

# PS4FS Monthly Newsletter - March 2012:

Dear PS4FS friends,

This month's newsletter is unique: we have received a special gift from one of our members, Mary Ryan Skolasky, from Mattawan, Michigan, loving mother of James Lawrence Arnold, DOD 3/15/2007. Mary joined us February 2009, about two years after Jimmy's death. I felt Mary was so strong to do this. At the time, she explained to me that our ministry would keep her mind preoccupied, something she sorely needed. We all understand how the highs and lows of this grieving comes and goes within minutes, days, months – Mary has now lived with that process for five years. She and I wrote back and forth in the past weeks, and I was so impressed with what she shared with me, I asked if we might share it with you. She approved, and we both decided to share excerpts of her thoughts on our website (under the "*Prayer Shawl Ministry*" section).

Many of you remember how timid we were in the beginning months of this ministry, unsure how to approach our families. Mary has shared with us some true pearls of wisdom; some of it we've learned along our own journeys in this ministry. She allows us to see things through the eyes and heart of one who has walked this path. It crystalizes our understanding of the tremendous grief our families face. Read Mary's notes under the "*Communications from You*" section. It's a long article, but well worth the learning's. Mary and I believe our military families will gain some inner peace and comfort from her words. Thank you, Mary, for coming forward and sharing this difficult story – it was tough for you to do, which makes us appreciate so much more your willingness to do it! Jimmy must be very proud of you! Blessings in your healing process, Mary, and blessings to all our families!

I'd like to take a moment, once again, to thank everyone in this ministry for making us so successful. Who knew, just a few years ago, we'd be able to reach so many of our families to let them know there are many Americans who care about their grief, to give them a loving gift made stitch by stitch, hoping we might be able to give them more comfort, less pain, more love and maybe even more smiles in their futures! Thank you all for staying with this ministry, for evolving as we need to adapt to changes, for mending the hearts of so many who needed our gifts! Blessings to you all!

Reminder: No one in this ministry should ever feel pressure to send prayer shawls. Occasionally I receive a direct request for a prayer shawl. I generally notify all our members from the requestor's state, saying the first one to reply will receive the information. When this happens, do not feel you must even reply to the request, and above all, if no one from that state answers within a few days, there are another more than 200 of you for me to go to. Please keep in mind we do this as a group, helping each other. Truly, the sum is more than the parts!

Note: Please notify me if your email address changes or if you prefer to be removed from this list.

<http://webpages.charter.net/ps4fs/Shawls/>

Fondly,

Cozette

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## **I.) CURRENT STATISTICS:**

# Prayer Shawls made since October 2007:	<b>5,796</b>	<i>Includes Dover prayer shawls (yellow numbers below)</i>
# sent to Dover since inception of program (Sept. 2009):	<b>2,580</b>	
# sent to Dover this past month:	<b>40</b>	<i>This number is included in above totals</i>
# Prayer Shawl Groups/Individuals:	<b>280</b>	

## ARMY'S CASUALTY LIST:

There are a number of you who prefer direct contact with our families, so this list will once again be displayed in our newsletters. **Please remember to keep me up-to-date of how many prayer shawls you send to these families so that we may keep accurate statistics.** If you take a name/town, I will **not** mark a prayer shawl sent unless you follow-up and tell me you have done so.

The list of towns below includes "Next-of-Kin" of Army casualties who we have **not** delivered prayer shawls through our direct contact/mail program. It is likely a few members of these families have visited Dover Air Base and chosen a prayer shawl while there. Often families return home wishing they had taken more, wanting to comfort a grief-stricken sister, grandparent, special aunt or uncle, or for the soldier's children. If you would like to contact these families to offer a prayer shawl, send me a list of towns.

