

Postcards from Iraq

I grew up in a very small tight-knit community in upstate New York. I spent the first 18 years of my life seeing the same people everyday. There was nothing I didn't know about them and vice versa. When I graduated high school I had to give a speech at commencement. Not really able to express the depth of emotion I felt at having to leave home, my friends and my family I decided to forgo the speech. I read Shel Silverstein's "The Giving Tree" instead.

As I get ready to leave my Gulf Region Division family I find myself thinking about "The Giving Tree" again.

The short story chronicles a man's life from boyhood to old age. Through all of the boy's joys, trials and tribulations the tree stands steadfast,

offers him comfort with his shade and pieces of himself when necessary. By the time the boy is old the tree is nothing but an old stump as he has given everything he has to support the boy in his times of need. In the end the tree is sad because it feels as a stump it has absolutely nothing left to give. The tree is wrong. The boy, now an old man, simply needs a place to sit.

I think about Silverstein's analogy while I look out over the GRD compound from my rooftop office and see a forest of trees.

I see people who are steadfast friends. I see people who offer up pieces of themselves to help in times of crisis. I see people who give and give till I can't believe there can be



(Left) Julie Cupernall films a Corps of Engineers project site in Baghdad, Iraq with the support of a U.S. Army military unit. (Above) Julie Cupernall returns a greeting from a young Iraqi boy in Ameriya district in Baghdad, Iraq.

more – but there always is.

I volunteered to serve in Iraq because I believe in the goodness of people. I believe that the vast majority of Iraqis are grateful for the 13 billion dollars of American taxpayer money that the Corps of Engineers has invested into jumpstarting infrastructure reconstruction.

And despite the mortars, the rockets, the small arms fire and the road side bombs that have tested my luck - my faith in the goodness of people has never wavered.

Because here in the desert in the middle of Iraq, I live in a forest of trees.

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