

LCPL Eric A. Palmisano
Care Package Project

Eric was a soldier of the United States Marines. He was in the Marine Corps for 13 months total. He was deployed to Iraq in February of 2006, and he was killed on April 2, 2006. He had only been in Iraq for 2 short months. Eric was only 27 years old. He left behind family, friends, and his fiancé. Only a few days after finding their son had been killed in Iraq, two care packages his parents had mailed to him were returned to them as “undeliverable”. They stared at the returned packages, full of grief and disbelief. Wondering what to do with all the items meant for Eric, his parents realized that even though he no longer could use them, his fellow Marines certainly could. They removed the letters they wrote to their son, and sent the packages back to Iraq. This began the Care Package Project.

The scene is the basement of a woman’s house. It is where her corporation, The Care Package Project, takes place. She calls it “Care Package Central”. Also located in her basement, is her son, Eric A. Palmisano’s memorial room. What was once his bedroom is now a room full of all his achieved accomplishments in life. Photos, flags, and awards cover the walls. When his mother showed me, it took my breath away. She loves her son, and has changed the lives of many, many people because of Eric. Since they lost their son, Eric’s parents have mailed out over 2300 care packages to soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. All care package items and costly shipping expenses are paid for by the donations of people in our community and beyond. It is an amazing project that needs to continue to grow, enabling us to continue giving back to our troops what they deserve; support and love.

Eric’s mom picked me up on Nov. 10th around 2 p.m. to assist her at a Memorial Day service. We arrived at the Bethany Lutheran/Grace United Methodist church of Norway, MI half an hour before the service was scheduled to begin. I helped her carry everything she needed for her display into the church. After we were given a tour by the hostess of the service, we set up the Care Package Project display table.

People of all ages began arriving for the service. There was a donation table by the door for those that chose to donate. The donation table and the floor surrounding it were soon covered with care package items.



The service began and all were asked to rise to recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Christian Flag and then to the American Flag. The lady in charge then thanks everyone for coming. She introduces Eric's mother to the congregation and everyone gives thanks for all she has done. We then proceeded to sing a few songs, whose lyrics the leader had passed out beforehand. "God Bless America" and "This Land is Your Land" were a couple of the songs we sang together. Around 3:30 the 5th grader read us her award winning essay on Patriotism. The veterans then stood to be honored for their service to our country. Finally at 3:45 Eric's mom was called to give her presentation about The Care Package Project, which I recorded.

After the service ended, Eric's mother was extremely impressed and excited by all the donations. Many people helped us load all the donations into her car before we left. On her way to bring me home, she told me there were enough donations to have a Care Packaging event on the upcoming Saturday. My daughter, Abishae, and I were sure to attend.

It began at 10 a.m. When we arrived, most of the volunteers were already present. Bobbie (Eric's mom), was eager to get started putting together the care packages. We were split up into different sections, like an assembly line all around the room. The children colored pictures and wrote letters for the soldiers while the adults began packaging. Starting at the far end of the assembly line, the first section was responsible for completely filling plastic shopping bags with donated items. They had to try to get a little bit of everything to fit in these bags. There was also a section specifically assigned to sort through movies and pick out genres such as comedy or action. Bobbie didn't want any depressing or gory movies sent to soldiers. On the other end of the assembly line, others were taping boxes, making labels, writing out addresses, and so on. The bag would be put in a box upon a stocking full of candy for each soldier. We ran out of boxes before we did donations! There were 3 younger volunteer boys who hauled all of the ready-to-go boxes out to the garage. A total of 52 care packages were complete within only 3 hours, thanks to the volunteers. Bobbie shipped them to our soldiers the following Monday.



The major volunteer categories of The Eric A. Palmisano Care Package Project would be Grief, Love, and Support. These categories are organized best in this order, based on true sense of meaning and purpose as to why these people do what they do.

