

To every person who takes the time to read this,

Well, it has been one month since the tragic loss of Tom. I have done a great deal of reflecting and have some things I would like to say.

I would like to start out by telling you all a little bit about Steven Thomas Stefani, the man that I loved and would have been honored to call my husband. Tom was like no one I have ever known and possibly like no one I will ever meet again. He had a charisma that pulled people in and a sense of humor that only the strong of heart, will, and stomach could truly appreciate. He was a large man, with an even larger heart. Tom sensed when he was needed and often appeared without warning to help in whatever way he could. After all he was not a planner of life, but lived life one day at a time, with that eternal smile that showed everyone he touched that he was loving life and having fun.

In my time of loss, I want to do my best to share the love that Tom gave me before his passing on October 4, 2007 in Afghanistan. I want to genuinely thank all of those that have contacted his family or me to give condolences and offer up assistance in dealing with our grief. Your heartfelt cards, letters, flowers and donations helped to show us that the love that Tom radiated had not been lost. For all of those that offered up assistance or those who are interested in doing so now, I do have a request.

Tom lost his life helping the good people of Afghanistan regain strength and hope after 30+ years of war. He believed that through listening to these people and helping them obtain the skills and resources that they needed, he could diminish their fear and reduce the stronghold that the extremists have on the day to day lives of Afghans. Only through understanding and teaching could he succeed in his mission to make the people of Ghazni province better equipped to survive the harsh reality of their lives. By helping them obtain water, raising livestock for food, or improving crop production and storage, Tom was building bridges (sometimes literally) between the United States and Afghanistan. We as a society are often quick to generalize our feelings toward entire groups when something bad happens, instead of focusing on the few that caused the harm. Please do not hold hatred in your hearts for the good people that Tom was trying to help as they had nothing to do with his passing and are just as upset with the loss of him as all of us that knew Tom here.

Tom and I talked often about our future and family. He asked me a few months before he left for Afghanistan if I would be interested in adopting at least one child after we tried to have a couple children of our own. Tom understood that there were children out there that through no fault of their own needed people like us to step up and care for them, love them, and show them what a family could be. This compassion extended to the children of Afghanistan as well. He visited an orphanage in Ghazni and his heart sank when he saw that they had no playground or toys. He wanted to be able to see these children laugh and play despite the cruelty that begot them. Tom thought that if they were allowed to just be kids again, that they would be able to rise up in adulthood to ensure that their country could thrive. He spoke with all of us at home about sending playground equipment and sports equipment for these orphans and the other children of Ghazni, as well as school supplies for the local schools. Nothing fancy, just ballpoint pens, wooden pencils, and paper, as anything that could be easily construed as coming from Americans could make the children targets. Through these efforts he felt like he was adopting each one of those beautiful children and giving them a real chance at success in the future.

Tom was a dreamer and dreamed big. Through his experiences in Afghanistan and at home he was formulating all the things he wanted to do when he returned. He often talked about acquiring land for one purpose or another; his newest idea was a small vineyard in Chile...he

really enjoyed the work he was doing and all that he was learning about grape production in Afghanistan. Tom wanted to have a fishing cabin in Alaska for all of his friends to visit, so we could torment the salmon there whenever we wanted. He wanted to manage his own piece of forest (his, not the national forest) in Washington or British Columbia. He loved forestry and this is why I think so many of the dedications to him are well suited. The people of Ghazni province are planning to dedicate a new tree farm in Tom's name. A tree is being planted on the lawn of the USDA building in Washington, DC. One of Tom's permittees planted a tree and began a memorial garden in Tom's name at his ranch near Wells, NV. A tree is to be planted at the Forest Service office in Wells, NV and at the ranger station in Jarbidge (Pole Creek) where Tom spent many of his summer days. Tom's cousin sent a donation to the Arbor Day Society to plant 100 trees on the Gallatin National Forest in Tom's name and Tom's family purchased several trees to be planted at locations of their choosing in memory of Tom. I am sure Tom is smiling, because he got his forest, one tree at a time.

Tom's desire to help did not stop here. He wanted to continue doing these types of things in the future. He talked about finishing an engineering degree that he started long ago, so that he could join the Navy Reserves and be able to plan and approve the projects that he was working on in foreign lands. He spoke of continuing his work with FAS or other USDA international programs, to teach people around the world to better care for themselves and the land around them. This is an interest that we both had and were planning to find locations that we could travel to together to assist those that needed help. This goal is something that I plan to carry through, to assist all of those that I can in the United States and abroad in Tom's name and memory. While I do not feel that Afghanistan is a place that I can go now, I hope that in the future I may travel through the Ghazni province to see the impact that Tom (and all of those that came before and after him) had on improving the lives of the deserving people there. Tom would have wanted it that way.

I will continue forward as best as I know how and while it is very difficult for me, I will find my path again. The love that Tom and I had was a unique gift that few people experience in a lifetime and while I wish that our life together could have lasted longer, I cherish every moment I had with this wonderful man. He truly was extraordinary and an angel on earth, sent to improve the lives of everyone he touch.

Thank you for your time. If anyone wants to reach me for whatever reason, I can be reached at jdhaemers@fs.fed.us.

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