



The Price of Peace

[Alyssa and Cassy Gaddis sing for military families]

Story and photos by
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Deployment ceremonies are never easy. Emotions can be overwhelming as families and friends gather together for their good-byes.

Twelve-year-old Alyssa Gaddis and her 16-year-old sister Cassy Gaddis, of Springfield, IL, know this firsthand. They've been to many such events because their father, CW5 Jim Gaddis, is the command chief warrant officer of the Illinois Army National Guard. They've felt the power of families being torn apart.

These experiences inspired Alyssa to write a song—a song to lift the spirits of those enduring deployment, a song to inspire courage and hope. Alyssa titled her song, “The Price of Peace.”

Thinking positive

“I went to a deployment ceremony where kids were clutching to their dad’s neck crying,” Alyssa recalls, “and it just broke my heart. [Cassy and I] have it so easy right now with our dad at home. There are dads out there [with] loved ones going off to war.”

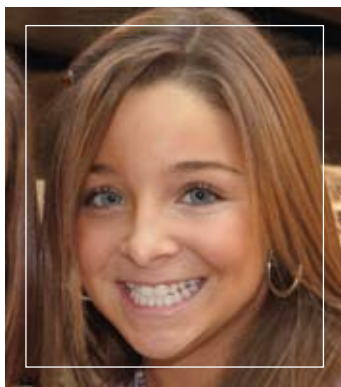
Cassy agreed, adding, “That particular ceremony was probably the saddest one I have ever been to because there were so many families there. I think that some people don’t really understand because they haven’t seen it with their own eyes.”

When Alyssa started writing her song, she knew there were other songs out there with similar themes. But many of them had sad endings. She wanted hers to be unique—by being positive. She wanted it to have a happy ending.

Cassy had the same idea. “I think that a lot of people want to focus on the negative,” she shared. “And [it’s] there ... but I always think there’s a silver lining to everything.”

Alyssa felt her original point of view could make the song stand out. “I wanted to write it from a girl’s perspective—‘My dad’s going off to war,’ ” she explained. “There aren’t any songs about younger kids with dads going off to war.

“Hopefully this song will allow people to focus on the good. [Yes], it is hard when he’s gone, but he is coming home.”



“I FEEL PROUD FOR DOING THIS. CASSY AND I ARE VERY GRATEFUL FOR WHAT WE HAVE NOW, AND KNOWING THAT OUR WORK WILL GO TO A GOOD CAUSE.”

>>ALYSSA GADDIS

Love for the Soldier

The Gaddis girls’ compassion extends beyond the families to the deploying Soldiers.

“I definitely respect [them] for their courage and strength, and their sacrifice,” Cassy stated. “I think in today’s society, especially now, people just want the war to end so much that they kind of forget what these Soldiers and their families face.

“I know what they go through. Their sacrifice for us is just jaw-dropping. [While] we sit here, they are over there training and fighting to help us. I think self-sacrifice is the definition of ... a Soldier.”

State Farm was there

Alyssa’s crafting of the tune was only the beginning of this project. The next question was how to get it “out there.”

Enter an unexpected ally—State Farm Insurance. Its Adopt-a-Soldier program was created to thank and support deployed troops by sending them care packages and has received national accolades. State Farm was also recently awarded the highest employer honor bestowed by the Department of Defense—the Freedom Award—for recognition of its support of employees serving in the Guard and Reserves.

Jim Gaddis ran into a State Farm rep at a Family Readiness meeting in Springfield and told the rep about his daughters’ song. The two discussed the possibilities, and State Farm offered to help pay for the recording studio time in Nashville, TN.

The Gaddis family also set up the Web site ThePriceofPeace.org, which promotes and sells downloads of the song. Profits from the song will be going to Illinois’ Family Readiness Groups and local VFWs.

“This is another effort to raise money for the Illinois Family Readiness groups, so they can support the troops,” said Bill Hrabik, President–Military Affinity Group at State Farm. “The goal is to raise money for the group, and awareness of the separation issues of deploying Soldiers and their families.”

The man with the plan

People often make the mistake of assuming it is not that hard to record a song.

