Better every day, thanks to an angel—a combat casualty visiting nurse

see page 2
Donors tell us they support the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society because they, or someone they know, were helped by the Society along their journey. Often, they send a note: “...sending this so others can get through their own hard times.”

We’ve all experienced hard times. However, like Jorge and Jessica Rodriguez, who share their journey with us in the cover story of this issue of Legacy® newsletter, Navy and Marine Corps families continue to amaze us with their perseverance and resiliency.

Take Senior Chief Ray Willis, whose Navy career took him and his family around the world, creating a journey which his daughter has turned into books and movies for young adults. You’ll also read how NMCRS Groton director, and her team of volunteers, persevered to help a young Navy child say goodbye to his father.

Which stories do you identify with? Go to the Society’s Facebook page (facebook.com/nmcrs) and let us know.

I remain grateful for your financial support, your volunteer spirit and your unfailing commitment to helping Sailors, Marines and their families along their journey.

Sincerely,

Admiral Steve Abbot, U.S. Navy (Retired)
President and Chief Executive Officer

Cover Story:
Your Support Brought a Society Visiting Nurse and an Injured Corpsman Together, Saving His Life

The first IED that hit Hospital Corpsman Jorge Rodriguez in downtown Fallujah knocked him unconscious. “I don’t remember a lot,” he said. “I woke up and there were a bunch of Marines around me asking, ‘Are you ok, doc?’ When I got up I was dizzy and disoriented, but I asked if anyone was sick or injured, and I kept doing my job.”

Less than a week later, Jorge faced another IED as his unit was crossing a bridge. “I looked down, and there was a big hole in the ground, but we kept moving and providing protection. Shrapnel from the IED was lodged in the window next to my head. We got into a small arms fight, and while bullets ricocheted next to me, I took care of two Marines—one hit in the neck and one in the chest.”

During his 2005–2006 deployment to Iraq, Jorge’s convoy got hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. “I took care of multiple casualties. At one point, I took care of 13 or more who got injured in the blast.”

Always focused on helping his men survive, Jorge put his own symptoms aside. “First, you take care of your men,” he said, “and then you take care of yourself.”

After his deployment, Jorge worked as a surgical technician at Naval Hospital Groton, Connecticut. “I was the assistant lead petty officer, ordering supplies and instruments and helping surgeons,” he said. “Then, one of my nurses told me I was ordering multiple orders of the same supplies. I was having headaches, not sleeping, my vision was distorted, and I had nausea and hearing loss.”

“...sending this so others can get through their own hard times.”

It took Jorge a while to realize his symptoms were related to his deployment, but he went to the VA for neurological tests and learned that he had a closed skull traumatic brain injury, PTSD, hearing loss, and tinnitus. “The VA never called me or followed up,” he said. “A month after I was diagnosed, I was discharged from the military. Eventually, I began working as a civilian EMT, but I was forgetting the addresses of where we had to pick-up or deliver patients. I
was also forgetting the names of patients."

Seven years after his brain injuries, Jorge's health continued to decline. He had to cut back his hours on the job from full-time to part-time, and he dropped from four to just one of the college courses he'd been taking to advance his career. "I wasn’t getting any medical treatment," he said. "I was only followed by a psychiatrist for PTSD."

Fortunately, during his EMT shifts, Jorge started bringing patients to a sub-acute transitional care unit, and that's where he met Jessica.

"He was charming, funny, and nice," Jessica said. "He swept me off my feet." But soon she started seeing unusual behavior. "I noticed sticky notes all over his apartment," she said. "The notes were labels on objects and reminders of things to do.

"When we started dating seriously," Jessica said, "I noticed he would ask me the same questions over and over again. He would say he couldn’t hear me. When we went on dates, he was hyper-vigilant. When he moved into my apartment, he kept forgetting where his clothes were. He would forget how long he was in the shower or if he'd washed his hair. As time went on I said, 'I think it's more than PTSD.'"

The couple had their first child in 2011, but Jorge's condition continued to deteriorate. "He wasn’t able to remember to eat,” Jessica said. “They had him on medication for insomnia and depression, but he was forgetting to take them. I started advocating for him. I became part of the caregiver program through the VA in 2012. However, Jorge was getting worse. He'd leave for school and then call me from the supermarket, unsure of how he'd gotten there."