*(Note: Repeat towns have been eliminated, so multiple next-of-kin may be associated with a town. In earlier days of this program, I received a monthly list of prayer shawl recipients from Dover Air Base. We no longer receive that list, and the Army's updated Casualty List is sporadic. This means we don't know who on this list has been to Dover and chosen a prayer shawl.)*

Anchorage	AK	Ontario	CA	Valrico	FL	Covington	LA
North Pole	AK	Reseda	CA	Wesley Chapel	FL	Deridder	LA
Boaz	AL	Riverside	CA	Atlanta	GA	Fort Polk	LA
Enterprise	AL	San Bernardino	CA	Bonaire	GA	Haughton	LA
Homewood	AL	San Jose	CA	Gainesville	GA	Kenner	LA
		Santa Clara	CA	Hinesville	GA	Leesville	LA
Hoover	AL	South Lake Tahoe	CA	Kingsland	GA	Merryville	LA
Montgomery	AL	Williams	CA	Ludowici	GA	Monroe	LA
Peterman	AL	Castle Rock	CO	Macon	GA	Shreveport	LA
Trussville	AL	Colora]	CO	McDonough	GA	Kensington	MD
Bonnerdale	AR	Colorado Springs	CO	Midway	GA	Saint Leonard	MD
Conway	AR	Fort Carson	CO	Newnan	GA	Silver Spring	MD
El Dorado	AR	Baltic	CT	Saint Marys	GA	Windsor Mill	MD
		Hartford	CT	Valdosta	GA		
Russellville	AR	Niantic	CT	Winder	GA		
Pago Pago	AS	Suffield	CT	Ewa Beach	HI	Auburn Hills	MI
Litchfield Park	AZ	Willimantic	CT	Honolulu	HI	Boyne City	MI
Phoenix	AZ	Bradenton	FL	Bettendorf	IA	Brighton	MI
Sierra Vista	AZ	Clearwater	FL	Davenport	IA	Flint	MI
American Canyon	CA	Debary	FL				
		Fort Walton Beach	FL	Glenwood	IA	Jackson	MI
California City	CA	Immokalee	FL	Grimes	IA	Romulus	MI
Capistrano Beach	CA	Jacksonville	FL	Le Claire	IA	Saginaw	MI
Corona	CA	Lakeland	FL	Idaho Falls	ID	Southgate	MI
Dana Point	CA	Lynn Haven	FL	Nampa	ID	Williamston	MI
Fresno	CA	Maitland	FL	Decatur	IL	Duluth	MN
Garden Grove	CA	Minneola	FL	Effingham	IL	Inver Grove Heights	MN
Glendale	CA	Naples	FL	Moline	IL		
		Navarre	FL	Opdyke	IL		
		Opa Locka	FL	Taylorville	IL	Lengby	MN
Hayward	CA			Winchester	IL	Rosemount	MN
Huntington Park	CA			Fort Riley	KS		
Lake Elsinore	CA	P.S.L.	FL	Holton	KS	Shevlin	MN
		Palatka	FL	Junction City	KS	Advance	MO
Lancaster	CA	Panama City	FL	Olathe	KS	Fort Leonard Wood	MO
Lawndale	CA	Pensacola	FL	Overland Park	KS	Kansas City	MO
Los Angeles	CA	Pinellas Park	FL	Palco	KS	Steele	MO
Lynwood	CA	Plant City	FL	Wichita	KS	Warsaw	MO
Marina	CA	Port Charlotte	FL	Elizabethtown	KY	West Plains	MO
New Cuyama	CA	Safety Harbor	FL	Fort Knox	KY	Wildwood	MO
Northridge	CA	Tampa	FL	Bastrop	LA	Foxworth	MS

