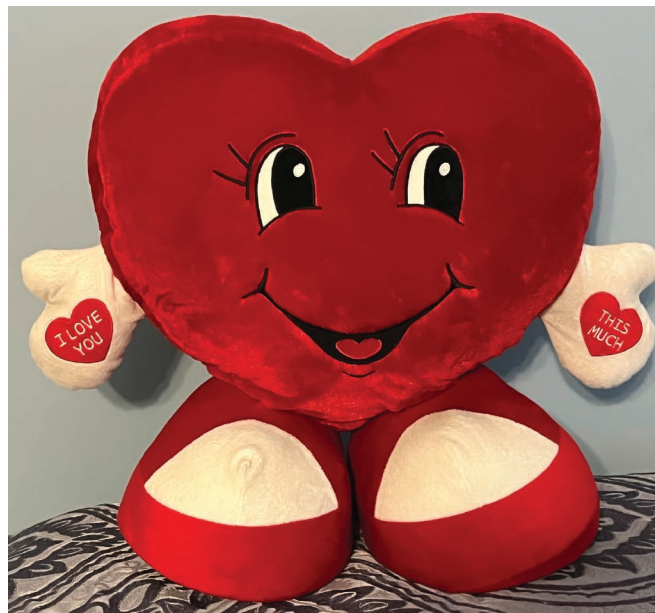




## About Love

This month around the world we celebrate what I affectionately refer to as the “Love Day.” We think of love during this time in such narrow terms, and yet in truth love is so incredibly vast. For some of our recipients this day may be altogether heartfelt and happy, and yet for others it can feel heartbreaking, bittersweet or just plain bitter. Valentine’s Day a.k.a. the Love Day surely evokes memories for me. I will never forget my last Valentine’s Day with Jerry— it is like a moment frozen in time through photographs and artifacts of the past. I have a giant stuffed animal that we call “Mr. Heart Man” at our house, which Jerry surprised me with that day.



I try to remember the sweet moments and let go of the hard feelings and the pain of the fact that he’s not here to continue to celebrate this holiday with me. Sometimes it works and sometimes the effort falls flat.

This month I want to widen our stance on love as we approach this special day, so here are a few perspectives on the topic of love. It’s not specifically romantic love but love in a much fuller sense. These thoughts touch my heart and I hope they do yours as well:

“When I die give what’s left of me away to children and old men that wait to die. And if you need to cry, cry for your brother walking the street beside you. And when you need me, put your arms around anyone and give them what you need to give me. I want to leave you something, something better than words or sounds. Look for me in the people I’ve known or loved, and if you cannot give me away, at least let me live in your eyes and not in your mind. You can love me best by letting hands touch hands, and by letting go of children that need to be free. Love doesn’t die, people do. So, when all that’s left of me is love, give me away.” – Mourner’s Kaddish Meditation

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"I have succeeded as gloriously as anyone who has ever lived; I have loved another with all my heart and soul, and to me, this has always been enough." - Noah, The Notebook

"You need to get out of your head and live in your heart." - Kathy Humphreys

No matter where our hearts are at this time, and no matter what thoughts cycle through our heads life is always better lived from the heart. Our love, YOUR love, and love in all its varied forms is needed in this world right now.



I hope you have found or are finding a way to share your heart with your community, your loved ones, and the world.

My heart is always with you.

Nancy Gass  
Surviving Spouse of SSG Jerry Gass Jr.  
Gold Star Family Home Program Recipient



# find a way to love who you are



"Do you love me?" Alice asked. "No, I don't love you!" Replied the White Rabbit. Alice frowned and clasped her hands together as she did whenever she felt hurt. "See?" Replied the White Rabbit. "Now you're going to start asking yourself what makes you so imperfect and what did you do wrong so that I can't love you at least a little. You know, that's why I can't love you. You will not always be loved Alice; there will be days when others will be tired and bored with life, will have their heads in the clouds, and will hurt you. Because people are like that, they somehow always end up hurting each other's feelings, whether through carelessness, misunderstanding, or conflicts with themselves. If you don't love yourself, at least a little, if you don't create an armor of self-love and happiness around your heart, the feeble annoyances caused by others will become lethal and destroy you. The first time I saw you I made a pact with myself: I will avoid loving you until you learn to love yourself."