Well, it entails a little bit more than just singing into a microphone. You need producers to handle the project. They have to know the ins and outs of music. And they have to be passionate about achieving top quality.

Hart Steen fit that bill for the Gaddis girls. A young musician in Nashville, Steen’s love of music radiates from him. A chance meeting hooked him up with the Gaddis girls. Jim and his wife Annette were visiting Nashville and went to the Commodore, a popular music venue. Steen happened to be onstage and the Gaddis’ took a liking to

his music. After the show, the three talked about Alyssa’s song, and Steen liked the concept.

Steen and the Gaddis’ kept in touch, and shared ideas. After much discussion, the girls were on their way to Nashville to record their song with Steen as their producer.

“They have been awesome,” Steen declared. “[I]t’s been a joy to have them in my life.”

Steen has his own investment in the concept of this song. A few years ago, his younger brother enlisted in the Air Force. Steen took notice of his brother’s transformation during an emotional graduation at Lackland AFB in Texas. “It was very powerful,” Steen recalled. “He had changed into a man.”

Trip to Music City

So the Gaddis family packed their bags and hit the road, aiming for the global hub of country music.

Cassy and Alyssa were ecstatic to be able to go, not because they got out of school for a few days, but because they were going to a place that

is rich in musical history. For nearly half a century, countless country artists have traveled to “Music City” to see if they have what it takes.

“When I got there, I thought about how amazing it was to be doing this,” Alyssa said, smiling. “I felt proud.”

Being in the big leagues, so to speak, made the girls step up their game. Working with professionals in a recording studio was a big step forward. But the girls adjusted.

It was an especially powerful experience for Alyssa—barely in 7th grade.

“Her maturity just skyrocketed when we were in Nashville,” Cassy revealed. “The fact that she wrote the song and took on all this responsibility—it made me really open my eyes. It made me look up to her. Even though she is my little sister.”

The girls took their time behind the mic to let loose and give it their all. With so much riding on their shoulders, this was no time to goof off. They worked hard—but enjoyed every minute.

“It was a really good experience. It was amazing—and surreal,” Alyssa shared. “I have never really done that before. I have gone

A GROUP EFFORT
CW5 Jim Gaddis and his daughter Cassy celebrate and relax after a hard day at work in the recording studio.



--Excerpt from "Price of Peace"

*The price of peace is paid by the families on their knees
praying tonight*

*By a Soldier's feet on some foreign street just trying to
save a life*

*By a daughter's tears as she sees her hero do what he
thinks is right*

The loss may run deep but if it's love we leave

Well that's the price of peace

to studios locally in Springfield, but this was different. I felt like I was a superstar."

"My wife and I are so proud of Alyssa and Cassy for what they have done to support the deploying Soldiers' families," Jim declared. "They genuinely care and want to make a difference in these people's lives."

The waiting is the hardest part

Returning home from Nashville, the girls left their song—and trust—with Steen. The process of mixing and editing music can take a long time, and the girls tried to be patient.

After anxiously waiting for several weeks, the finished piece was finally delivered, and the Gaddis family gathered at their Springfield home to listen.

"When we heard the rough version, it brought tears to my mom's eyes," Alyssa marveled. "It's amazing knowing that Cassy and I did that together."

Looking back on the experience, Alyssa shares, "People think that singers have it easy. They think all they have to do is sing. The day after the recording, I wanted to pull my hair out."

But that was only the beginning. "Now we get to do the really fun part of the process—send the message," Cassy shared. "To me, that's the most important part—talking to people and hopefully inspiring them the way [we've been inspired]."

Reaching out

The Gaddis' are invested in the success of the song not because of the chance to make it big but to help others.


"Hopefully, it will touch people deeply," Cassy said.

And, Alyssa adds, "It's for a good cause. All of the money made off of this is [being donated] to the military families."

It has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words. In the same way, a deployment is worth a thousand emotions. Maybe "The Price of Peace" will be worth a thousand smiles. **GX**

GOOD TIMES The Gaddis Girls take to time to laugh and have fun during their recording session in Nashville, TN.




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