shiner (fighting is of course an age-old tradition of brothers the world around), the terrible mischief we got into. I think about the husband and father who spent hours and hours reading bedtime stories to a camera so that his girls could still get their story every night while we was overseas on deployment for many long months at a time. I think of the joy it gave him to buy gifts for his wife and his unwavering devotion to her. Perhaps the two things (among many) I will always remember most were his loyalty to and love of family and the wonderful smile he so often shone that could lift the spirits of anyone who saw it. I will leave you with the same thought I concluded with last year when I had to break the news of my family's loss. That is to never forget to love. Love of family, love of friends and love of country were things that defined my brother. He was never shy to express it. To live rich and full lives we all need to love one another as individuals who experience this thing called humanity all together. Most of all, we need to never forget the people closest to us that help fulfill our lives and bring joy to our hearts. Embrace those people and tell them you love them. Our time together in this life is short and we mustn't ever take that for granted.



Aboard the USS Wisconsin Eric had his official Navy retirement ceremony. Though reserved for those with 20 years in the service, his wife Geodee fought like hell to get Bub his at 15 years. This was the second to last time I saw him. Three months later, he was gone forever.