Vicksburg	MS	Harrod	OH			San Antonio	TX
Great Falls	MT	Marion	OH	LaVergne	TN	Seguin	TX
Salisbury	NC	Miamisburg	OH	Murfreesboro	TN	Sunset	TX
Supply	NC	Nashport	OH	Nashville	TN	Watauga	TX
Nashua	NH	Oklahoma City	OK	Brownsville	TX	Weslaco	TX
Plaistow	NH	Owasso	OK	Cameron	TX	Layton	UT
Blairstown	NJ	Porter	OK	Copperas Cove	TX	Santaquin	UT
Hamilton	NJ	Sapulpa	OK	Dallas	TX	Bedford	VA
Espanola	NM	Stillwater	OK	Denton	TX	Lynchburg	VA
Espanola	NM	Tulsa	OK	Edcouch	TX	Midlothian	VA
Roswell	NM	Creswell	OR	Edinburgh	TX	Nokesville	VA
		Hillsboro	OR	Fort Davis	TX	Providence Forge	VA
				Fort Hood	TX	Arlington	WA
		Coraopolis	PA	Fort Worth	TX	Cheney	WA
Santa Cruz	NM	Corry	PA	Gatesville	TX	Longview	WA
Henderson	NV	Jeannette	PA	Greenville	TX	McChord Air Force	
Las Vegas	NV	Philadelphia	PA	Harker Heights	TX	Base	WA
		Pawtucket	RI	Houston	TX	Shelton	WA
Reno	NV	Simpsonville	SC	Irving	TX	Tacoma	WA
Sparks	NV	Warrenville	SC	Killeen	TX	Yakima	WA
Wells	NV	Lead	SD	La Porte	TX	Appleton	WI
Ballston Spa	NY	Yankton	SD	Lawn	TX	Darlington	WI
Oswego	NY	Cane Ridge	TN	Lumberton	TX	Elkhorn	WI
Tyrone	NY			Mansfield	TX	Green Bay	WI
Wallkill	NY			McAllen	TX	Jackson	WI
Watertown	NY			Mesquite	TX	Marshfield	WI
Akron	OH	Clarksville	TN	New Caney	TX	Neenah	WI
Ashtabula	OH			Pharr	TX	Waukesha	WI
Columbus	OH			Plano	TX		
Hamilton	OH	Goodspring	TN	Rowlett	TX		

## I. COMMUNICATIONS FROM YOU:

PS4FS knitter/crocheter Joan Mathis heads the First Presbyterian Church's very active prayer shawl group in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. This group of fine women joined our ministry on December 3, 2009. Thank you for all you do here, ladies! Joan tells us:

(3 photos right and below)

*In 2001, we gave out 96 prayer shawls in our parish-related ministry. We think that is a lot for our 1,500 member parish, but it is God's work to spread healing as far as we can. God bless, Joan Mathis*



Seated L to R: Kathleen Emberlin, Sue Bodkin, Marilyn Fish  
Standing L to R: Joan Mathis, Beverly Fickinger, Ruth Pierce, Joan Meyer, and Dotsy Stuart



REMARKS FROM **PS4FS KNITTER/CROCHETER MARY RYAN SKOLASKY, FROM MATTAWAN, MICHIGAN, LOVING MOTHER OF JAMES LAWRENCE ARNOLD, DOD 3/15/2007.** (3 photos of Mary and Jimmy below)

In the infancy of this ministry (October 2007), we were all quite new with a lot to learn. We worried it was too soon to contact a family within the first 6 months, or too late after a few years; many of us felt an awkwardness to engage direct contact with our families, not knowing what to say under the circumstances. We've come a long way since those days – I often refer to us as “veterans” in this ministry. We've learned to **not** expect thank you cards for our work – social rules are no longer the norm under these horrific circumstances. We do our work quietly, with love, and that love transcends and knits into our prayer shawls a healing for our families who are seeking this kind of comfort and peace. If only we had had this “wisdom” early on! Many of you remember how often I repeated to not expect thank you notes or replies to our initial postcards, and along the way we finally seemed to “get it”...but not without losing a few from our ministry along the way, very few, but there were some who just didn't understand and left the ministry.



