On the Road to Finding Harmony

Corporal Jessie Fletcher is a 23-year-old Syracuse, NY, native. An avid runner, skateboarder and guitar player, Jessie worked two jobs and volunteered at school, mentoring younger students. Immediately following graduation from Indian River High School in 2008, he enlisted in the Marine Corps.

Jessie went through two deployments. Between the two, he met his fiancée, Emily, and was promoted multiple times.

In July 2011, during Jessie’s second deployment to Afghanistan, his patrol team was ordered to reorganize in a heavily mined area to provide additional rear security. Jessie was escorting another Marine to his position when he stepped on a non-metallic pressure plate, detonating an improvised explosive device (IED).

The explosion cost him both legs, two fingers on his left hand and his right thumb. Months later, following several surgeries, transfusions and countless hours of physical therapy, Jessie is recovering well and starting to regain his independence.

The Semper Fi Fund assisted Jessie with family support grants for travel and loss of income so that his family could be by his bedside as he recovered. He received an iPad to communicate with loved ones and friends, and a much-needed folding wheelchair. The Fund assisted with travel costs for him to fly home and see his family, and surprise his little brother at school (it was the first time Jessie’s brothers had seen him since his injury). His old high school also surprised Jessie with a “welcome home” social attended by friends, teachers and relatives.

With the Fund’s help, Jessie has received an adapted guitar that he can play with missing fingers and continue to pursue his love of music. Jessie is working with a team that provides guitar lessons to several wounded Warriors who are making music their new hobby.
A Word From Our Chairman

In the message written for the previous newsletter during the last holiday season, we mentioned that our nation’s Warriors continued to be engaged in our country’s longest war. Although there has been considerable discussion in the media about the end of combat operations in Afghanistan, we must all recognize that very dangerous activities continue to be undertaken by our magnificent young service men and women.

Further, these young Warriors often receive life-altering wounds, and the human cost is catastrophic for them and for their families. In many cases, it will take a lifetime of love, understanding, support and care for those who have borne our country’s burdens.

In addition, we must ensure proper treatment and therapy for those personnel suffering from Traumatic Brain and Post Traumatic Stress Injuries (TBI and PTSD) and PTSD. We encourage all of you who have been our loyal supporters over the eight years of Semper Fi Fund history (yes, we just reached our eighth anniversary) to spread the word and help educate others on the need for lifelong assistance to help a large number of our Warriors—and their families—as they courageously face the future.

As you know, your Semper Fi Fund (SFF) has provided vital assistance to our Marines, our Sailors and their families. As of today, we have offered 32,649 grants to 6,578 Marines and 3,425 grants to 916 Sailors. We have also provided the same support to members of the other Armed Forces whenever they are providing support to Marine operations and activities. For example, we have helped 157 Army Warriors with 639 grants, along with 34 grants to Air Force Airmen and eight grants to three members of our Coast Guard. Additional funding has been provided for a variety of programs such as transition assistance, home and vehicle purchases or modifications, wheelchairs, TBI/PTSD study, and adaptive exercise/sports equipment. Your generous support, coupled with the dedication, experience and creativity of our staff—plus the diligent, attentive efforts of our wonderful volunteer “Angels” across the globe—have built a Fund that is critical to the long-term recovery of our wounded Warriors.

In the past, we have often been asked why we did not help all the members of our Armed Forces when they were severely wounded or injured in the line of duty. Recently, a cadre of prominent Americans engaged the SFF with a request to expand our scope and develop an approach that would support all seriously injured Warriors and their families—regardless of their branch of service. Accordingly, and in concert with the leadership of our Armed Forces, we intend to meet this significant challenge because we believe it is best for our great nation. We have therefore formed the “America’s Fund” to meet this major task of providing vital assistance and support to our service men and women. To this end, we have already provided 13 grants under the America’s Fund.

It should be noted that this Fund is separate, and independent, from the SFF, as we do not intend to commingle funds. We will, however, use our heretofore successful business model and modus operandi. Further, our standard—wherein 95 percent of funds received go to our service personnel and their families—remains our target.

It is a rare privilege to be associated with the SFF team and its magnificent accomplishments. We are all truly excited that we will now have the opportunity to share insights and practices—opportunities developed through our involvement with many remarkable and inspiring Marines, Sailors and their families— with the wounded Warriors of all the services who have repeatedly sacrificed on far distant battlefields in what has now become over a decade of war. We remain eternally grateful to all of you who have supported our efforts—you indeed are special! Our goal must and will be: that no American service man or woman, or their families, should ever feel like they are alone during the long road to recovery.

May God Bless, and Semper Fidelis.

