



**Answering the Call of U.S. Veterans**

## HERO AWARD WINNER

# *The Grieff Family*

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## PATRIOTISM

With decades of military service in the U.S. Air Force, there is no doubt about Eric and Teresa Grieff's loyalty and dedication to their country.

What makes this IBO couple unique, though, is that they've answered another call of duty – one to reach out to aging veterans. Together with their 13-year-old daughter, Lili, the Grieffs give their time, energy and resources to make life better for the residents of a Northern California veterans home.

"They've truly made a difference," said Jenny Brown, who has known the Grieff family for over a decade. "When I look at all the work they've done at the veterans home, it amazes me. I have personally watched the faces of veterans light up whenever they are given the selfless gifts of kindness, compassion, a hug or a listening ear. That's what the Grieff family brings to the table."

For their longtime commitment to their country and their meaningful volunteer work with U.S.

veterans, the Grieffs are being honored with the Amway Family Hero Award for Patriotism.

## LIFTING VETERANS' SPIRITS

The veterans home where the Grieffs volunteer has about 900 residents and is the largest of its kind in the U.S. The veterans include men and women who served in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and Operation Desert Storm.

Eric, an Air Force flight engineer, and Teresa, an Air Force chaplain's assistant, are stationed nearby at Travis Air Force Base. Both of them have visited veterans at the home through their work. Then Teresa learned something about the vets that surprised and dismayed her: Many of them don't have visits from family or friends during the holidays. "It really hit me," Teresa said. "I thought, 'We've got to do something!'"

Inspired into action, she began to organize efforts to brighten the lives of the veterans with greeting cards, holiday ornaments, origami, gift baskets, gift cards, blankets and pillows. The endeavor grew when she gained the support of Jenny Brown, her friend and mentor. Jenny, her husband, Terry, and members of the Brown organization all pitched in to support the vets during the holiday season, Veterans Day, Valentine's Day and other times during the year. >

"Eric and Teresa have both  
been so loyal to the call of duty.  
They've gone above and beyond."

JENNY BROWN  
FRIEND OF THE GRIEFFS



The simple act of spending time with the veterans lifted their spirits, Eric and Teresa said. “It’s important to just hold their hands, hear their stories and look them in the eye,” Teresa said. “To me, they’re the real heroes. We need to remember what the vets did for us and our country. We go to serve them and honor them, but yet we get so much out of it.”

Added Eric, “What we do is small compared to what so many of them have given. I think the biggest thing is the time we spend with them. They really like telling their stories and it’s just great to listen to them.”

The visits made an impression on Lili, who enjoys getting to know the veterans. “I’m kind of young, so they don’t tell me all their stories about war. But they do tell me about their past, which is really cool,” she said. “A lot of them are really funny and they love telling jokes.” She remembers one veteran in particular who turns a dollar bill into a ring and gives it to her every time she’s there.

Lili said she is proud to help the men and women who served her country. “I also feel kind of accomplished when I make them smile,” she added. “It makes me happy to give them some joy.”

## HELPING FAMILIES HEAL

Both Eric and Teresa have served in the Air Force Honor Guard, which provides funeral honors for Air Force personnel. Teresa also served as a memorial affairs airman at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. Her duties included processing the remains of military and civilian victims who were at the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

Seventeen years later, the grief and trauma can still feel fresh to her. Recalling those duties, Teresa fights back tears. “Although it was a hard job, I know it was honorable to do everything possible to get the remains back to the families so they can grieve,” she said. “As tough as it was mentally and emotionally, I would do it again.”

Teresa said when it came time to transport the remains of military members, everyone lined up. “When the hearse passed by, we were in uniform and we would salute them as they left,” she said. “It didn’t matter if it was a general or a one-striper, you would go and salute them. We were paying honors all the way to the end.”

It takes an exceptional person to fulfill those duties, but that’s Teresa, say those who know her. “I just think her heart is so huge and so selfless,” Jenny Brown said. “She has that special heart that wants to serve other people. And even though I know she was impacted greatly by the experience, she was really thinking about the families.”



*The Grieffs make it a point to reach out to aging veterans, especially during holidays.*



*When they volunteer at the veterans home, Teresa, Lili and Eric love listening to veterans share their stories.*

## **APPRECIATION FOR AMERICA**

Eric and Teresa both have traveled extensively with their military careers. After visiting more than 50 countries with the Air Force, Eric said, he has a deep appreciation for the United States. “We are so lucky to live where we do,” he said. “We cannot forget that we live in the greatest country in the world.”

Teresa feels the same way. Born in Mexico, her family moved to the U.S. when she was 5. She grew up in California, went through the citizenship process and then followed her sister into the military. “I joined to get a better life, and what better way to do it than serving your country and serving people?” she said. “I have always loved to serve, and I knew this was home.”

Their daughter Lili is always with them when they volunteer to help veterans. It’s especially important to Eric and Teresa that Lili understands the meaning of patriotism. “We want her to know where her freedoms come from and why they’re precious,” Eric said. “And the fact that we can be different and vocalize our opinions.”

Lili gets the message. “Patriotism means being proud to be an American and being proud to be in a country where you have freedom of speech and religion,” she said. “There are a lot of places that don’t have that.” ■



*Eric and Teresa have performed Honor Guard duties many times with the Air Force.*