



**Tunnel to Towers Foundation**  
T2T.ORG

# Renewal and Growth

## Renewal and Regrowth

An injured soldier is more than just a statistic. In our family, he is a loving husband, a doting father, and a provider. His injury, however, did not come without cost.

My husband, Matt, was catastrophically injured in Afghanistan in 2010. The loss of his right leg changed the course of his life forever. After his injury he had to endure several surgeries, intense therapies, and the healing process continues to this day fourteen years later.

In the last decade, Matt has had to grow and change, sometimes willfully, and other times not. He was forced to change his outlook on what life would be like for himself. He had a renewed sense of belonging when he found adaptive sports at Walter Reed Medical Center and played soccer and hockey with other amputees. The sports brought a new sense of accomplishment and value to Matt's life and it enhanced his recovery, both mentally and physically.



Since then, Matt has evolved into a father of six beautiful children. His journey into fatherhood has required him to grow and heal the invisible wounds that accompany many soldiers into civilian life. Matt, however, faces the ghosts of his injuries with bravery and courage, just as he has tackled every other challenge he has faced.

As a family, we can say with confidence that because of Matt's willingness to grow from his experiences, we have grown as well. Matt says that his family is what motivates him to pursue more opportunities. For the first time in twelve years, Matt is working a civilian job, which has not come

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without challenges. He has pursued higher education, been licensed to fly drones in pursuit of a photography career, and more. He even spent time coaching a local sled hockey team. Matt's drive gives everyone around him a sense of hope and pride.

I am proud to call him my husband, and our children are proud to call him "Dad".

**Ashley Castillo del Muro**

Spouse of Catastrophically Injured Veteran U.S. Army SPC Mathew Castillo del Muro  
*Smart Home Family Program*



## **Fresh Start, Embrace and Refocus**

### **Fresh Starts & Embracing Change**

Fresh starts can be amazing at any age and in any stage of life. They assist with your emotional, spiritual and mental growth.

As women, it is essential to keep in touch with our feminine energy. Feminine energy is enchanting, vivacious and free. Never forget how beautiful you are. Know your value and self-worth as a *Queen*. So, let's make that fresh start the best ever!

### **Embracing Feminine Energy**

Embracing feminine energy is a powerful and empowering journey. Here are some tips to help you embrace and cultivate your feminine energy:

1. Connect with your intuition.
2. Nurture yourself through self-care.
3. Embrace your beauty inside and out.
4. Cultivate self-compassion and self-love.
5. Embrace your feminine essence.
6. Create sacred rituals to honor and connect with your feminine energy.

### **Finding Love Again**

Don't be afraid to love again. Guilt might creep up, but that's normal. Take your time, be patient and embrace the moment of the experience.

Keep your eyes open and don't forget to pray and fast for clarity. It's okay to try again. The process of learning how to love someone else can be terrifying, but incorporating prayer and fasting can bring mind-blowing results.

Remember, it's all about God's timing, not yours, so don't give up if a relationship doesn't work. Pace yourself, give time to yourself and reflect.

### **Refocus on Your Goals & Self-Love**

Let's refocus on our goals, on our self-love, our education and on living life to the fullest. Self-care is your power, so remember to prioritize your health.

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Take the time to refocus on once-lost dreams, ideas and missions that God has put on your heart.

Step out of your comfort zone and embrace your heart's desires without fear and doubt.

### **New Adventures & Motivation**

What new adventures have you started? What gets you motivated? Together, we can achieve greatness and make our dreams a reality.

Sending love and prayers your way,

### **Mecca Nelson**

Surviving Spouse of U.S. Army Sgt. Mario Nelson

Gold Star Family Home Program



## Renewal

After the passing of my husband, due to cancer of 9/11 WTC, I was upset and depressed and now a single mother.

At one point... I knew my husband would want me to do what's right for our son. He wouldn't want me to just give up on life. Our son at the moment was only 10, and was relying on me.

My husband had a dream to move out of Brooklyn, NY. With that in mind... I knew I had to shake this depression off! I was determined on my days off to search for a place to move to.

I found an amazing neighborhood, where I knew my son would feel comfortable. I placed our son in a good school where he was happy.

Now it was time for mommy to take care of her health as well. At 200lbs I knew I wasn't where I wanted to be, and trying on clothes was frustrating. I decided to make new moves to lead to a healthier new me!

So I managed to start eating clean, fasting and working out. Doing this brought my weight to 140 lbs. Now I'm in the works of getting my personal trainers license so that I can help other women become new healthier versions of themselves.

We believe it's the end of it all when we are under pain or stress. I'm here to say this: *just when you believe life is bad, I promise you someone out there has it way worse.*

It only takes one person to help another in a moment of need. On that note, I'd also like to thank Tunnel of Towers for being one of my blessings in my family's life.

I'm here for anyone that just needs to talk or needs help. Always feel free to reach out to me, even if it's to say "hi" or just to vent— I'm here for it all.

Stay positive.

