

“This is a tremendous story of resilience and hope. Carlos and Rosemarie Evans tell a powerful personal account of overcoming trauma and tragedy. In so doing, they give hope to all who have experienced and are experiencing the wounds of war.”

—**TIMOTHY J. DEMY**, ThD, PhD, professor of military ethics, US Naval War College, and retired chaplain, US Navy

“Carlos and Rosemarie will bring you to tears—and cheers—with their frank story of hardship—and victory—after major trauma. Their vivid narrative of tough times, tough love, and God’s grace shows the way through both terrible circumstances and struggles of the soul. They don’t give you a feel-good formula or how-to tale. They do share how they beat the odds against survival and recovery by leaning on God and all the good people in their lives. You don’t have to love God or love marines to be enriched here, but you cannot read their story without coming to love Carlos and Rosemarie and being grateful for this time spent with them. You’ll learn from them that with Christ all things are possible!”

—**MARK A. JUMPER**, PhD, director of Chaplaincy and Military Affairs and assistant professor, Regent University School of Divinity

STANDING TOGETHER

THE INSPIRATIONAL STORY *of a*
WOUNDED WARRIOR *and* ENDURING LOVE

Carlos R. Evans *and* Rosemarie Evans
with Cecil Murphey

 Kregel
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Standing Together: The Inspirational Story of a Wounded Warrior and Enduring Love

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This work of creative nonfiction is told from the authors' perspectives and recalled to the best of their memories.

This is one couple's story. The path to recovery presented in this book is not intended as a guide to diagnose or treat medical or psychological problems. If medical, psychological, or other expert assistance is required, the reader should seek the services of a health-care provider or certified counselor.

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For our beloved daughters,
Nairobi and Genesis

*Now I have one hand,
and I'm touching more people than when I had two.
I don't have feet,
but I'm leaving more footprints than when I had two.*

—Carlos Evans

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The Phone Call

Rosemarie

Even though he couldn't call often, the phone call on Saturday, May 15, 2010, from Carlos was different from any of the others. Afterward, I couldn't stop crying.

He was on his fourth deployment, this time in Afghanistan. The previous three deployments had been in Iraq. Because of the time difference—they were nine and a half hours ahead of us in Fajardo, Puerto Rico—I was never surprised when he called at strange hours. I was so glad to hear from him, I didn't care if it was the middle of the night. Each call meant he was safe, and I was relieved.

I had flown to Puerto Rico, and that Saturday I had gone out of town for my uncle's wedding. Now, back at my mother's, I was putting both daughters to bed. My cell rang. Caller ID showed me it was a strange number, such as 1111111111, so I knew it was Carlos.

"Hey, baby, how are you?" I asked.

"I'm fine."

His voice sounded flat, unlike him. I was excited to hear from him, yet his tone upset me. "Baby, are you okay?"

"Everything here is different than before."

That was an odd thing for him to say and nothing like the usual upbeat Carlos. After a pause, he said, "You know I love

you, don't you? You know that you and my daughters are the most important part of my life."

"Yes," I said, "and you're the most important person in my life."

What's wrong? What isn't he telling me?

"Everything is different here, but I'm thinking about you all the time." Then he repeated, "You're the most important person in my life."

The phone went dead.

Why did he hang up? What's happened to him? Why was he talking that way? Was he saying goodbye to me? Is he in the hospital? Has he been badly wounded?

My tears flowed. I couldn't call him back because I didn't know his number. All night long I couldn't stop crying. I'd fall asleep for a few minutes and wake up sobbing. *No, dear Lord, don't . . . don't let him die.*

All the next day I waited for my cell to ring, but no calls came from Carlos. I didn't cry as much, but I fretted. I couldn't focus clearly on things I had to do because I kept hearing that sad tone in his voice. Then I would cry out to God to take care of him. For a short time I'd feel at peace, but minutes later I'd worry about him again.

