

Run For The Wall An MIA Daughter's Experience

You never know when your life is going to change – when you will see life and your surroundings through a different pair of glasses, when you will accept gifts that have been offered, though never seen as yours to accept, when your heart will grow...

Run For The Wall 2010 offered me a new pair of glasses, a plethora of gifts and a swelling of my heart. I am honored to have been a part of this year's ride.

Why? Because I am Ron Forrester's daughter. He's Missing in Action.

RFTW, for me, started in late 2008 when I was in San Jose and met Doug Lyvere, aka Sgt Major, at the American Legion. He shared with me what RFTW meant to him, and asked to carry my father's picture with him. That was the beginning of our "picture project" and brought me to Rancho Cucamonga in 2009.

Last year, my plan had been to fly out and bring photos of our MIAs that would be carried to D.C., and fly home to Austin before heading to D.C. to meet you, then participate in Rolling Thunder for the first time. My dear friend, with whom I was riding in Rolling Thunder said, "Ride with them. At least one day." So I did. That sole day (or shall I say "soul" day) in 2009 started my true journey with RFTW, leading me to RFTW 2010.

Cowboy called me during the Kerrville reunion in 2009 to tell me I had a ride for 2010. I was on way my back from "The Ride Home" and said, "I can't ride with you. You're a Road Guard!" (I learned a few things on that one day...) He said, "Little Sister, you're riding with me. It's settled." I was happy and my heart smiled.

I knew I couldn't do the whole run, as much as I wanted to... I'm a single, working mom. A week off and a holiday weekend? I could pull that... Perfect. RFTW pulls into Odessa, TX on a Friday. The real beauty? I'm from Odessa, TX, and so is my father, Capt Ron Forrester, USMC, MIA 12/27/72. It was the perfect place to join and start my personal journey.

I left Odessa in 1989. I had been back to visit family, but had never been to the Permian Basin Memorial before. My hometown did me

proud on that memorial. I think it was the BEST, second only to the The Wall. The elephant grass, the helicopter, the healing vibe....

Along our way over the next 10 days, I met some of the most awesome people on the planet. While I experienced the kindness of strangers in the towns where we stopped, I was overwhelmed by the genuine love of your community while traveling with you. I cannot BEGIN to thank the riders of RFTW enough for the love and caring I felt.

In an effort to keep it brief, can I just say "Mississippi" and "Wytheville, VA"??? I mean really – I was blown away.

Which brings me to my last point... You ever get that feeling that you're doing the right thing?? I experienced it over and over with RFTW. I knew my father was with me in spirit through it all. I can't begin to explain this feeling, but will share examples of how I know...

After I spoke at the 2009 kick-off to say THANK YOU for what you do, I sat down at my table and a man at the table behind me tapped my shoulder. I turned around to see a man with tears in his eyes and went to him. He couldn't speak at the moment, so he showed me his wrist. It bore a well-worn MIA bracelet with Daddy's name on it. We hugged, shared tears and promised never to forget. The man didn't know Dad or I, he just wanted a "Texas boy" when he got his bracelet in 1977.

This year, just as I was putting down my suitcase and hoop, Sgt Major comes to me and says "Stop what you're doing and come with me now." A man from Odessa had been speaking with Sgt Major and showed him his bracelet. My father's name was on the bracelet. After being introduced to Mike Jackson, I was shown his motorcycle that prominently shows Daddy's name as well. He said, "I take him everywhere." Why? "Because he's a hometown boy."

Flame wrote about this on her Facebook blog, and a responding post found yet another man who has been wearing my father's bracelet for years. Then in early June, an email came from a man who randomly had been in Weatherford, out and about the day we all came through. A veteran himself, he came out to meet us. He checked out the website and was shocked when he saw Ron Forrester's kid. Yes – he has been wearing Dad's bracelet for 20+ years.

To answer that question – YES, I was doing something right. I was with YOU, RFTW. Dad agrees as you can tell from above.

I am honored to have met you, to love you and be a part of your family. I cannot express in words what the ride did for me, but know I love and appreciate each and every one of you for taking the time to do this and to remember our POW/MIAs.

So what, 320ish days until we do it again?? See you then!!