

HAPPILY HIDALGO

February 25, 2011

Daren

The point of this little blog was to keep family and friends updated on what's happening in our lives, but most people know what has been going on these past few days. But I guess I feel the need to write things down - I guess this blog has not just been a way to keep people updated, but to serve a therapeutic purpose for me to deal with all the thoughts and emotions that go hand-in-hand with what is going on in our lives.

On February 20th, my brother-in-law Daren was killed in Afghanistan. Miles, who was also deployed at the time, called that night to tell me he was coming home. I knew something was wrong. I thought he had been hurt. And then he said "Daren was killed today." I'll never forget that phone call. I felt such sadness and such helplessness not being there with Miles.

But feelings of pain and sadness are not all I've felt in the last few days. I've also been overcome with sense of pride. Daren died a hero, but he was already living his life as one.

I first met Daren back at school when Miles and I started dating. In fact, the first time I met him, Miles told him that he would be bringing me home the following month for Thanksgiving. Daren turned and looked directly at me and said, "nah, not family material" and then busted out with the big grin that never left his face. Over the years I'd like to think that Daren and I formed a bond closer than most do with their spouse's siblings. After Miles graduated, Daren and I both were at school together for one more year before I graduated. We lucked out in that Miles and I were stationed at Fort Benning for most of the time Daren was there for his training and schooling prior to heading to his first duty station. So we got to spend a lot of time with him. Miles, Daren and I ran a 10K race together, we enjoyed hearing about all the shenanigans Daren would get into with his friends over the weekend, go on bike rides with him (or Miles would pick him up from a bike ride when Daren got two flat tires). Daren would bring his "lady friends" over to our house for dinners, and Miles helped Daren prepare for Ranger School. Miles deployed while Daren was in Ranger School, but I was lucky to be able to attend his graduation from that as well as his graduation from Airborne School.

And Daren was there for us when we lost Cale. He immediately came to the hospital and cried with us. I remember waking up at one point and Daren was sitting with Miles, staying by his side as we were waiting for the delivery. Daren went to our house and took care of Roscoe while we were still in the hospital. He put away all of the baby things so that they were in the nursery and not throughout the house ready to greet us with a painful reminder of what we were missing. Daren extended his time at Fort Benning to be with us. To help us grieve.

Eventually, he had to move and report to his first duty station in Germany. Of course in typical Daren fashion, it was not an easy transition. His dad came down from Wisconsin to help him pack up his house and move it into our garage before the Army would move his belongings. So for a few weeks, our garage housed all the things important to Daren . . . which included a broken Bow-Flex he bought at a garage sale for \$40 and an authentic Mexican Sombrero.

Daren was out on a patrol, leading his Soldiers, the day he was killed by an IED. He was 24 years old. He left behind him an incredible family and hundreds of friends. I think Daren held a special spot in each of his family member's hearts. He was the stereo-typical little brother to his older brothers Jared and Miles, but he handled that role with humor, wit, and above all, very thick skin. And he loved his little sister Carmen in a very evident fashion, in a way of loving we should all strive to display.

We've been going through pictures and reminiscing about the time we had with him. I only knew him six

years. I can't imagine the depths of the grief his siblings and parents have and will always have. And there are people who may have only known Daren a few months and they too, feel the pain in losing him. He was more amazing than I'll ever be able to do him justice for him my blog-ramblings, and while I will miss him so much, I am just so incredibly thankful that he was a part of my life. And I'm comforted to know that Daren is in Heaven with his nephew Cale. And I know he will take good care of him for us, until one day, we all meet again.



Best Man at our Wedding.





Roscoe and his Uncle Daren, watching TV.



Daren's graduation from USMA, May 2009



This is a very special picture for me. It's the last one I took with Daren, but it was also taken three days before Cale was born. So it's also the last living picture I have of Cale - the last picture taken during my pregnancy. I find it very fitting, and incredibly special, that it was taken with Daren.

Cale