Before going out of town, I had made a number of things to mail to Carlos, such as a photo blanket collage and a photo dog tag with our wedding picture, and I put photographs of the girls and me in an album. Our anniversary was a month away, and I wanted him to have those things because he was away from us. Father's Day was also in June, and I wanted it to be a special occasion for him and a reminder of how much we loved and missed him.

After the phone call, I didn't know if I should mail the package or not. Finally I pushed away my negative thoughts

about Carlos. If he had been badly injured or worse, the Marine Corps would have notified me. No notification must mean he was all right.

I kept repeating those words to myself. Slowly I calmed down and was able to focus on making him happy. Once Carlos receives the package, I told myself several times, he'll be reminded that we love him, and we didn't forget him while he was gone.

I thought of Carlos's mother, Virginia Evans, who also lived in Fajardo, Puerto Rico. I had worked hard on the blanket and decided to show her everything I was going to send him. I drove to her house that day on my way to the post office.

Virginia smiled as she examined the contents. "Oh, this is all so pretty." She picked up the blanket and the photographs one by one and assured me that her son would like everything.

After I expressed my concern over the telephone call, she hugged me and assured me that Carlos was fine and reminded me, "He's in God's hands."

"I know." Being with Virginia often eased my concern about Carlos's safety.

I sealed the package and drove to the post office. Before I got there, my cell rang. It was a local number that I didn't recognize. "Hello," I said.

"Is your name Rosemarie Evans?" a man asked.

"Yes, it's me."

He identified himself as being with the Marine Corps. After that I don't remember anything else until he added. "We're in front of your mother-in-law's house. We need you to come back immediately."

They knew how to reach me because earlier that morning

I had received a call from the Family Support Program in Camp Lejeune at Jacksonville, North Carolina. The caller asked me how I was doing and where I was staying. I gave him the address of my mother-in-law.

More than once my husband had said,
“If you see marines in front of the house,
they’re going to tell you bad news.”

“What’s wrong?” My voice was shaking, but I couldn’t stop it.

“We’re waiting for you,” he said. “We’ll explain when you get here.”

“No! No!” I yelled before I hung up. They had terrible news to tell me. *Carlos is dead. That’s why he called yesterday. He was dying.*

More than once my husband had said, “If you see marines in front of the house, they’re going to tell you bad news.”

As I drove back, I thought of what I’d seen in movies when two military officers knocked on the door. Only the year before, Carlos and I had watched the film *Taking Chance*, in which the body of Lance Corporal Chance Phelps, an Iraq war casualty, is escorted home by Marine Colonel Michael Strobl (played by Kevin Bacon).

Carlos is dead. I was crying so hard that several times I had to brush away tears so I could see well enough to drive. I kept screaming, “No! No! Not Carlos!”

When I reached Virginia’s house, three marines stood next to a government car in front. I parked my car, ignored them, and rushed up to the house. It sounds silly now, but it was as

if I didn't have to talk to them in order to know my Carlos was gone.

I started knocking on the door and yelling, "Virginia!"

She opened the door, shocked at seeing me. "Why have you come back so fast? Why are you crying?"

"Virginia, they're here! They're here!"

Virginia shook her head, confused. "Who's here?"

I turned and pointed to the marines in dress uniform who were walking up the driveway.

Then she knew.

Virginia grabbed me, and we both cried uncontrollably for several seconds. The three men stood in front of us, saying nothing.

As soon as we calmed down a little, one of them said, "May we come inside?"

Virginia nodded and opened the door for them.

Once inside, one of them looked straight at me before he said, "Mrs. Evans, we are here because we have to notify you that your husband was on foot patrol. He stepped on a bomb, on an IED—"*

"Is he—is he dead?"

"He lost both legs instantly, and we cannot assure you whether he is still alive."

I was so emotionally overwrought that I heard only "lost both legs."

"Is my son still alive?" Virginia asked.