Jessica realized that Jorge had fallen through the cracks of the military health system. "He got an honorable discharge, but never received a medical review board," she said. "Finally, he was rated with 70% disability for hearing, knee and back degenerative joints, a degenerative disc in his back, and TBI—but they weren't treating him for poly trauma. The first time we had a poly trauma case manager was 2014."

Jorge was forgetting words and withdrawing. He suffered migraines and became aggressive. "This was not just PTSD," Jessica said.

Then Jorge had a seizure while driving and crashed into a guardrail, setting his car on fire. And a week later, Jessica learned she was pregnant with their second daughter. The day she came home from the hospital, Jorge had another seizure. "The ER doctor called the VA and said, 'You need to see him right away,'" Jessica said. "He had a flat affect, developed a tremor and shuffled gait. He would close his eyes and fall backward. They were running all these tests, but the tests didn’t show any changes. I was losing my husband."

After two more seizures in early 2015, Jorge could barely speak. That’s when Jessica met NMCRS combat casualty assistance (CCA) visiting nurse Sue Lado.

Sue recommended a dramatic change in Jorge's care. “Sue started advocating for Jorge to get out of the VA system and go to the Shepherd Center," Jessica said. The Shepherd Center is a brain injury and spinal cord rehabilitation hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, that has helped scores of NMCRS clients through its SHARE Military Initiative.

"Thanks to Sue’s tenacity, we got him to the Shepherd Center," Jessica said. "I had to go with him because he couldn't be left alone. Sue helped us get a hotel room, where I stayed for almost three months. I was there with our four year-old and our nine month-old baby.”

Jorge showed remarkable progress at that facility. “When he — Continued on page 5
Noted Author and Former Navy Brat Got Her Start Thanks to Your Support

Kimberly Willis Holt had already written several children's books when she created the character of nine-year-old Piper Reed, the daughter of a Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer, in Piper Reed, Navy Brat. Like the author, Piper traveled the world with her Navy family. Piper continued her adventures in five more books—but only a handful of the 18 novels and picture books Holt has written. (She's currently working on her 19th title!)

“I've never forgotten my military roots,” Kimberly said. The Navy made it possible for my parents to send me to college. Had my parents stayed in Forest Hill, Louisiana — the little town where they met — I wouldn't have had that opportunity. I owe a lot to the military because of that.”

Kimberly's parents, Ray and Brenda, were married in 1958 and transferred to Ray's first duty station at Naval Training Center Great Lakes. In 1959, they transferred from Illinois to Pensacola, Florida, where Kimberly was born. Because of the Navy, Kimberly went to kindergarten in Paris, France, and learned to read in French before English. After Paris, they moved to Norfolk, Virginia; Alexandria, Louisiana; Barrigada, Guam; Bremerton, Washington; Forest Hill, Louisiana; and finally New Orleans, Louisiana, before Kimberly's father, Senior Chief Ray Willis, retired. “I consider Louisiana my emotional home,” she said.

Kimberly went to college at the University of New Orleans, then transferred to Louisiana State University. “My parents always made it clear I was going to college,” she recalled. But Kimberly didn't realize that financing college for three children would be a challenge.

Thankfully, the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society provided Holt with a loan to help pay for tuition. “I was always aware that the Society helped me go to school,” she said. As she neared graduation, Holt was offered a full-time job in radio news. She attended school part-time while she worked, but never graduated. “Attending college is part of the reason I’ve done so well,” Kimberly said, “and it wouldn’t have been possible without that loan from the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society.”

Kimberly always wanted to be a writer, but didn't plan to write books for kids or write about military families. “I just started out writing,” she said. “My first book—My Louisiana Sky—was about a 12-year-old girl. I felt like the genre chose me.” Both My Louisiana Sky and When Zachary Beaver Came to Town (for which Kimberly won the National Book Award) have been made into movies.

Kimberly has a special place in her heart and her work for military families. On book tours she visits schools on military bases or where there are students from military families.

She also offers The Ray and Brenda Willis Scholarship (named in honor of her parents) to schools with large military family populations who invite her to speak to students.

Kimberly will always be grateful to the Navy and to the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society. “I’m where I am now because they helped me on the road,” she said.

Isn't it good to know that your support makes a difference?

Learn more about Kimberly Willis Holt and her books at www.kimberlywillisholt.com.
With Your Support, NMCRS and CACO Helped This Son Say Goodbye to His Dad

Nine year-old Jacob* was living in Connecticut with his mom when he learned his dad had died. He hadn’t seen his dad, a Navy Chief stationed in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii in a long time. Jacob’s parents had split up, and he lived with his mom.

