

## Resilience.... As Tough as They Come

There is a word that has been talked about a lot this last year. I see it often in newspaper articles; it is part of my Civil Air Patrol teaching to cadets. It is a good word... **resilience**.

Resilience - how do we define it? Quick definition: The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties.

If you look in Wikipedia, you will see *“Resilience is the ability to mentally **or** emotionally cope with a crisis or to return to pre-crisis status quickly. Resilience exists when the person uses "mental processes and behaviors in promoting personal assets and protecting self from the potential negative effects of stressors.”*

I think we would all agree that we have each needed resilience to deal with the challenges of this past year. The pandemic has altered our society, caused immense hardships, resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths in our country. Schools, workplaces, homes, synagogues, every part of society has been affected. There was a time this past summer that we thought there could be a return to normalcy. But the virus has mutated... and now we are returning to a state of societal angst and concern.

Resilience is something our soldiers need as well... The difficulties of serving in a combat zone... especially Afghanistan, have been well documented. The term PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) has entered our vocabulary as never before. Think how that term would especially apply to a soldier who was wounded in action or has witnessed the deaths of his comrades.

It is only one of the many tragedies of war that tens of thousands have been wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. But to my knowledge, only **Five** have survived **quadruple amputee injuries**. I cannot conceptualize this.... Quadruple amputee injuries.... How can this be a situation where one could EVER expect to find resilience? And yet, it has happened. I am going to share with you one soldier's story. It is not just as a former military chaplain that I respond so viscerally to his story, although I know it plays a good part.

Thousands of soldiers have died in Afghanistan. United States Army Staff Sergeant Travis Mills was sure that he would become another statistic when, during his third voluntary tour of duty in Afghanistan, on April 10, 2012, he was caught in an IED blast four days before his twenty-fifth birthday. Against the odds, he lived, but at a severe cost—Travis became one of the five soldiers from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to survive quadruple amputation.

Suddenly forced to reconcile with the fact that he no longer had arms or legs, Travis was faced with a future drastically different from the one he had imagined for himself. He would never again be able to lead his squad, stroke his fingers against his wife's cheek, or, he thought, pick up his infant daughter.

Travis struggled through the painful and anxious days and months of rehabilitation so that he could regain the strength to live his life to the fullest. With enormous willpower and endurance, the unconditional love of his family, and a generous amount of faith, Travis surprised everyone with his remarkable recovery. **RESILIENCE, RESILIENCE, RESILIENCE.** Even without biological limbs (prosthetics today are amazing), today he swims, dances with his wife, rides mountain bikes, drives his daughter to school, and helps other wounded veterans.... And yes, picks up his daughter. His book, Tough As They Come, tells his story. I thank Iris for encouraging me to read it. And if this man can still embrace life... how can we not as well. How can we not go beyond our minimalist concerns and worries to see that life can provide beauty and meaning under all circumstances.....

You should also know that Resilience is not limited to the military.... **READ SLOWLY**

*Many of you are aware that Iris's daughter Jenn was run over by a town snowplow operated by a reckless, negligent driver this past December. As Iris shares: Jenn was not expected to live. When it became apparent that she might survive, her medical team feared the loss of a leg and/or serious infections. Jenn spent 5 weeks in hospitals after tolerating 12 surgical procedures. Once home, she began intense physical therapy, wound dressing changes, trips by ambulance back to the hospital, along with almost intolerable pain. Gradually and miraculously, she graduated from her at-home hospital bed, to a wheelchair, to a walker, to 2 canes, then 1 cane... to walking (gingerly) without assistance. She is now driving and, by her own choice, back to working part-time, despite continuing to be in chronic, intense pain. She may be facing more surgical procedures. Yet, as she wrote in those early days, "I laugh more than I cry; and I am happy more than I am sad." As are many of you, Jenn is a great example of someone with grit, determination, a good attitude... buoyed by resilience, along with the prayers of many of you who are hearing these words.*

The journey to recovery for Travis was not an easy one. By his hospital bed, after being medevaced to Walter Reed Hospital, there was a plaque with the Biblical verse...."Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9)." Travis wrote that he thought.... *"Hmph, I wasn't too happy with God just now. Where was God when I stepped on that IED?"*

He was treated with an experimental procedure that put him in a ketamine coma... drastic and dangerous. But it worked. After he returned to consciousness, he looked at that plaque again.... He wrote: *"My anger wasn't gone completely, but in my mind and soul I felt a glimmer of hope. My situation sucked, yes. But I was beginning to see some perspective. There was much work to be done. Huge work. An enormous challenge lay ahead of me.... Sure, if I could have changed things I wouldn't have been in this situation. But I couldn't change things. Being a quadruple amputee was my new reality.... For higher reasons I would never know, I was being called to walk a new and unknown pathway. I would need to be strong and courageous, just like I'd always been. I wouldn't be terrified. I had a wife and daughter I needed to live for, and God had said He was with me."* (204)

I invite each of you to read the book. Nothing could seem to be more shallow than to call a story like this a "feel good" story, yet that's really exactly what it is. The courage and humanity that Travis Mills shows are timeless and above politics. Which is good, because I am giving a sermon about resilience and not politics.

Mills' story is inspirational. The kind you can't put down. The kind that makes you cry with joy and pain. The kind that makes you feel petty with your mundane problems and makes you promise not to complain. He has the fortitude, the upbringing, the support system and the optimism to get through anything. If he can do what he did, maybe each of us can meet smaller hurdles head-on and prevail. Mills teaches a life lesson that can serve well. **Concentrate on the stuff you CAN control. The rest will drive you crazy.**

Travis inspires thousands every day with his remarkable journey. He doesn't want to be thought of as wounded. *"I'm just a man with scars," he says, "living life to the fullest and best I know how."*

The final words of his book are *"To live in freedom. To go forward. To love your family. To make something of your life. To never give up. To never quit."*

## **RESILIENCE**

Shana Tova... a year of health, of safety, of love, and of resilience!