*Jimmy and Mary*

Every now and then a “pearl” of wisdom comes our way. Mary Ryan Skolasky has just handed us that “pearl”! Mary is the loving mother of James Lawrence Arnold, DOD 3/15/2007. Mary joined this ministry February 2009 to keep her mind preoccupied from her grief. It has been five years since Jimmy's death, and Mary, with a great deal of maturity, shares with us her grieving process, a process she continues to go through, and she tells us how important our ministry is to families like hers. Mary's words show us, from the heart, what our families endure. Her story is so valuable, I have added excerpts on our website (“Prayer Shawl Ministry” section) so that grieving families may find hope, healing, and peace

in her words. One notable quote Mary shares with us is: *“We appreciate all that you do for us, but early on in the process we are too wrapped up in our own grief to express our gratitude in the manner that we should. Give us time to be able to feel more than the pain of our loss and our appreciation for your loving kindness should show through again.”*

Note this is a long story, told over several weeks' time. I have edited very little, wanting you to feel what came from Mary's heart. She even mentions the importance of the newsletter as a healing tool. We thank you, Mary, for sharing what has been such a painful experience, so that we may better understand an important aspect of this ministry, one we don't often get the opportunity to “peer into”! In Mary's words:

*Yes, you may use my comments in your next newsletter. My hope is to ease the hearts of those who are frustrated when they do not hear back from us right away. It is not unusual for it to take two responses to receive an answer to your postcards. We Gold Star families are inundated with mail for the first few months after the loss of our Soldier. People all over the U.S. send their condolences and many people want to show us support in memory of our loved one. Sometimes it is all just too much to deal with until we feel we can bear moving forward again, which can take some of us months, and others years. But I thank you all for your perseverance. You do make a difference in our healing efforts.*



*Jimmy and mom, Mary, dancing at her daughter's wedding in 2003*

*My son was killed before the Dover Program was instituted so he was brought to an airport near our home town. I remember that day like it was yesterday. The government keeps families pretty busy during the first couple of months following the funeral with all the paperwork that needs to be completed and the return of your soldier's personal belongings from Iraq or Afghanistan. So it could take months before families can get back to dealing with everyday life again. I sent thank you cards in the beginning to show my appreciation for everyone's kindness because I couldn't eat or sleep until after the funeral. Anything that came in the mail and required a response or a decision was thrown into a box until I could deal with making decisions again. I think it was six months later before I went through that box. I was a zombie during the first few months, walking through this house and not remembering what I was going to do. I've heard it explained by other Gold Star Mothers that the loss of a soldier is so painful because these soldiers, who happen to be our young sons and daughters, volunteered to serve their country and lost their lives doing their job, a job that they loved. Freedom is not free. The cost that comes with it is the loss of lives and the pain and suffering bestowed upon the families who must move forward without their loved ones. Some are even bitter while working through their grief due to the situation seeming so unfair. It doesn't make sense. There is so much to process and I believe these are the reasons we are so 'out of it' for*

*such a long period of time.*

*You are all doing a wonderful thing providing prayer shawls at Dover because that is the day that reality hits like a brick – you see with your own eyes that what they have been telling you for the past week is true. I can't think of anything better to get you through that terrible day than wrapping yourself in the*



warmth of a loving prayer shawl. For those who choose to continue with the personal touch of contacting families by post card, my advice is to have patience. Give us a few months to get through our grief and take care of the business-at-hand before expecting an answer.



We appreciate all that you do for us, but I believe that early on in the process we are too wrapped up in our own grief to express our gratitude in the manner that we should. We don't mean to be so noncommittal or to seem ungrateful in accepting a prayer shawl without writing a thank you note, but during that first year, there are so many emotions going on in our hearts that we just aren't ourselves. Life has changed for us and some of us don't know where to turn next. Give us time to be able to feel more than the pain of our loss and our appreciation for your loving kindness should show through again.

Mary says:  
This boot camp picture was taken at Jimmy's going away party before he headed off to boot camp Parent's Weekend, fall of 2005. I think this was the last picture of the two of us together.