Like Bobbie, losing a close family member or friend to war is completely devastating. Almost unreal when she first found out and probably still to this day, losing someone so dear to her heart is the most emotionally painful experiences she would have to endure. It was grief caused by the death of her son, Eric, which led her to establish the Care Packaged Project. Helping and supporting troops in honor of Eric is the only reason his mother has been able to make his death into something absolutely beautiful. He is not gone; he lives on and is well known throughout the community. She finds meaning and purpose in this setting because she is making a huge difference in soldier's lives, in remembrance of Eric.



There were a couple Care Package Project volunteers present who were part of the next major category: Love. A currently pregnant woman and her three year old daughter were a part of this group. The woman's husband and child's father is a soldier for the National Guard. He has been deployed in the past, and has recently been told he is being deployed once again. Another woman who volunteers is the mother of a soldier who is currently overseas. He was actually one of the soldiers who we addressed multiple care packages to. He receives all of the care packages and distributes them throughout his fellow soldiers. The love they have for their family members and respect for those serving alongside of those members is where they find

their meaning and purpose in volunteering. They know how it feels to have a loved one deployed. They see firsthand how deploying affects soldiers. How important receiving these care packages is to them. It gives them strength and courage, knowing their loved ones are thinking of them and waiting for their safe return. Just like these women want their loved ones to have everything they need, they want all soldiers to have what they need.

The other few volunteers at the Care Packaging event would be part of the “Support” category. People who haven’t lost or experienced someone close to them go to war. They are simply just there to be a good person and help support the less fortunate. Whether they were friends of Bobbies or a compassionate loving person wanting to do well does not matter. They were volunteering to support not only families of soldiers, but soldiers themselves. They are the people who help to make a dramatic difference in others’ lives without expecting anything in return. The kind of people this world needs more of.

Vignette is demonstrated via video. It is a video of Eric’s mother, Bobbie, explaining to a group of church members all the details of The Eric A. Palmisano Care Package Project. She tells of how the project began, and how it works. Also, how much the organization has grown and developed.

I selected this cultural scene because I fit into the major category, Love. My big brother, Al, has been in the Army for almost 4 years now. He has been deployed to Iraq once. He would call me every single day while he was deployed, just to get his mind off of where he was. He loved getting letters or packages. It was something for him to look forward to. I was always really close to my brother, and it was very hard when he left for the military. I can’t imagine if I lost him to war. I feel for Bobbie, and I think how she has impacted the lives of others is incredible. I really enjoy being in her presence and doing anything I can to help her! She’s a truly amazing and inspirational woman.

I had no problems gaining entry to this cultural scene. Bobbie and I attend Our Saviors Lutheran Church together. She also knows my brother really well because of her love for soldiers. She babysat my daughter a couple weeks ago. It was my first time being to her house. When she showed me Eric’s memorial room, I knew I had found my cultural setting. She was happy to have me doing a class Ethnography paper about the Care Package Project. She wants people to know and help with it, because it’s for a great cause.

The types of fieldwork methods I used were observational notes and participant observation. I had multiple conversations with Bobbie who in this setting would be considered a key consultant. Although I never actually interviewed her, I learned many things about her corporation and how she turned a very sad, painful experience into something so great and positive.

My selection of data was influenced by Bobbie and all the volunteers of the Care Package Project. I want the whole story to be known. I want more people to help in this corporation because it is more than worth their time. Another huge influence on my selection of data was the outline and rubric to receive an A on this assignment. I chose what I observed in each volunteer’s meaning and purpose for being a part of this cultural setting.

I have learned way more about this cultural setting than I thought I could. I’ve learned how really great opportunities can come from horrible experiences. I’ve learned if one lets Him, God can heal any hurting heart. He will always help someone through hard times; all it takes is faith in Him. I’ve learned there are many different reasons why people choose to volunteer and to donate for all of our troops. I’ve learned to appreciate the people in my life, because I never know when or if they’ll suddenly be taken out of it.

I would do two things differently if I could. The first would be to begin my ethnography on the Eric A. Palmisano Care Package Project way sooner than I did. I would allow myself more time spent with Bobbie, and I would sit down and interview her.