

Songs 4 Soldiers Annual Benefit Concert Coming In September

by Tara L. Cale
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(BUZZ MAGAZINE) - It was April 9, 2004. The United States Army 724th Transportation Unit of Bartonville, IL was in Iraq. Their mission - to escort fuel convoys to Baghdad and the Anbar province in Western Iraq. During their tour, they experienced many firefights, IED's, land mines, and more. But nothing compared to the attack on their convoy on April 9th.

After a failed email, the unit drove their support convoy directly into an ongoing offensive between the 3rd Calvary Armored Division of the U.S. Army and Shiite militiamen of the Mahdi Army. Enemy fighters were estimated to be in the numbers of three to four hundred. The 724th convoy consisted of eighteen American civilian-driven fuel trucks with only eight armed support vehicles.

Dustin Row from Columbia, IL was driving one of those military support vehicles. “We were completely picked apart and destroyed. My 50-caliber gun truck was one out of six trucks to even make it through the three-mile-long kill zone. It was also the only truck out of the entire convoy that didn't have any dead or wounded in it.”

When it was over, two of Row's fellow soldiers, PFC Gregory Goodrich and SGT Elmer Krause, were killed in action. SSG Matt Maupin was captured by insurgents and his remains were not discovered until several years later. Five civilian drivers were killed and one is still missing. Fourteen soldiers and civilians were also wounded in the attack. It was a rough tour. Row was one of the fortunate ones that lived to be able to go home. Row explained when he left the military and returned to Columbia that his homecoming was like a “Budweiser commercial.”

But like most combat veterans, Row often struggled with “why?” Why did his friends die? Why did he make it through with limbs intact? Why did he fire into that building during that attack - who else was in there? Was there more he could have done during that firefight? But ultimately it came back to, “Why am I still alive?”

With the benefit of a great family and time, Row has made it through some difficult times when other combat veterans were not so fortunate.

“When I got home I got a job and as a musician, got some gigs with bands and did some tours,” Row explained. “My life was blessed.”

For awhile, accepting that blessing, was enough. Until a few years after returning back to the states, when one of Row's friends from the military succumbed to the demons that often haunt veterans, and feeling there was no other escape, took his own life.

“That's when I realized that although I was doing well, it wasn't the case for most combat vets,” he explained. “In fact, it's a pretty crappy mess for most of them. And I had to do something.”

His brain child, Songs4Soldiers (S4S), a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, was established May 31, 2013. Their mission is to enrich the lives of combat veterans and their families who have limited resources and honor their service through effective assistance in everyday situations.

The organization has seen tremendous growth in its charitable efforts and concert attendance since their inaugural show in 2013. Helping veterans nationwide, S4S has now spent nearly \$1,000,000 on combat veterans and their families, helping them with direct needs and financial hardship.

Before detailing just how they do that, let me mention that 100% off all funds raised go to help these veterans, because the S4S work force is 100% volunteer based. Songs4Soldiers uses sponsorship funds to cover all production and marketing costs.

“So if you hand me \$50 for S4S, then \$50 goes to help a veteran,” Row stated simply.

In addition, they don’t just hand over money that is requested, S4S pays for the needed services directly, to avoid misuse of funds.

Where does the money go? All profits go to benefit veterans who are either wounded, disabled, suffering from PTSD, or possibly just down on their luck. The money raised will be used to pay for specific needs these individuals may have such as bills, home improvements, provisions for their family, etc.

Where does the money come from? Many people and businesses have discovered S4S and generously donate time, services and more. Home Depot is a huge supporter and even offers employment to many veterans. S4S also holds fund raisers with the biggest being their annual benefit concert, held every September at Bolm-Schuhkraft park in Columbia, IL. This year will be the biggest and best to date.

The 10th Annual Songs for Soldiers Benefit Concert, proudly brought to you by Weber Chevrolet and Budweiser, will kick off on Friday night, September 9th at 6 pm. Headlining will be the bands Ever Clear, Tonic, Stir and Feel.

Saturday is family day and will feature live music all day with bands including Alexandra Kay, The Mighty Pines, Superjame, the Charles Glenn Band and Dazed N Confused STL, of which Row is a member. In addition there will be great food available, activities for the children and much more. The show will go on, rain or shine.

Tickets for the event are \$30 for one day, or \$50 for a weekend pass. Veterans and children under 12 get in free. Parking is free.

“It’s easy to say ‘Hey, let’s go to this concert, it will be fun!’ But this one is different. Here you will get to see the good it does,” Row emphasized, as he explained that videos will be shown throughout the shows featuring many of the veterans they have assisted.

Songs for Soldiers also has their own “Secret Santa” program where you can adopt a veteran and his/her family for Christmas.

In fact, it’s one of Row’s favorite moments each year with Songs for Soldiers. “It’s that ten minutes before the concert and seeing over 4,000 people there. People there to help this cause, and realizing what we can do for veterans in the next 365 days because of their support,” he reflected. “And it’s every Christmas morning. Even though I don’t see it happening live, I know it’s going on... that this year even more veterans and their families are probably having the best Christmas of their life.”

Row admits that he still sometimes struggles with the “Why?” But he is grateful for this second chance at life, something many of his fellow soldiers were not given.

“I am here and very grateful,” he added, “The least I can do is help the living, by honoring the dead, and use my gift of music to help others.”

When you donate to Songs4Soldiers your tax-deductible donation goes to help veterans who are in our area and who need our help. If you or your company would like to help support the event or charity in the form of a donation or sponsorship please contact Dustin Row personally: dustin@songs4soldiersstl.org or call/text 618-719-2333. Your support would be greatly appreciated!

For tickets to the show and information about the organization, including details on individual veterans helped, volunteering, donating, upcoming events and more, please visit S4SSTL.ORG. Press inquiries should be sent to dustin@songs4soldiersstl.org or call 618-779-8511.

Songs4Soldiers also has a Facebook page with a lot of great photos and more information that will help you see what a truly wonderful organization this is.

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