Hugs,

### **Yvonne Garcia**

Surviving Spouse of NYPD Police Officer Pedro Garcia  
Post 9/11 Family Home Program Recipient





## Spring Has Sprung

As the old saying goes, *"April showers bring May flowers!"* Three days into April, the tri-state area proved that there will be a May full of flowers!

We have experienced so much rain in the New York area... so much so that one might think a watering can for the May flowers might not be necessary.

The way I view life, I believe that the watering can is always necessary. Growth comes within us when we learn to step outside of our comfort zones.

I have had personal growth throughout my life by learning to *"pay it forward"*. Paying it forward makes the recipient, in most cases, happy. What paying it forward actually does for the giver is it fills his or her soul. The giver receives more than the receiver.

The thing about paying it forward is kindness begets kindness, and this world certainly needs more of that. When you give from the heart with no expectation of anything in return, your giving becomes a natural part of your routine. You are no longer stepping outside of your comfort zone.

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Paying it forward does not necessarily have to cost you money. Here are some ways for you to spread kindness without spending \$1.00:

### **Smile**

It takes less muscles to smile than to frown. When you smile at a passerby, sometimes they smile back but if not, you still made a connection. That smile could change their day.

### **Speak Kindly**

Pay a compliment to a complete stranger. I particularly like to do this one, and it's the best feeling to watch the recipient process the kind words that you just said. They then realize it's for them and their heads lift a little higher, and sometimes they giggle. Occasionally, they'll get really excited by what you said.

More importantly, speak kindly to yourself. If you find saying and thinking things about yourself that you would never say to another human being, then don't say them to yourself! You matter, and you are a beautiful soul.

There are times that I do get tired from spreading love and kindness. It doesn't happen often, but hey I'm human, too. It is at these times that I stop and take time to fill my personal watering can—watering oneself is imperative.

I fill my can by leaning into my higher power, and taking time to build up the strength to carry on. While I've had an interesting deck of cards dealt to me throughout my lifetime, it has never and will never outweigh all that I have been blessed with.

Life is not easy and it does not always come up roses, but it is always worth living.

Be blessed and *happy spring!*

### **Clare Cranston**

Surviving Spouse of NYPD Detective Christopher Cranston

Post 9/11 Family Home Program Recipient

## The Pier

By Catrine Kyster Giery

The old pier was right here.

I have a picture of our toddler  
smiling through the railing  
at the glinting blue-green sea.  
I don't remember the exact day,  
but I know  
it was a good day.

We likely bought ice cream  
in the little shop  
at the entry to the pier.

Tides came and went.  
Our daughter entered first grade.  
34 days later, you died.

18 days later, Hurricane Matthew tore the pier away.

We walked on the beach  
to inspect the damage.  
A cordon was up.  
No visitors allowed.  
For a long time.

Slowly plans were drawn up  
for a fine, new pier.  
They tidied the beach.  
Hauled away the debris.

We walked on the beach  
among the old pilings  
sticking out of the sand  
like broken toothpicks.  
The old pier  
was right here.

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The newspaper reported on many delays.

Then,  
cranes,  
trucks,  
workers.  
New cordons.

We walked on the beach  
and watched them rebuild it.  
And sometimes not rebuild it.  
For a long time.

Then,  
2,714 days after Hurricane Matthew.  
2,732 days after your passing:  
The new pier  
is here.

We walk on the beach  
onto the pier.  
It's made of concrete, not wood.

It's supposed to be sturdy.  
But we all know  
that nobody knows  
the strength of hurricanes  
and all the weaknesses of piers.

We walk to the end of the pier.  
Behind us is the beach.  
Somewhere behind the beach, our home.  
In front of us,  
all around us,  
the ocean  
the sky  
the wind.  
Inviting us to laugh and play.  
Some days.

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Some days, asking us to hold on for dear life.

I turn to our daughter.  
She's a teen now.  
She doesn't want her picture taken.  
But she still says yes to an ice cream  
from the new little shop  
at the entry to the pier.

The new pier  
is here.  
Today's a good day.

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## **The Surfside Beach Pier**

