



# Heroes Thanking Heroes Newsletter

Rebuilding Lives. Restoring Hope.

September 2018

## What is Heroes Thanking Heroes?

The Heroes Thanking Heroes provides a six-month transitional part-time, flexible employment to wounded veterans or their primary caregivers, enabling them to make phone calls from their homes, most often to personally thank donors for their contributions to the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes. The program also offers qualified participants some basic training and experience working in a "virtual call center," thereby preparing them for other potential jobs requiring similar skills.

## Our Life After War By: Silvia Lopez



Hi, I'm Silvia. I am a representative in the Heroes Thanking Heroes program which allows me to stay home and care for my husband, Alexis Pabón, who is a wounded veteran. In addition to my caregiving responsibilities, I am also a Mom to 5 beautiful kids and the grandmother to a newborn baby grandson. My husband is originally from Puerto Rico and I am from Costa Rica. We currently live in Dover, Delaware as we rebuild our life after war with the complete realization that we are in this together, long-term.

My husband, United States Army Retired SGT Alexis Pabón, served in the military for 15 ½ years as a Mortuary Affairs Specialist (92 MIKE). He was one of the first responders at the Pentagon to come in to recover the remains of the 9/11/2001 terrorist attack. Needless to say, it takes a unique mindset to perform this type of work, but the Army had given him extensive training in managing his emotions. After 9/11, he went on to serve 3 deployments to Iraq, his last tour during 2007-2008. Mortars were continually dropping nearby him but there was one specific blast that would eventually change the course of our lives and it wasn't until he returned back to the states that we would truly understand just what we were dealing with. This mortar got him indirectly, leaving a laceration or cut in his middle/inner ear that would lead to Meniere's Disease. He also suffered from a mild TBI and post-traumatic stress from the type of work his job required.



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**Come see us at**



During his military career, he processed over 3000 remains including recovery, collection, evacuation, and establishing a tentative identification of the remains. He was exposed to many chemicals that caused different kinds of skin conditions that are still unknown to medical professionals.

Alexis returned from his final deployment overseas in 2008 and began getting really sick by 2009. We spent the next 7 months seeing different specialists, all of them unaware of the Meniere's Disease and unable to make a diagnosis. Apparently, the disease is very uncommon, with fewer than 200,000 US cases per year. He eventually lost hearing in his right ear. By the time that 2010 was upon us, his PTSD began spiraling. He had just retired from active duty, and the suicidal attempts started. 4 of them to be exact. Fortunately, I was there to stop each of them. He spent a couple of months hospitalized, and his vertigo episodes were frequently happening, at least 3-4 times per week. He became very frustrated as his capabilities were dwindling. He was having severe balance issues. He couldn't bend, drive, or pick up the kids to hold them. Then came the traumatic brain injury (TBI), and the migraines and memory issues caused even more challenges. Lastly, we have the embarrassment he feels from the skin conditions he suffers from. Sometimes, very painful flare-ups happen on his head or hips, and he completely isolates himself from his surroundings. There is no cure for his Meniere's Disease and many of the conditions he has, so like I mentioned before- we are in this for the long haul. We experience very good days and then some very bad days but through it all, we have been lucky to have a good VA care team here as well as a good support system to help us through. Most of all, our kids and I have developed a method for the bad days, and we all know our parts when the days are unbearable for him.

We were fortunate to be introduced to the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes back in 2016 for their Road to Recovery Conference. The whole experience was terrific and we were blessed with a \$500 gift check for the holidays which allowed us to buy our kids gifts that we otherwise couldn't have afforded. This has been a really tough year for my family financially so opening up the mail around Easter and Thanksgiving to find help with our meals, was definitely a beautiful surprise. We were also helped with Back to School assistance, allowing us to purchase our children's school uniforms for the year. After being dropped in tiers in the Caregiver Support program, I prayed hard for the Heroes Thanking Heroes program. I was offered a position earlier this year, and it has been such a rewarding experience. The program has helped my family financially but also given me the opportunity for 'ME' time. It's a joy to talk to other people who understand, but the most rewarding part of all is being able to say, "Thank you" to those who support our nation's heroes.

"The HTH program has given me the opportunity to afford additional health care and supportive services for my husband, while continuing to care for him at home." - HTH Representative

We LOVE receiving sweet thank-you messages and photos from veteran families we've helped. Thanks to the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes and their Back to School financial assistance, many of our families were able to get the school uniforms and supplies needed to make it a great school year for their little ones! Learn more ways you can help our wounded heroes and their families by visiting [www.saluteheroes.org](http://www.saluteheroes.org)



We raffled off 2 awesome teacher baskets earlier this month! Our lucky winners were Amy Miracle and Hannah Kaniewski! Congrats Ladies! If you would like to join our Facebook Supporters group and participate in our future raffles, you can join [HERE](#).

Heroes Freedom Weekend: 4-day veteran couples retreat in New York City! The last week of September, we will be traveling to NYC for our 2nd annual Heroes Freedom Weekend! 29 of our Veteran Circle couples will have the opportunity to explore Times Square, reconnect with their spouse, visit the 9/11 memorial and museum with a special private tour from Retired NYFD Joe Torrillo, see Lady Liberty and so much more. Next month's Heroes Thanking Heroes Newsletter will feature photos and memories from the weekend so be sure you're subscribed! Go [HERE](#) and click subscribe in the top left corner of you aren't receiving our email copy!



It's official! School is back in session for our Heroes Thanking Heroes veteran families! We hope you saw on Social Media the fun video we posted featuring our very own program children and grandchildren and their back to school memories! You can watch it here if you missed it: <http://retiringyourboots.blogspot.com/2018/09/back-to-school-2018.html>



### 2018 Salute to the Stars and Stripes

Some of our team members recently attended the Coalition's Patriot Day Gala at the NASA Space Center near Houston. The evening commemorated those that are no longer with us after the 9/11/2001 terrorist attacks and also brought awareness to the needs of our military heroes that chose to serve because of the tragic events of that unforgettable day.

September is **Suicide Prevention Month**

# #BeThere

for Veterans and Service members.

Confidential crisis chat at **VeteransCrisisLine.net**



September is Suicide Awareness Month and we're dedicated to fighting the suicide epidemic amongst our veterans. If you or someone you know is having suicidal thoughts, help is available. Things get better, don't give up now! Call the Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255, and press 1 for veterans.