

Grief TV

BY REBECCA ZISCH

REBECCA ZISCH SPLITS HER TIME BETWEEN THE WOMEN'S STUDIES DEPARTMENT AT UNLV AND THE OFFICE OF COLLEGE RELATIONS AT NEVADA STATE COLLEGE. ARMY CPL. STANLEY J. LAPINSKI WAS LAID TO REST AT ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY ON JUNE 30, 2005.

Last summer, I was what one might call a "media darling." This was not because of my wit in the local media or accolades for excellent teaching. Rather, I was repeatedly interviewed and featured in the local and national press because of a tragedy.

On June 11, 2005, someone I loved was killed by a roadside bomb in Baghdad. Losing a loved one is usually a private horror. For most people, the indignity of mourning can be kept behind the closed doors of homes and other sanctuaries. For me, it was televised. For me, it was published and circulated.

This was a strange and bitter taste of fame. I was recognized and pitied in the places that I normally frequent with relative anonymity: the gas station, the grocery store, the dry cleaners. While I appreciated the sympathy that people wanted to share, I also wanted the privacy to be able to be miserable and infuriated without an audience.

I was seen on every local television station in Nevada, some of them two and three times; and that footage was shared with other network affiliates. I was quoted in and had my photograph in the Las Vegas daily papers as well as local newspapers in other states, such as Pennsylvania and Florida, and even *The Washington Post*. In fact, at a memorial service in Florida, I was stopped by a reporter who said, "Aren't you the girlfriend? Would you pose for a picture?"

Why is the misery of some people news to others? And if the idea is to express the larger tragedy of the war abroad by expressing personal stories, then wouldn't just one interview be enough? Why did they follow me to work and show up at my home uninvited? It wasn't even until the interviews stopped that I was actually able to begin dealing with the loss. And by that point, there were other people who already thought I should have been back to my normal routine.

Even after the newsworthiness of the death of someone close to me had passed, I still received phone calls from the local press when other local soldiers were killed and when the president made speeches about the troops in Iraq.

I am lucky to be able to express my emotions about this loss without having to go through a reporter and have done so in this publication, on Nevada Public Radio and, most notably, on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*. But it is the immediate media saturation that people still remember. A few months ago, I went to visit the soldier's memorial at Red Rock and a woman said to me, "Didn't I see you on TV awhile ago? Who was it you lost?" And at a recent cocktail party, a local TV news person exclaimed, "Don't I know you? Oh right! Your boyfriend died!"

Nevada has lost 21 soldiers in Iraq; 12 of them were from Clark County. And I have relived the publicity of my mourning with every other grieving local family that I've seen on television and in the newspaper. I cry with them. I empathize with them. I pray for them to be able to privately mourn and hope that the press will be more thoughtful and considerate with them than it was with me. **CL**