

James Tarbush back home after spending two Christmases in Iraq

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Dozens of families will be celebrating this Christmas with loved ones who have returned home from war-torn countries overseas. There may be nothing more endearing or special to a soldier than to be able to share those times once again with their families and friends. Christmas in Iraq could never be Christmas at home.

One family has experienced two holiday seasons without each other, from two separate deployments to Iraq. The first time James Tarbush returned home was wonderful for his fiancée Belinda Ruhnau, but the second time was different. She kept her cool until she saw him. When he approached, she leapt into his arms, nearly knocking him over, for a long elated embrace. The holidays especially, have become more precious to their family.

Tarbush has served in Iraq twice now with the Army National Guard 505th Engineering Battalion.

"His second time in Iraq was the hardest," she said. Ruhnau thought his second deployment would be much easier having gone through it the first time. But she was wrong. As the fighting in Iraq intensified, so too did the loneliness of her nights. Their son, Caleb, was born just a short time after Tarbush left. She and the kids missed only him. He missed all of them.

Not only the absence of touch and presence made his second deployment so hard, it was also the unknown. "We have a don't ask, don't tell policy," she said.

After having been in the military, growing up in the service environment, and having so many friends in the armed forces, she knows that missions and a soldier's safety can be compromised by telling too much.

"There are certain things you don't ask over the phone, certain things you don't put in an e-mail and definitely you don't put in a letter," she said. So in a time full of chaos, worry, uncertainty and fear she held her tongue. She said that was her only means of control over keeping him safe. Halfway home from Fort Bragg the long-kept questions and answers spewed forth. They were finally able to share their thoughts, concerns and feelings or to at least begin the long reconnecting process.

But even though there were certain things they could not talk about while he was away, they kept in touch as often as possible through e-mails, web-cameras and phone conversations. One day, she said, Tarbush was watching the children through the web-cam that was pointed in their direction, while she was busy typing on the computer.

"All of a sudden these messages start popping up that say, 'Look at Caleb! Look at Caleb!'" she said. She turned around and saw their son's first walk. Even though he was thousands of miles away, he was first to witness their son's first steps. She laughed at this, in imitated frustration.

Now that they are reunited, the home-sweet-home holidays can begin. Caleb has been calling Tarbush "Dada" for a few months now and can walk like a pro. Both he and Ruhnau are grateful to share their son's first Christmas together in the safety of their home. But they feel truly blessed to have these memories and share these holidays with each other and their other two kids (Ruhnau's children from her first marriage) because they know how precious these times are when Uncle Sam calls.

Ruhnau is a fourth generation soldier. Her mother, father, grandfather and great grandfa-



EMILY WEAVER / HERALD
James Tarbush and family pictured at recent program at Grover Elementary School.

ther all served in the U.S. Navy along with three of her uncles and one of her aunts. She enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and served until her retirement in 2004. She was supposed to go to Afghanistan in June of 1999, but something prevented her

from going and she still does not know it was. Whether deployed or not, they have both served their country well. They plan to wed very soon. Tarbush is not due for another deployment for five years.

WARM HEARTS, WARM FEET

Hundreds pack senior center to receive Christmas shoes

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People packed the H. Lawrence Patrick Senior Center Thursday morning, lined up through the front door and around the building in search of shoes to fit their feet that definitely fit their budget. Mayor Rick Murphrey and city councilmen purchased nearly 2,000 shoes to be given out for free. Tables were set up in the activity room at the center. Shoes and shoe boxes were stacked and scattered on each table and some were in big cardboard boxes on the floor.

A few officers from the Kings Mountain Police Department stood guard making sure that peace was kept as the crowds spewed forth in massive numbers. Half past noon on

Thursday the crowds were still strong but the lines to get in were growing shorter. "We had to limit shoes to one pair per person because we were afraid that we were going to run out of shoes and every one who came and needed a pair wouldn't have a chance to get one," said Special Events Dir. Ellis Noell.

Murphrey said that the shoes give-a-way was a very successful outreach to the community. "We started at 11 o'clock and by 1:30 a majority of the shoes were gone. Within a half an hour later, they were all gone," he said. "We really enjoyed doing that for the community and it gave us the Christmas spirit."

Murphrey displayed a new side of himself to the public - shoe salesman. He eagerly helped people find shoes that would be a good fit for them and

See Shoes, 5A

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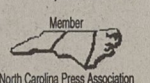
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PEARL

From 1A

She added that she won't have to worry about the alarm clock going off anymore and it will be nice to simply relax and stay in bed a little longer if she wants to.

"When you have an 8-5 job it seems like you can't get much accomplished with the family," she said. But all of that is due for a change. She looks forward to retirement because it will grant her more time with her family, her husband, and her four grandchildren. She also plans to be more active in the community and with her church. But perhaps one of the biggest perks on the horizon, outside of family and friends, is the open road.

"Traveling is one of my plans. I don't know where or when, I just want to go," she said.

Even though she likes visiting other places, she said that there is nothing like coming home

again to her peaceful corner of Kings Mountain.

Brown was born in western Kings Mountain, the youngest of six siblings, to the late Rev. Sloan and Mrs. Mary Lee Murray. Rev. Sloan toiled in their cotton fields and her mother worked hard in the home. They moved off of the farm when she was about 7 or 8 and her father went to work at the mill. He worked at Margrace Mill and later at Oxford Plant for many years. Her parents both received an elementary school education decades before higher education was a widely-sought goal. But her education would be different.

Her childhood education, outside of home and church, started in a one-room school house called Vestibule School. After Vestibule, she went to Compact School, Lincoln Academy and Lincoln High. Even though her beginnings were humble, she has risen to great heights in the field of educators. She achieved her

bachelor's of Science degree in Health Education with a minor in Library Science and later a Master's degree in Library Science from NC Central University. She obtained her doctorate from Nover University in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

She started off wanting to be a nurse but didn't know if she could handle seeing and dealing with all of the pain. However, she did know that she loved to read. This life-long passion for the written word pointed her in the direction of a library.

"I worked in the high school library and I worked my way through college in the library," Brown said.

After college her first job was also at a library and it all seemed to fit. She loved books. She loved

students. She loved working with people and seeing new faces. Being a librarian was in her blood.

"My joy is to be working with the public, and especially with students and helping them," she said.

One of her regular bookworms and favorite students, Matt Berry, said that he will miss her very much.

"She's absolutely wonderful," he said. "She's the only person I know of that when it comes to dealing with students - she makes you feel like you're home."

Her home is still in Kings Mountain just on the eastern side, now. She is a member of Vestibule A.M.E. Zion Church.

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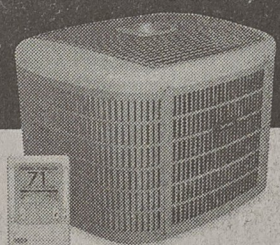
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