Thanks to Casualty Assistance Calls Officers (CACOs) in Connecticut and Hawaii, and the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, Jacob and his mom flew to Hawaii for his dad’s memorial service. Jacob’s mom couldn’t afford food and lodging for the trip, so NMCRS also provided money for those expenses.

Because Jacob’s dad’s new wife was living in Florida, his dad’s funeral was held there. The CACO arranged for Jacob and his mom to fly 1,000 miles south, and NMCRS again provided the funds for Jacob and his mom to attend his father’s funeral.

“Jacob’s mom didn’t know about the benefits Jacob was entitled to as a surviving military dependent,” said Evelyn Liberty-Topliff, director of NMCRS Groton. “We made sure Jacob got a dependent ID card, and referred his mom to the local Gold Star coordinator,” a resource available to children whose parent dies while serving on active duty.

NMCRS is committed to meeting the needs of military children. “We made sure he had winter clothes, and we helped them with rent, utility bills, and car insurance,” said Liberty-Topliff. “They were grateful.”

Retired Major General Carl Jensen, USMC, Executive Vice President and Chief Operations Officer for the Society, seconds how vital this work is. “Helping military families through their financial crises is important work—made possible by the volunteers who serve and the donors who support the Society. Jacob got to say good-bye to his father. And that memory is priceless.”

You helped make it happen. Isn’t it good to know that your support does so much?

*The name has been changed.

— Continued from page 3

went in, they couldn’t even assess his comprehension or speaking ability because it was so low,” Jessica said. “But because of his hard work and dedication, he went from .1% ability to 50%—average ability with speech. When he left, he could speak full sentences, walk, climb stairs, laugh, and engage.”

After 10 months with no seizures, Jorge was able to get his driver’s license back. His doctors think that Jorge has a form of chronic traumatic encephalopathy, which can show up 7 to 10 years after an initial injury.

Although he still has memory problems, Jorge still undergoes occupational and physical therapy, as well as eye and speech therapy. “Now we want fun—we want to give him that back,” Jessica said.

Jorge gives credit to Sue for his recovery. “She is an amazing woman who takes care of people with her heart,” he said. “And she was pushing every single button of every doctor to help me.”

“On one occasion, I was having a very bad day,” Jorge said. “Sue called to check on us, and I told her my wife was ill and I was going to get her medication from the pharmacy, but I couldn’t get out of my driveway because my snow blower broke. She came in a few minutes with her husband and cleaned the whole driveway for me so I could get out. She goes above and beyond her job.” Jessica agrees. “We’re fighting an invisible war. With Sue, I know I have someone to rely on.”

That’s the life-changing help you provide to service members and their families with each gift you give to the Society.

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Caring for the children of fallen service members is one of the most important things your support does. Thank you!
How Active Duty Volunteers Help Service Members and Their Families in Need

For many service members, the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society is not simply a place to ask for help, but also a place to offer help to fellow Sailors, Marines, and their families. So far this year, 20% of our nearly 3,200 volunteers have been on active duty while serving with the Society during their off-duty times.

Active duty volunteers are vital to everything the Society does. These amazing volunteers:

• Work in our thrift stores. “My volunteer thrift shop lead opens the store each morning,” said director of NMCRS Great Lakes, Carol Ward.

• Respond to after-hours emergencies. Including cases when service members don’t get paid. “We help them get through the weekend or until the pay situation is straightened out,” explained Maureen Farrell, director of NMCRS Patuxent River.

• Give back. “It’s not enough to say I’ve benefited from the Society,” said PO1 Charyn Clark, USN. “I actually contribute as well.”

Active duty volunteers manage uniform lockers, help with budget counseling, make emergency travel arrangements, and so much more. They even teach budget-for-baby classes and knit blankets for Junior Sea Bags.

Join us in saluting our active duty volunteers by reading more about all they do.

Visit our blog at http://legacy.planwithnmcrs.org now, and learn about our wonderful active duty volunteers and the many ways they serve the Society.

Navy Doctor Joins Team NMCRS to Support Sailors and Marines in Need

During his first assignment as a Navy physician in Yokosuka, Japan, Stephen Fischer was surprised to realize how tough it was for enlisted families to make ends meet. “Especially in a place like Japan where things are so expensive, a family with four kids would be living at poverty level,” Fischer recalled.