-Excerpt from Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

## My Perspective on Love After Loss



Love is often defined as intense, deep affection. What does the word love imply for you? Love conjures up feelings of comfort, friendship, commitment, and compassion. Some describe love as loyalty, patience, and kindness.

Love extends grace and helps us endure life's complex challenges. It's the gentle push of encouragement to live beyond our self-imposed limitations. Love is the cherished memories that guide us through the darkest of nights.

Love before the loss of my husband looked dramatically different. A typical celebration of Valentine's Day represented mutual acknowledgment and appreciation of our love over dinner with flowers and a glass of wine— seemingly cliché but true.

Our lives were filled with constant obligations that demanded our time, but this holiday was about focusing on and celebrating our love. Everything changed after Brad's untimely death, and our once cherished holidays became painful memories.

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I've heard experts say that grief is the price you pay for love. That simple truth resonates within me; I suspect many feel the same. Romantic dinners are now replaced with gratitude and love for the support system that I have gained over the past four years. My heart, although at times still heavy, has so much love and appreciation for the relationships that have become vital in my life since Brad's passing.

During the holidays I find myself requiring additional support. This would come in the form of an ever-so-familiar firehouse dinner with the brothers and sisters Brad called his family. I still find comfort in the familiar sights and sounds of the firehouse. A sense of perceived normalcy that provided strength and helped fulfill my need to be a part of a culture Brad was passionate about.

Love is multi-dimensional, traversing space and time. Its boundaries always expand, even after loss and heartbreak. Love is the mechanism that keeps us moving forward, even if only one step at a time. It's about learning to embrace the people in our lives and not taking them for granted, and to fully comprehend what life without them can be.

In so many ways, my heart has stretched and grown in love and dedication in a way that I may have never recognized in the past.

During this holiday of love, I hope that each of us remembers our loved ones with a familiar smile and all the comfort our hearts can contain.

May we remember to give ourselves grace and forgiveness during grief as we navigate life. Give yourself permission to continue or alter traditions during the holidays that would encourage or inhibit healthy healing. Allow yourself the opportunity for growth while developing healthy support systems.

There is no right or wrong way to heal and move forward in life; however, with faith and an open heart, we can find opportunities to live beyond circumstances. To honor every memory of the past while firmly thriving in the present.

A legacy of love is something all can proudly display.

Melanie Clark  
Surviving Spouse of Lieutenant Bradford Clark  
Fallen First Responder Home Program Recipient

# Unconventional Ways to Celebrate Valentine's Day - The "Love Day"

- Plan a weekend trip for yourself and the kids for some family fun.
- Put up a pink Valentine's Day Tree as a sign that your love is sure to grow.
- Plan a special fun activity to do with a friend like a craft night or a game night.
- Write a love letter to your hero addressing how you continue to express your love for him or her in the world.
- Take your kids out to dinner and share your love story about your hero and what made you fall in love with him or her.
- Volunteer somewhere that fills your heart with love.
- Make a love bucket list of things you want to do to grow love in your community or the world.
- Plan a baking date with a friend to make sweets together and then gift them to those you love.
- Have an indoor picnic.
- Go play at an arcade with friends and/or family.
- Set aside some funds to use on Valentine's Day like spending it on an experience that you can look forward to.
- Write a love letter from your head to your heart as if they were separate entities, and express what you wish for yourself in every aspect of your life.



# Let Us Do Good Village

Tunnel to Towers is pleased to announce one of our newest initiatives—the development of the *Let Us Do Good Village* in Land O’ Lakes, FL. It is a first-of-its-kind community that will provide mortgage-free homes for our *Smart Home* recipients, Gold Star Family Home Program recipients, and First Responder Home Program Recipients.



