



Payton's GI Joe Dad

Here's the story behind the seventh www.Keys2Heaven.com song, leading up to release of *Stories of Faith: 12 Songs Inspired by You!*

By Julie Larson

It was two days after my son Payton turned two, a day that I was dreading for the unknowns in our future. On this day my husband, Dustin, was deployed for a one year tour in Afghanistan. How do you explain to a 2 year old that his dad was going to fight for our country, and he would be gone for a long time?



Payton received a G.I. Joe doll for his birthday and immediately called him "Dad." From that day on, "Dad" was with us everywhere we went. We would bring him on walks, to Church, to the park and to friends and family functions. There were days that I just wanted to give up and think I couldn't deal with this anymore. I would just look at Payton and he would tell me, "Don't worry mom, Dad is still here even though he can't talk."

The innocence of him trying to comfort me with his doll was so heart felt, and you could see that he really believed that "Dad" was looking after us even if he was not in our home. The faith that he had is more than anything I could ever instill in him. Payton would have me tuck him and

"Dad" in bed at night. We would say our prayers to bring his real Dad home to be a family again.

My husband was in an explosion. He received 2nd and 3rd degree burns on both legs, from his knees to his ankles. Payton took a red marker and colored both

GI Joe Dad from *Stories of Faith: 12 Songs Inspired by You!*

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legs of his doll red to "look just like Dad." I always believe that God only gives you what you can handle, and to be at such a young age and take the situation and wrap your arms around it the way he did proves that all of our prayers were answered.

The big day came where his unit was to return home. Butterflies were in my stomach, wondering how Payton was going to react when he saw his Dad get off the plane. As we were leaving the house, he looked at his doll and said "I don't need this Dad anymore; my real Dad is coming home!" He then proceeded to head to the kitchen and throw his doll in the garbage. We arrived at the airport, and stood there waiting to see Dustin come off the plane.

Then it happened! Payton just screamed "DAD" and B-lined right to him and jumped in his arms.

Everything we endured that year was worth it because of the faith of this little boy and his G.I. Joe doll. Payton is now 7 years old and we are a complete family.

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