

# FALLEN SON'S PURPLE HEART REPLACED AFTER TRAGIC LOSS

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Months after her son, an 18-year-old Marine, was killed in Iraq, Kathy Hamilton suffered another tragedy: her family's mobile home was destroyed by a fire.

Although family members did all they could to save Lance Cpl. Jeremy Z. Long's military memorabilia and photos from their Sun Valley home earlier this month, much was damaged or ruined, including his Purple Heart medal.

But Sunday, Hamilton and her family received a surprise.

U.S. Sen. John Ensign R-Nev., presented her with a new Purple Heart medal for Jeremy, as well as a certificate from President Bush and an American flag.

"It's really important that we as Americans say thank you in some small way ... (Jeremy) paid the ultimate sacrifice and we know that sacrifice was for all of us," Ensign told Hamilton during a brief ceremony in Powning Park, near a marker for Nevadans who died in the "War against Terror." Long and several other soldiers' names are to be placed on the marker.

As Ensign expressed his sympathy to Hamilton, her eyes welled with tears and the two hugged. The exchange prompted other family members to embrace and smile.

"This just brings everything back, like it was his memorial service again," said Hamilton's sister-in-law, Candy Bushgens. "It's very special this could happen. Jeremy was the best. He was an amazing kid and our American Hero."

Jeremy was killed Aug. 10 in Iraq while on foot patrol when a explosive device detonated in the village of Zella in Al Anbar province. He was a member of Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force based at Twentynine Palms, Calif.

Jeremy's death and the recent fire prompted an outpouring of support from the community, for which Hamilton and her family said they are grateful. Many have donated money, clothing and one woman, Colleen Martin, donated her mobile home.

Hamilton said the Marine Corps has been supportive.

"They're all great in helping me through this all," Hamilton said. "It's been so tough losing Jeremy and then dealing with the death (of another relative) and then the fire ... that was my big three. I'm done."

Jeremy's aunt, Patsy Cave, of Carson City was also thankful for the community's support.

"The community has been such a blessing," she said. "We didn't expect anything good to come of losing such a beautiful boy, but we are all here taking care of each other. That's what's important.

"I know Jeremy is probably looking down at us and saying: 'Wow, the community really is showing they care.'"

Bushgens said Jeremy would be proud of the community and Ensign's replacing his medal.

"He'd be proud his mom would be taken care of and honored people would be thinking of his family," she said.

On the morning of Jan. 3 an electrical fire started in Hamilton's bedroom. Her stepson, Drew, 19, son Zach, 22, and daughter, Samantha, 16, had been sleeping. Drew awoke and yelled to everyone to get out.

Hamilton was working at the Caughlin Club health club when her neighbor called to give her the bad news.

Martin donated her own mobile home and is buying a new one. Now, the family needs to find a lot for it. They are hoping to stay near Samantha's school, Spanish Springs High School.

They are staying with Hamilton's mother until they can find a lot.

The family still goes back to the charred trailer to recover old photographs of Jeremy's childhood and days leading up to his deployment. One photograph that was taken by his fellow Marines was destroyed. Hamilton hopes to get a replacement. It showed her son's memorial in Iraq.

Hamilton and her daughter lost nearly all of their possessions. Her children lost their Christmas presents. The family computer that had screen saver photos of Jeremy is destroyed. The case that held Long's American flag was singed, and a collection of photos showcased in the living room were destroyed.

Salvaged was an answering machine that held the final voice mail Jeremy left his family just days before his death. He reminded his brother to take out the garbage and told his mother he missed her.

Spanish Springs High School, where Long graduated in 2005, replaced his yearbook.

Long was on several athletic teams in high school. He was described by family and friends as having a great sense of humor, making everyone laugh and being proud and

passionate. Long had told his family that meeting country singer Toby Keith and President Bush were highlights of his career as a Marine.