General Al Gray, USMC (Ret.)
29th Commandant of the Marine Corps
Chairman of the Board of Directors

Warrior Games Bring Out the Best

Over 1,600 fans, including first lady Michelle Obama, were on hand to celebrate the official opening of the 2012 Warrior Games presented by Deloitte on April 30 at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, CO. Hosted by the United States Olympic Committee, the opening ceremony took place on the Olympic Path and included a march of the 220 wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans who took part in the third annual competition May 1-5.

Five U.S. Armed Forces teams from the Marine Corps, Navy/Coast Guard, Army, Air Force and Special Operations, along with a United Kingdom Armed Forces team, faced off over the course of the week. The teams competed in seven sports: archery, wheelchair basketball, cycling, swimming, shooting, track and field, and sitting volleyball. Games were played at both the Olympic Training Center and the U.S. Air Force Academy.

The Semper Fi Fund was well represented, having given assistance to 59 of the 195 competing U.S. athletes. Semper Fi Fund Warriors brought home 24 gold, 31 silver and 23 bronze medals.

Bob Woodruff Foundation to provide family members of competitors with lodging, meals, T-shirts and more so they could cheer on their Warriors without financial burden.
A new year has come and Team Semper Fi’s schedule has been jam-packed. The team has grown tremendously and now includes over 345 athletes, up from 270 at the end of last year. It has participated in four events to date, helping provide opportunities for 272 service members, along with many others who are training and competing all over the country.

The year began with an Alpine Big Mountain Camp in Park City, UT. Working with the National Ability Center, Team Semper Fi (TSF) saw 22 service members take to the slopes of Park City Mountain Resort. There were varying ability levels, from those experiencing their first time on the snow to some Paralympic Development Team members—including a two-time National Champion—all learning from one another.

The next event for TSF was the Marine Corps Trials, hosted by the Marine Corps’ Wounded Warrior Regiment at Camp Pendleton, CA. There, 185 Marines (75 from Battalion West, 60 from Battalion East, 50 Veterans) and 35 service members from visiting countries competed in seven sports for a chance to represent the Marine Corps against the other services at the United States Olympic Committee 2012 Warrior Games. We’re proud to announce that 29 of the 50 Marines who made the team for the third annual event are Team Semper Fi!

March began in Fresno, CA, with the spectacular Blossom Trail Ride, one of TSF’s most scenic events. Fifteen service members and eight family members enjoyed this cycling event through the orchards of the San Joaquin Valley. Service members challenged themselves to one of the 60-mile, 40-mile or 20-mile routes. The next day, the team members enjoyed some camaraderie as they explored Yosemite National Park together.

The final event for March was a TSF community event in Charleston, SC, called the Cooper River Bridge Run. As is customary for this event, the weekend began with the Blue Star Moms hosting a dinner for our 10 service members and five family members. With 44,000 runners, this 10K is an amazing event for our Team.

April was an exciting month for TSF. The Team participated in the Sea Otter Classic in Monterey, CA, and took part in the opening of the 2012 Warrior Games at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, CO.

As Team Semper Fi has grown throughout the years, so have the success stories. While the Team provides athletic opportunities for hundreds of service members, many have excelled beyond the recreational level, providing inspiration to all of us. The Team now counts among its ranks 50 service members who are competing nationally or internationally in their chosen sport. Team Semper Fi is proud to support these athletes as they pursue excellence and show their more recently injured teammates what is possible when they pursue “Recovery Through Sport.”
Corporal Larry Bailey II grew up in Zion, IL, where he played football at Zion-Benton Township High School. He also liked to kickbox, surf, play volleyball and video games, and work out. In October 2007, he decided to follow in his father’s footsteps: He enlisted in the United States Marine Corps.

On June 28, 2011, in Helmand province, Afghanistan, his unit was moving to occupy a new patrol base when it was attacked by small-arms and machine-gun fire. While moving into position to repel the assault, Larry was struck by an improvised explosive device, costing him both legs and his left hand.

Presently, Larry is an outpatient at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center Bethesda (WRNMMC) in Maryland, where he receives daily physical and occupational therapy. The Walter Reed and Johns Hopkins Joint Experimental Surgery Program selected Larry for a hand transplant, and he is adjusting to his new prosthetic legs and hand. When he’s finished with WR, he plans to go to college in Illinois, major in international studies/international security, and get a job in the security or intelligence field.

The Semper Fi Fund assisted with family support grants to cover travel costs and basic necessities for family members as they stayed by Larry’s side during his time at WRNMMC. The Fund also helped Larry visit home in December (check out the photo of Larry and his dad at a Chicago Bulls game) and assisted with a family gathering at Walter Reed for Christmas.