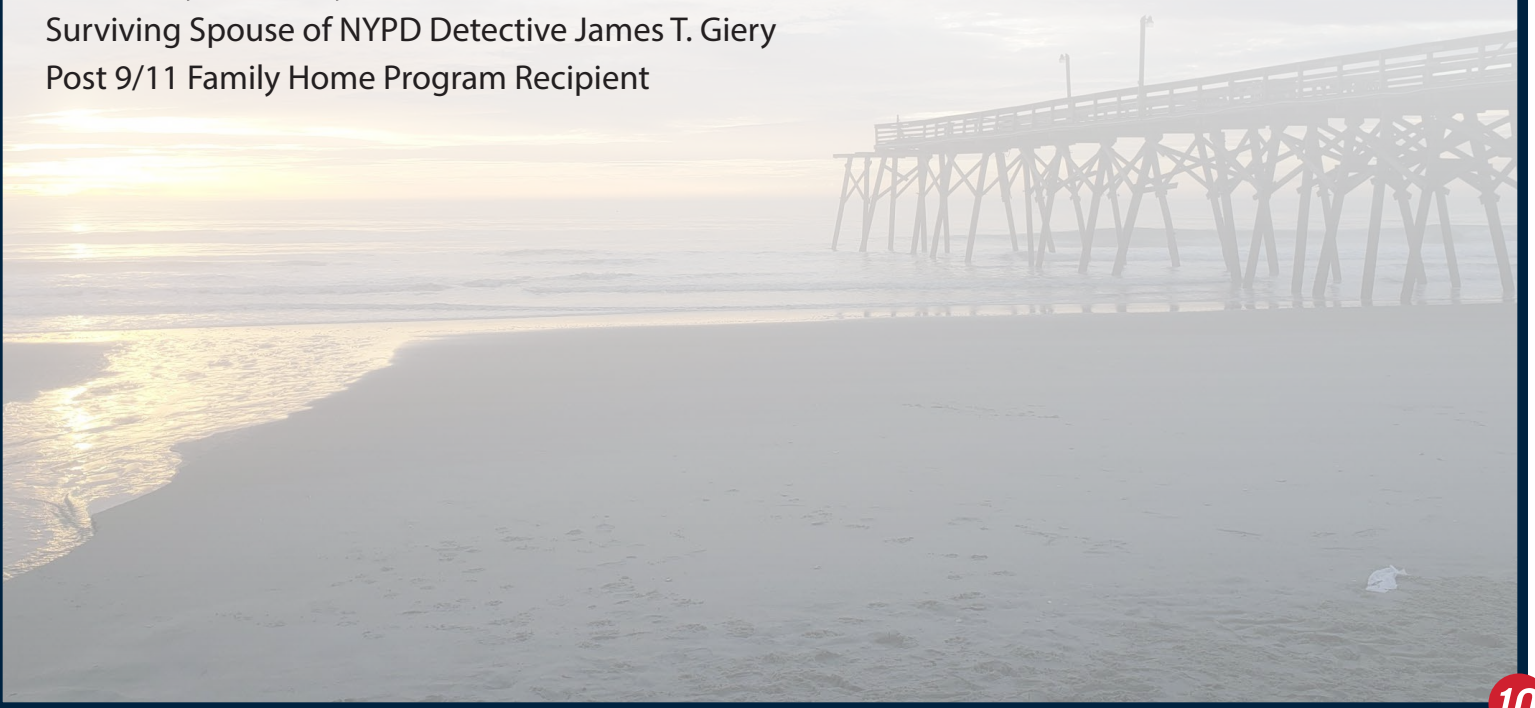
This poem is inspired by the Surfside Beach Fishing Pier near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. On October 8, 2016, the Surfside Beach Pier was hit by Hurricane Matthew.

Even though Hurricane Matthew had been downgraded to a hurricane 2 when it hit, the pier suffered extensive damage. It took almost eight years to tear down the old pier and build a new one, which opened on March 14, 2024.

Read more about the pier at: [www.surfsidebeach.org/212/Surfside-Beach-Fishing-Pier](http://www.surfsidebeach.org/212/Surfside-Beach-Fishing-Pier).

### **Catrine Kyster Giery**

Surviving Spouse of NYPD Detective James T. Giery  
Post 9/11 Family Home Program Recipient





## National Mental Health Network for Tunnel to Towers Home Recipients

For many families facing some of the toughest moments in their lives, Tunnel to Towers has had the profound honor of providing a sense of security and comfort through our home programs. We know that true well-being goes beyond physical walls and reaches deep into the heart and mind. That's why we offer a range of services designed to support you and your family, all delivered with the warmth and care you deserve, and completely free of charge.

### Holistic Comprehensive Services

Much like a personal trainer who guides you on a path to physical fitness, our team of experienced and sensitive providers, all with a personal connection to first responders and veterans, are here to support your mental and emotional health. These mental health services offer a confidential journey between you and your provider, ensuring a safe space for healing and growth.

Overview of the services we offer:

- **Life Coaching:** Helping you navigate life's challenges with guidance to discover your full potential.
- **Crisis Intervention:** Offering immediate support during critical moments of need.
- **Decision Making:** Helping you make informed and confident life choices.
- **Psychotherapy:** Providing a safe space to address emotional and psychological challenges.
- **Individual, Family, or Child/Adolescent Therapy:** Tailored sessions to support every member of your family.
- **Consultations:** Professional guidance to determine the best therapeutic path for you.
- **Peer to Peer:** These Veterans and First Responder peers provide a confidential ear and offer emotional, social, and practical support, ensuring you never feel alone in your experiences.

If any of these services resonate with you, now or in the future, we encourage you to reach out to your program manager. We're here to help you build strength from within, just as you build strength in your new home.

Dr. Shayna J. Popkin  
General & Forensic Psychiatrist  
Medical Director,  
Tunnel to Towers Foundation

