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Love helps U.S. veteran overcome the scars of war

By David Martin



Marine Cpl. Tony Porta was severely burned during a roadside bomb in Iraq in 2007 that claimed the lives of his two friends. He later underwent 128 surgeries.

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(CBS News) BELTSVILLE, Md - It was ten years ago this month that U.S. combat forces invaded Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein. For many Americans, the war is fading into history. But not for those who fought it, including Marine Cpl. Tony Porta. His story is about tragedy and triumph.

Tony Porta was a 20-year-old Marine running convoys in Iraq in 2007, when his ordeal by fire began.

"I saw my body just burned," he recalled. "I saw my skin melting. It was like a hot candle."



Marine Cpl. Tony Porta served in Iraq running convoys.

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A roadside bomb had just killed his two best friends, Charles Palmer and Kenneth Mack, and the fire was about to consume Porta.

"I said, 'It's all over,'" said Porta.

Even though Palmer and Mack were already dead, Porta credits them with saving his life.

"They were telling me to get up. 'It's not my time yet.' They cheer me to get up -- 'Get up and get out.'"

"They were [dead] yes, but they were there. They were."

He floated in a fog of pain, drifting in and out of consciousness, until one night in the burn unit, Porta saw himself in a mirror.

"I couldn't recognize myself," he said. "I saw scars, I saw blood. I didn't have lips, my nose was missing, my ears were gone. That day I felt, 'How can I live like this?'"

Porta would undergo 128 surgeries, trying to undo the cruel wounds left by fire.

"I said to myself," Porta recalled, "'Who's gonna love me? Who's gonna, who's gonna love me the way I look right now?'"

But then he met Daisy.



At first, Tony Porta thought his life was over following his war injury. Then he met his future wife Daisy, and the two of them would have a son, Kenneth Charles, named after Porta's friends who were killed in Iraq.

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"She didn't care about my wounds," said Porta. "She care about me in the inside."

And then Daisy and Tony got married and had a baby.

"I named him Kenneth Charles," Porta said, "in memory of my two friends, Kenneth and Charles. They saved my life and now they will be remembered forever."

The Porta family lives in the house where he grew up. The day Kenneth was born, Porta put off all further surgeries so he could enjoy his family full-time.

So when people do look at him, does he feel like they're saying, 'Oh, that poor guy'? "Yes," said Porta, "but they don't realize that this poor guy has a beautiful wife, a handsome son, a beautiful family."

The more time you spend with Tony Porta, the less you see his scars.

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