**New Hand, New Hope**

On September 6, 2011, Petty Officer 1st Class Joseph Miller and his team responded to a request to clear a mined area. During the mission, he stepped on a mine, resulting in severe injuries. His left leg was amputated below the knee. He also broke his right hand and suffered injuries to his left arm. A medevac transported Joe to a field hospital, then to Kandahar province, Afghanistan. He was immediately flown to Landstuhl, Germany, and finally to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center Bethesda (WRNMMC) in Maryland.

After the explosion, Joe spent 17 days as an inpatient at WRNMMC. Remarkably, he was up and walking on prosthetics within 41 days of the explosion. He spent four additional months in rehabilitation at WRNMMC before transferring to complete his rehab training with United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) near Virginia Beach, VA.

The Semper Fi Fund provided Joe’s father and fiancée with family support grants so they could remain at his bedside during his entire recovery and rehabilitation process. The Fund also awarded Joe a vehicle grant, making it easier for him to drive while wearing his prosthetic. It also assisted him with travel for his first trip back to see his unit after the injury.

“I will do anything I can for the Semper Fi Fund, because the money they receive goes directly to help injured service members and their families,” Joe said.

**Family Fuels His Rapid Strides**

On October 21, 2010, Ben was on a dismounted patrol in Sangin, Helmand province, Afghanistan, when he was hit by a 20-pound IED that resulted in the amputation of both legs above the knee and shrapnel wounds to his face. He arrived at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, MD, and was then transferred to Walter Reed Army Medical Center to begin his rehabilitation.

Lance Corporal Benjamin Maenza was assigned to the fleet attached to 1st Combat Engineer Battalion, Charlie Company’s 3rd Platoon, based out of Camp Pendleton, CA. He deployed in September 2010, with 3rd Battalion 5th Marines.

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During his recovery and rehabilitation, the Semper Fi Fund assisted Ben’s family with support grants for his father, mother and girlfriend to remain at his bedside. Ben said, “The Semper Fi Fund made sure that I was never without anything I needed.

“When I first arrived at Bethesda,” he added, “I had nothing but the blankets that were covering me. When I needed clothes, they helped. When I purchased my truck, they helped. When I went home to see my family and friends, they helped. I can’t express in words how much the Fund has done for me and what a big part of the recovery process they’ve been for myself and others.”

In 2011, Ben returned home to Brentwood, TN, with plans to pursue a bachelor’s degree at Lipscomb University. Before fall classes start, Ben will also be taking part in the Semper Fi Ride for Heroes—setting a goal to ride recumbent trikes from Florida to California to raise awareness for injured service members.

**SETTING SIGHTS ON A DEGREE**

He plans to stay in the Navy on Active Duty once he has completed his medical boards.

We want to also congratulate Joe and his wife, Lia Bell, on their recent marriage. We wish them all the best as they start their new life together.
Patriotism Is Her Passion

Born in Cuba, Gladys Rodriguez knew what it meant to live in a Communist state before she and her husband, Bob, came to America in 1970. The experience gave her a deep-rooted appreciation for freedom. Since 2004, Gladys, now 69, has been donating money and volunteering with the Semper Fi Fund to help the veterans who are selflessly protecting that freedom on the battlefield.

Q: How did you get introduced to the Semper Fi Fund?
My daughter-in-law had a friend who was injured in Iraq. We went to see him at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. His wife told me about the Fund. I started contributing a little bit of money. Eventually, I began organizing a yearly fundraiser at the garden center I work at. In 2009, I came up with the idea of getting a cookbook together [with other Marine wives]. So far, it has raised $44,000.

Q: Why were you so inspired to get involved?
[My husband and I] have a tremendous amount of love and appreciation for this country. We really know what freedom means and how bad it is if we do not have it. We fell in love with the Semper Fi Fund. It’s a great part of our life right now. Anything we can do to help them, we are there.

Q: Have there been any experiences that have influenced your desire to help others?
Mostly it was our experience in Cuba. There were times we thought we would never get out of there. Once we were able to come to the States, we worked hard. In four years we were able to buy our own home. We were embraced by so many people that we became Americans in our heart, not just when we got our citizenship.

Q: When you aren’t helping with the Semper Fi Fund, are there any hobbies you enjoy?
Our lives revolve around the military. We have four sons. None of them chose to be in the military. So we feel an even bigger commitment to those who choose that life and have paid a great price for keeping us safe. So we send care packages to the troops, we volunteer at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. We do fundraisers. It’s a tremendous satisfaction.

Q: When you aren’t helping with the Semper Fi Fund, are there any hobbies you enjoy?
We are always amazed when service members take the time to thank us for the small way in which we serve them. They are the true heroes, but notes like this absolutely brighten our days:
“Thank you for your help and support. You truly are an asset to the system, and your service is deeply appreciated.”