Overseas there are no government programs to help young families, so the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society is there to help, Fischer explained.

Every duty station where Fischer has served he’s sent patients and their families to the Society for help when they need it. “People have to band together to provide for their fellow shipmates and Marines and their families,” he said. “As physicians, we support the war-fighters and their families, and so does the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society. Family readiness is an important part of overall operational readiness. We see Sailors and Marines who are struggling to make it for whatever reason—single parents, people who have lost a loved one, or experienced something catastrophic like losing a home. During the financial collapse in 2008 and 2009, a lot of fleet concentration areas were hit hard, particularly in California and Florida. People had to try to refinance and they were having difficulty feeding their families and providing the basics.”

Because he’s seen time and again the vital assistance that NMCRS provides, Fischer said he didn’t hesitate to join the Society’s Marine Corps Marathon (MCM) team this year, committing to raising at least $600 for the Society, although he hopes to bring in $1000.

Now stationed at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, Maryland, he will be running his second consecutive MCM.

Although Fischer hasn’t run competitively since high school, he decided last year to run the MCM to test himself. “Running a marathon is something on your calendar and you’ve got to maintain long distance road work to stay in shape.” Fischer finished last year’s marathon in under 6 hours, and hopes to come in under five hours this year. “There’s something about the MCM that’s so euphoric,” he explained. “All those people running with you along the streets lined with red, white and blue, while running around the nation’s capital is really awe-inspiring.”

In 2015, 124 runners participated in Team NMCRS, and raised more than $60,000 for Sailors, Marines and families in need.

Help Dr. Stephen Fischer reach the MCM finish line and support his efforts at www.nmcrs.org/mcm-Stephen.
### Contributions

- Loan repayments: $17.9 million
- Other receipts (thrift shops): $1 million
- Other receipts (other): $41.1 million

### Other Receipts

- Thrift shops: $1 million

### Inflows

- Total inflows: $60 million

### Outflows

- Total outflows: $69.1 million

### Financial Assistance

- Total financial assistance: $45.8 million

### Programs

- Home visits and other contacts
- Combat Casualty Assistance (CCA)

### Volunteers

- Total volunteers: 4,021

### Traditional Visiting Nurses

- Total traditional visiting nurses: 34

### Combat Casualty Assistance Visiting Nurses

- Total combat casualty assistance visiting nurses: 22

### Administrative Staff

- Total administrative staff: 163

### 2015 Highlights

- 481,140 volunteered hours
- 22,282 home visits and other contacts
- 7,795 moms and dads attended a budget-for-baby workshop
- 5,902 gift bags with hand-made baby blankets and other items provided to parents-to-be

### Making a Difference

- 57,833 clients received financial assistance

### Note

The difference between inflows and outflows during 2015 was covered by a withdrawal from the Society’s investment reserve.

Full disclosure of the Society’s financial records can be found at [www.nmcrs.org/financials](http://www.nmcrs.org/financials)
YOU CAN MAKE AN IMPACT IN THE LIVES OF ACTIVE DUTY AND RETIRED SAILORS, MARINES, AND THEIR FAMILIES.

Make an Immediate Impact:
Go to nmcrs.org/donate or mail your gift to:
NMCRS
875 N. Randolph Street, Suite 225
Arlington, VA 22203-1767

Consider a Charitable Gift in your Will:
Ensure Sailors, Marines, and their families get the support they need for years to come.

HERE’S HOW YOU CAN BENEFIT:
• Most gifts cost you nothing now.
• They may effectively reduce taxes on your estate.
• You can feel good knowing your gift will help future generations of Sailors and Marines receive vital and compassionate care and financial assistance in their time of need.

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT MYPLANWITHNMCRS.ORG/RESOURCES.

The 2015 Annual Report is now available. We’re proud to report that independent auditors and charity rating organizations continue to find our business practices and mission effectiveness to be consistent with the highest standards of nonprofit management. Charity Navigator and GuideStar, two of the leading not-for-profit reporting agencies, continue to award the Society their highest ratings. As you read the report, you will discover how much your support means to the men and women who stand the watch here at home and across the globe to protect our freedom. Thank you for your loyalty and compassion.

Read it online at: www.nmcrs.org/financials

The Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society does not provide legal or tax advisory services. Work with your attorney and financial advisor to plan charitable arrangements that work best for you and your estate. The information contained herein is intended solely for general informational purposes.