I enjoy reading the newsletter. It brings a warm feeling to my heart knowing that there are still people who care about what we are going through. I do believe that Dover is a wonderful place to begin that healing process. I sure could have used a hug the day that Jimmy was brought back home to me. Seeing that flag-draped casket being carried out of the plane was very painful - I couldn't stop crying and I think my knees even buckled. I remember the

Army Sergeant who was next to me grabbing my arm to keep me from falling. And now, as I write this, tears are running down my face as I recall that day. The pain can return in an instant - with just a thought or a memory. I keep a box of tissues in every room of the house

because you never know when you will need one!

God Bless you for all the wonderful things you do to help ease our pain! And God Bless this wonderful Ministry! What you are doing with this Ministry is a good thing. Jimmy never talked about what he was doing or how he felt while over there, but I could tell he was proud of what he did. He also bonded with so many of the soldiers - and having no brothers of his own, only sisters, he told me that he considered all the soldiers his brothers. He called me one day and asked me what I thought was a strange question at the time. He asked if I would represent him and attend the soldiers' funerals from our area because he considered all of them his brothers. It made me sad to realize he knew that soldiers were dying over there. I replied, "Of course I will," and it touched my heart that he cared so much for all of them. It was only a few months later that I got the news that Jimmy was killed. It seemed so unreal at the time, until I saw that casket. And now, attending soldiers' funerals in his place has taken on a much bigger meaning. When I attended the Memorial Dedication at Fort Hood for all the soldiers lost to date in this war (it was about a year after Jimmy was killed), so many of the soldiers who knew Jimmy spoke about what a great kid he was and how much fun they had whenever he was around. It made me proud to hear he was so well-liked by his fellow soldiers.

No one knows how they will react until the time comes. I always thought I would be upset or feel the need to blame someone if Jimmy didn't return to me alive and well, but I surprised myself. I never got mad at the Army or at God. I only felt terrible pain and sorrow. My faith brought me through it. My heart still aches and I can still feel the hole that Jimmy left there when he left this world so suddenly, but knowing he is enjoying the beauty of heaven is what helps to get me through each day until I can see him again. Please understand that time and patience is all we need. I have come a long way. I couldn't talk about any of this in the beginning. What you are doing with this Ministry is a good thing. God Bless you and God Bless this magnificent Ministry for all the wonderful things you do to help ease our pain!

Mary Ryan Skolasky

## II. DOVER PROGRAM:

No messages from our chaplains this month.

#### V. THANK YOU NOTES AND MESSAGES:

PS4FS knitter/crocheter Ann Morrison, who works with the First United Methodist Church's prayer shawl group in Homosassa, Florida, shares a photo of two prayer shawls they recently sent to the family of PFC Michael Christopher Mahr, DOD 3/22/2011. James Albury, loving father of Michael, lives in the same town, so they have connected, as you will see from Ann's note below: (2 photos right)

*The prayer shawl in honor of PFC Michael Christopher Mahr, Homosassa, and his twin brother, Matthew is finished and am attaching a photo of it. It will be given to Matthew, when he and the family come to our church on March 18, 2012. March 22, 2011 was the date that Michael gave his life for you and for me, in Afghanistan. We delivered two shawls in November – one for Michael's mother and for his widow. Michael's Dad is working on getting things together for a memorial display for the surviving twin brother, Matthew. Hence his humble request to our group before Christmas. James, the father, even made a great suggestion of choosing colors in the shawl to "tie the twins together" - red/white/blue for Michael and blue and gold for Matthew who works for Wal-Mart. The group had trouble deciding about the exact Wal-Mart colors, so I left it up to the two knitters. Matthew lives in Bushnell and visits his brother's grave every other day which, in part, prompted James' request for the shawl for surviving brother and the colors he suggested.*

*I want to let you know that the Prayer Shawl Ministry, especially this very personal one for the Mahr family, is a very special ministry for me. God bless you and all the wonderful work that you do coordinating those involved in PS4FS (prayer shawls for fallen soldiers).*