Thank-You Note

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To all of you in the Semper Fi program, directly or indirectly involved, I cannot begin to say how much your help has meant to me and my family! Financially, you have provided me and my family a sense of relief. God Bless you all!! Thank you all so very much!!

LCpl Eric Kidder, USMC, and Family

Corporate Receives Home Depot Foundation Grant

Thanks to a $500,000 grant from The Home Depot Foundation, the Semper Fi Fund has been able to assist with providing adaptive housing for our injured service members. One of the grant’s recipients, Corporal Michael Nicholson, lost both legs and one arm below the elbow in an IED explosion while deployed to Afghanistan. The 22-year-old was sent to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center Bethesda (WRNMMC) in Maryland on July 11, 2011. With tremendous support from Hartmann Architecture; the Tampa, FL, community; and a grant from the Fund, an addition was made to Nicholson’s parents’ house in Tampa. Features including a new bedroom, an ADA-compliant bathroom and a wider exterior door will assist his recovery. Nicholson discussed how the Semper Fi Fund is making a difference.

Q: What was your reaction when you discovered you would receive the adaptive housing?
I was amazed. It was amazing that they would think of me.

Q: Why do you think the housing is so important?
Whenever I go home or visit my parents, I always have a place to go. I don’t have to worry about anything. I can just live normally.

Q: What adaptations to the house?
There are wide doors so a wheelchair can get through, smooth floors, a whole ADA bathroom with handrails and an adaptive shower. They widened everything so it’s easier to move around.

Q: How did you get in contact with the Semper Fi Fund?
They visited the hospital to help out families. They are always around to help.

Q: Why do you think the mission of Semper Fi Fund is so important?
It’s making it a lot easier for people during a stressful time. Just having them there—they’re someone you can fall back on. If you ever need anything, they can help you with it. It makes life just a little easier for people.

Q: Is this the first time you have received something from the Semper Fi Fund?
No, they’ve helped me out during my whole recovery. Even if it was little, like a jacket because it’s cold up here. They provided me with an iPad when I was in the hospital so I could stay in contact with my friends.

Bolstering Spirits by Saddling Up

The new Jinx McCain Horsemanship Program continues to provide opportunities for service members to harness their inner cowboy on a regular basis. In April, the program hosted yet another successful event with the third Cutting Horse Classic in Nokesville, VA. Horsemanship skills were on display, as were demonstrations showing how these skills can strengthen service members recovering both physically and mentally. At the conclusion of the competition, the Fund hosted a rousing BBQ and Barn Dance for the riders and guests, generously sponsored by TenCate.
A Note From Our Founder

Dear SFF Family and Friends,

We are delighted to share our eighth anniversary and our latest updates with you! I am happy to report that after eight years, our team is as committed and passionate as we were the day we picked up our incorporation papers in May 2004.

With you by our side, we have been able to help our wounded and critically ill Marines and Sailors, and other service members who were injured while attached to Marine units, with over $62 million in assistance.

With you by our side, we’ve helped 9,000 service members, and many of their family members, from point of injury or illness to recovery!

With you by our side, we’ve built a Fund that has maintained an A+ rating with the American Institute of Philanthropy and four stars (highest rating) from Charity Navigator!

With you by our side, we will continue to take this critically important mission forward to make sure our ninth year brings as much hope, inspiration and joy to those we are privileged and honored to assist: our service members and their families.

You have helped create a Fund that is relevant and critically important in today’s time of transition, as we stay faithful to those injured on the battlefield and in training accidents, those who are diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses while serving their country, and those who are at home, living with catastrophic injuries (both visible and invisible) from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Today, more than ever, we are committed to strengthening our efforts to sustain the Fund and make sure we are there when our service members and their families need us. We realize this is not a short-term commitment; it is one that we will strive to keep perfecting for decades to come.

With you by our side … we remain faithfully committed to those who have sacrificed much for our freedoms, for our democracy, and to make the world a safer and better place.

Forever grateful,

Karen Guenther
Founder, President and CEO
Semper Fi Fund

A NEW ADDITION TO THE SFF FAMILY

On May 10, a longtime friend of the Semper Fi Fund, Corporal Tony “Rony” Porta, welcomed his new baby boy into the world. Kenneth Charles Porta weighed in at 6 lbs., 14 oz., and is named after two of Rony’s heroes and friends. Having been at Rony’s side since his injury in 2007, many SFF team members consider him a special friend, and we are thrilled to welcome Kenneth to the SFF Family!
Semper Fi Fund
Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund
825 College Blvd., Suite 102
PMB 609
Oceanside, CA 92057
SemperFiFund.org

MAILING ADDRESS

A+ ranking from the American Institute of Philanthropy (AIP)
Highest Four Star Ranking from Charity Navigator

The Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.