The *Let Us Do Good Village* will be a community of approximately 100 homes exclusively for our home recipients. Home recipients will benefit from living in a community of other families like theirs, and will have the opportunity to come together to support one another.

In December 2021 Tunnel to Towers broke ground on this historic project. On December 17, 2022, the Foundation welcomed the first family into the *Let Us Do Good Village*, a Gold Star Family, and a ribbon cutting was held for the home dedication. Each home in the village will be built as needed for recipients who would like to live in this community.

The *Let Us Do Good Village* is a secure gated community that will feature a 20,000 square foot amenity center, an indoor regulation basketball court, a 40-seat movie theatre, an ADA-compliant fitness center, a game room, an Olympic sized swimming pool complete with an outdoor kitchen, tennis and pickleball courts, and more. All homes will be zero entry so that neighbors of all physical abilities will be able to visit each other’s homes if desired.



Tunnel to Towers intends to allow existing recipients, based upon request, to transition from their current mortgage-free home into a home in the Village if desired. This will be on a first come first serve basis. In time, the Foundation will be building at least one model *Smart Home* and one model Gold Star and Fallen First Responder home to be used as trial homes. This is for existing recipients to visit and experience the Village if they are considering this option and would like to first get to know the area to make the best decision for them and their families.



The goal for the *Let Us Do Good Village* is to bring families with similar backgrounds together to heal and help one another.

If you are interested in learning more about *Let Us Do Good Village*, please contact your *In the Line of Duty* Program Manager via email anytime. We are thrilled at the potential healing and support that will grow through and from the families that become residents of this very special community.

## What is love?



Love is defined as a deep and tender feeling of affection, attachment, or devotion to a person.

From the beginning of our journey in life we are born and made with love... and as we grow, we are shown what love is.

At an early age we begin to notice how our parents live, we learn the ways they make sure we are okay and observe how they give it all to care for us. As we grow into adolescents, we start to express that same conduct of love towards others. As we become young adults, we begin to express those feelings to others with whom we have an attraction. As we grow into adulthood, we realize more and more that love is not just a feeling. Love goes way beyond butterflies in our bellies, though it sure is a good indication that an immense feeling of attraction is present!

Love is expressed in so many ways. Where do we see love? We see love in those that feed the hungry. We see love in those that heal the sick. We see love in those that protect the defenseless. We see love in those that become selfless and give it all to see others do well. You see love is not just a feeling but also an ACTION— an action that shows the love that a person has towards life and others. Love is a feeling, but beyond just the feeling it is through actions that we demonstrate the love we have towards others. We can find one of the best descriptions of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 where it says:

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*“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.”*

What greater of an example of love than what it is demonstrated in John 3:16 that reads: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Again, we are shown that action is love. Matter of fact, dare I say that action is greater than words! Though words carry a significant weight when directed towards anyone and also have a cause and effect, it is the ACTIONS that determine the outcome.

How do you see love? Will you dare to do good and demonstrate love by your actions towards others? It is this way that we ALL can make this world a better place. We might never know the impact our love, through our actions, could have on the lives of others. One thing is for sure: it WILL have an impact! If we are able to see the outcome of our love through actions, then that is even better because it can act as fuel for us to continue to do good.

For some great reason the Bible states that it is better to give than to receive. So, let us practice to give more love through actions AND words. Let us do our part in making a better place for our families and for our fellow citizens of the world. Let us all love each other and see the good in all.

In conclusion my perspective on love is to be selfless and seek the benefit of others through any righteous channel. It is better to give than to receive. It is to express the kindness of our hearts through actions and words. It is to cry together. It is to laugh together. It is to reach out for no reason and ask how things are going. It is to create relationships and really get to KNOW each other. It is to lift someone up if they fall. We can all do this! We all have this one incredible life to live so as the Bible says in Galatians 6:10 *“Therefore, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those that belong to the family of believers.”*

Ezequiel Rodriguez-Guadalupe  
U.S. Army PFC  
Smart Home Program Recipient

