

Leslie Warren, a close Stefani family friend, submitted this warm recollection of Tom Stefani, to the *Auburn Journal Editor*, the Stefani's hometown on October 5, 2007.

Dear Editor,

Tom Stefani, the gentle giant of a boy, who was born and raised in this community, died October 4, 2007, in Afghanistan. An Eagle Scout, honor student and professional Range Manager with the U.S. Forest Service, Tom volunteered to go to Afghanistan, where he was killed by a roadside bomb. Only last fall, he left his beloved range management specialist job in Nevada's Ruby Mountains, the new home he'd just purchased, and the family he loved, and headed out to volunteer for the Foreign Agriculture Service campaign to salvage the environment of Afghanistan amidst all the war and horror.

In Afghanistan, he was teaching farmers how to heal and renew their wasted soil and to replant denuded hillsides with trees. He built relationships with Afghan tribal people in the same open and quiet way that he worked with ornery Ruby Mountain ranchers. This senseless loss of a young life is a blow to every parent's heart and to every world citizen who grieves at the human cost and the waste of conflict.

You can imagine Tom – he was the brown-haired kid, who knew how to work hard and proudly showed his prize sheep at the Gold Country Fair. He was the kid with the big cowboy boots and hat, and that sweet sideways, shy smile. Always polite, always kind, and always doing the right thing.

Barbara and Steve Stefani, Tom's Mom and Dad, are well-known personalities in the community. Always working as a team, Steve and Barbara are the muscle and brains behind nearly every community event you name – be it the Black and White Ball, the Gold Country Fair, or the multiple Service Club Barbeques that raise funds for the needy. Tom was regularly at his Mom and Dad's side during these events as a child, or with his Mom and Dad at work sites where they built fine homes for clients who came to love the Stefani Clan as family. Tom had many talents – gleaned from watching and working side by side with his folks.

Tom cared about the earth and he cared about people. He was so young and so full of promise and hope. His short life's work was devoted to public service. Only Tuesday, his Dad was on my porch – sharing a glass of wine and discussing work for me at Placer Nature Center, future projects for his family and Tom. Steve told me Tom had a project in mind for Afghanistan. Not unlike his Mom and Dad – he saw a need there – outside of his regular work assignments – and he wanted to fill it.

Through the years of war in that sad Country, all the playground equipment in all the schools had been stolen, destroyed, or looted. Tom wanted to bring play

equipment back to the children and set his Dad to work collecting equipment here in the States. He wanted slides, kick balls, soccer balls and sport shoes. Tom wanted to bring a bit of joy to the children. Maybe following through on this project will someday bring joy to his grieving parents.

In Tom's beautiful memory, if anyone out there has new or lightly used sports equipment that they would like to donate to the children of Afghanistan for Tom, please call me and I will collect it. Each donation of equipment must also come with a donation for shipping costs. One container ship box costs \$8,000, so all donations for this expense will be appreciated. Working together, perhaps we can fill a container full of quality play equipment for the struggling children as Tom intended.

On behalf of the whole Meadow Vista, Colfax, Christian Valley and Auburn Community, may our gifts of equipment and our expression of sorrow and love in some way comfort the wonderful Stefani Family during this heartbreaking time.

I will come by to pick up sports gear and donations. Please call 530-878-0738 to schedule this.

Leslie Warren, Stefani Family Friend