



My Daddy Is a Hero



all photos courtesy Sarah Verardo

When Grace was 3 years old, she went to preschool for the first time. Her mom and dad came to school events and met her friends at school. But her classmates had a lot of questions about Grace's dad.

Veterans Day is celebrated on Nov. 11. This week, The Mini Page tells the story of Grace's dad, her family and many other veterans of the U.S. armed services.

Wounded by war

Mike Verardo, Grace's dad, enlisted in the U.S. Army after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, in New York City; Arlington, Virginia; and Shanksville, Pennsylvania. In 2009, he was sent to Afghanistan as an infantryman with the 82nd Airborne Division.



Mike in Afghanistan.

In April 2010, Mike was struck by an explosive device known as an IED. He was badly injured and lost his left leg and the use of his left arm. He also had bad burns and suffered damage to his brain. Doctors thought he might not live.

Mike's brain injury affected his balance and motor skills, along with skills needed to manage himself. He can do many things on his own, but he needs help with some daily tasks.

A proud family

Three years after his injury, Mike and Sarah, his girlfriend, got married. Grace was born a year later, and now she has two little sisters.

Mini Fact:

There are about 4 million wounded veterans in the United States.

For Grace, her daddy *always* had one mechanical, or **prosthetic** (prahs-THEH-tick), leg that he could remove. For her, his left arm was *always* paralyzed. And many of her dad's friends also had new legs and arms.

But when Grace first went to preschool, another student made a lot of comments about her dad. She told Grace her daddy was "gross."

First, Grace corrected her, saying her daddy is a hero and is *not* gross. Then she told her mom, Sarah, about the comments.

Teaching children

Sarah decided she needed to help her children understand that although their daddy's body had changed, he still had the same heart. So she wrote "Hero at Home," a picture book for young kids about veterans with severe injuries.



Grace helps her dad attach his prosthetic leg.

"Children are naturally curious," Sarah Verardo told The Mini Page. "It's OK for kids to say hello and ask about" Mike's leg or his wheelchair. She hopes that with so many wounded veterans in our society, today's children will grow up to accept them and work for their rights.

Sarah said one of the most important messages of "Hero at Home" is that Mike is still working hard to get better. He has long hospital stays and more surgery ahead, and his family will need to support him for the rest of his life.

American veterans

Sarah Verardo said Mike "wore the uniform (of the U.S. Army) proudly." He wanted to serve "to protect the freedoms of all Americans," she writes in the book.

"Families serve along with them," Sarah said. "We're proud, too."

It's important that we remember and celebrate our veterans every day of the year, but Veterans Day gives us a chance to show our service members how much we appreciate their sacrifice, or something given up for someone else.

The holiday falls on Nov. 11, the anniversary of the end of World War I.

Helping other veterans

"Hero at Home"

was written for children of disabled veterans, but it will also help veterans themselves. Sales of the book will benefit The Independence Fund, an organization that provides wheelchairs and other mobility aids to veterans, along with help for caregivers and support for sports programs for disabled veterans.



"Hero at Home" was illustrated by Inna Eckman.

Resources



On the Web:

- independencefund.org
- bit.ly/MPcomfort

At the library:

- "Helping My Hero!!" by Sherry Barron
- "When Daddy Comes Home: A Children's Book on PTSD" by Maggie Hundshamer

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of veterans are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:

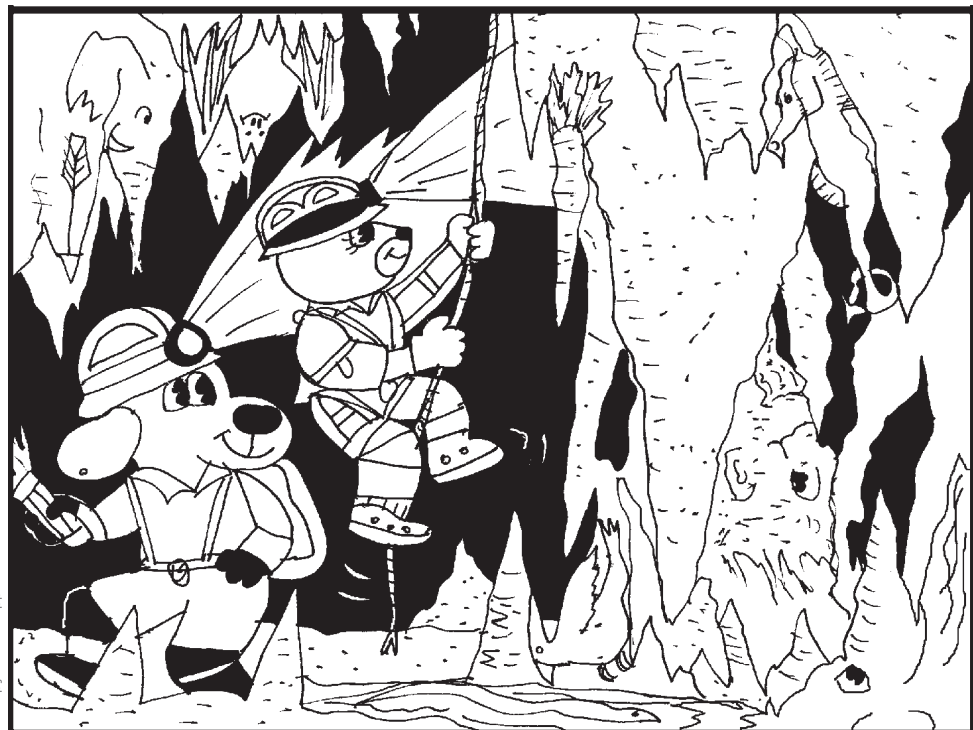


AFGHANISTAN, ARMY, BOOK, CURIOUS, EXPLOSIVE, FAMILY, HELP, HERO, HOME, LEG, MOTOR, PROSTHETIC, PROUD, QUESTIONS, SACRIFICE, SERVICE, SURGERY, VETERAN, WAR, WHEELCHAIR, WOUNDED.

W C U R I O U S U R G E R Y P
 C F B R I A H C L E E H W X R
 K Q O C B E C I V R E S M S O
 W I R A W M Q U E S T I O N S
 O G E L N A R E T E V J Y M T
 U O H E X P L O S I V E M O H
 N A T S I N A H G F A K R T E
 D H E L P L P R O U D M A O T
 E T R T Q F A M I L Y P G R I
 D B O O K S A C R I F I C E C

Mini Spy Classics

Mini Spy and Basset Brown are exploring a cave. See if you can find the hidden pictures. Then color the picture.



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- funny face
- word MINI
- carrot
- olive
- 2 elephant's heads
- cardinal
- snake
- seahorse
- letter D
- bat
- arrow
- letter B
- letter A
- mushroom
- letter H

Mini Jokes



Tommy: Which animals can open locks?

Tillie: Turkeys, donkeys and monkeys!

Eco Note



In 1830, there were about 1 billion people on Earth. Just 100 years later, the figure had doubled, and experts predict that by 2050, the planet may be home to as many as 9 billion people. As the human population grows, we need more and more resources, such as food, water, land and fuel. These needs put pressure on habitats and wildlife, threatening many living things.

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Thank You



The Mini Page thanks Sarah Verardo, author of "Hero at Home," for help with this issue.

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