"We do not know," the man said softly. "He was badly hurt, and doctors have been trying to assess his wounds."

"We came to prepare you," said one of them, who identified

* An IED, or improvised explosive device, is a bomb with a detonating mechanism, made in an unconventional way. IEDs are commonly used as roadside bombs.

himself as a chaplain. “Because of the time difference, we need you to get prepared for the worst—for everything.”

I started crying again, and this time I stopped thinking about myself or missing him but thought instead of how much Carlos must be hurting. I’m a nurse and had recently updated my certificate and received my license for prehospital trauma life support. The course had focused on accidents outside the hospital and included studies on people who had lost arms and legs after blasts such as explosions or bombs. I knew too much to listen objectively.

My whole system went numb. My tears continued to flow, but I couldn’t think or say anything as I stared at them.

Then the chaplain began to pray and pulled me back to reality. His voice sounded like someone speaking with authority and compassion.

One man had given me the bad news, and now the second was asking God to give me the strength to bear it, no matter what happened. His powerful words calmed me, and I was able to stop crying.

As soon as the marines left, I called my dad and other family members. All of us are Puerto Rican and part of a closely knit family. I didn’t trust myself to drive to my house, so I asked Dad to come over to take me to his home. My mother was taking care of my two daughters.

When we reached my parents’ house, Mom saw my face and asked, “What happened to you?”

“Carlos was injured and . . .” I broke down, and between convulsive sobs, I told her everything.

Mom held me and started praying. Afterward she said, “I’ll take care of the girls. You take care of yourself.”

Within an hour, the word had spread among our family and close friends, and the house filled with relatives and

church members. Many were kneeling or standing as they prayed. I looked around, grateful to God that we had a wonderful support system. As more family and friends arrived, I began to feel better.

With God's help and the support of my friends, I can survive this.

I reminded myself, Carlos is still alive. He may not have legs, but he'll still be Carlos. He's the only man I have ever loved. Each time tears came, someone seemed to grab me and pray for me.

"Don't believe Carlos will die," more than one person said. "Trust God, and we're all believing for the Lord to spare him."

Others promised they would come to see me every day to pray with me and to let me know they were with me in my pain.

The first time I heard those words, I didn't want to inconvenience them. "You don't have to come. You can call me—"

"No! I want to be here—to see you face-to-face," one friend said. "I can't do that by phone."

Then everyone was gone. I waited and prayed. Time seemed to drag by, and I frequently checked my phone to make sure the sound was on and that it was fully charged.

When I was finally alone, with my two daughters asleep, God's peace came over me and I slept.



The next day, a marine officer called and said matter-of-factly, "We can say nothing by phone. Please wait at the Diaz home for us to inform you of the circumstances." They didn't say when they would come.

I clung to the fact that he used the word *circumstances* instead of saying Carlos had been killed. I was filled with anxiety, wanting to know, and many times gave way to tears. Finally, about five o'clock, they arrived. By that time, once again the house had filled up with family members and friends.

"Is he—is he alive?" Carlos's mother asked.

"Yes, as far as we know," one of them said.

"Everything remains the same," the marine liaison said. "Your husband is still at the military hospital, Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany."

They had nothing more to tell me and left.



True to their word, those friends and relatives who promised to visit me each day came to see me. Their prayers and encouragement comforted me, but I still had no real answers. Carlos was alive, but . . .

"No! He's alive!" I shouted. "He is alive." I cried off and on through the night. I was such a mess that I couldn't take care of Nairobi, who was three years old, and Genesis, who was barely at the crawling stage. I finally called my mother, and she took care of our two children. That made me feel guilty, but I wasn't emotionally able to give them what they needed. I couldn't eat, and I slept little. I felt deep pain in my heart that wouldn't let go.

The next day, about the same time, the same marines came. When I saw their faces, I started to cry again.

Then the first marine smiled.

That's when I knew my husband was still alive.