



## **SILENCE OF THE DEAD VOICES OF THE LIVING**

**A WITNESS TO END THE WAR IN IRAQ**

**MAY 11 – 14, 2006 • WASHINGTON, DC**

**CO-SPONSORS:** AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE ● GOLD STAR FAMILIES FOR PEACE ● GOLD STAR FAMILIES SPEAK OUT ● IRAQ VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR ● MILITARY FAMILIES SPEAK OUT ● SEPTEMBER 11TH FAMILIES FOR PEACEFUL TOMORROWS ● VETERANS FOR PEACE ● VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR

### **AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW**

May 3, 2006

#### **For Event Information:**

Jen Bergman, (206) 447-1801 or Janis D. Shields, (215) 241-7060; 302-545-6596 (cell)

#### **To Speak With These or Other Military Families**

Katya Kruglak, (703) 304-5075, or Nancy Lessin, (617) 320-5301

## **MOTHER'S DAY WEEKEND BRINGS MOTHERS AND FAMILIES OF FALLEN AND SERVING U.S. MILITARY TO WASHINGTON, D.C.**

*Grieving Families and War Veterans Urge Congress to Stop the War*

PHILADELPHIA — They bear what may be the heaviest burden of the war. Some lost sons to the war in Iraq. Others have family now serving. One finds her son facing a fourth deployment. They come from different parts of the United States and all walks of life. Over Mother's Day weekend, the following women unite with war veterans and others for *Silence of the Dead, Voices of the Living*, on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., to send an urgent message to Congress: Bring our troops home *now*.

**WHAT:** *Silence of the Dead, Voices of the Living*, featuring mothers and families who lost loved ones to the war in Iraq; veterans of this and previous wars; families of those currently serving; Iraqis and others who bear what may be the heaviest burden of the Iraq war.

**WHEN: MOTHER'S DAY WEEKEND  
Thursday to Sunday, May 11 - 14**

**EYES WIDE OPEN: THE HUMAN COST OF WAR**, the American Friends Service Committee's widely acclaimed memorial exhibition that features a pair of combat boots for every U.S. military casualty. Civilian shoes that represent a fraction of the Iraqi children, women and men killed in the conflict are also on display.

#### **Thursday, May 11**

A dramatic new memorial to recognize the thousands of Iraqi children, women and men who have died in the war will be unveiled.

#### **Saturday, May 13**

Silent march around National Mall (signs provided). Speak-out and musical performances follow.

**WHERE:** National Mall, Washington, D.C.

**WHY:** Three years of war have taken a tremendous toll. More than 2,400 U.S. troops and 100,000 Iraqi children, women and men have been killed. *Silence of the Dead, Voices of the Living* will mourn for the dead and call for an immediate end to the Iraq war.

Sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee ([www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org)), Gold Star Families for Peace ([www.gsfp.org](http://www.gsfp.org)), Gold Star Families Speak Out ([www.gsfsso.org](http://www.gsfsso.org)), Iraq Veterans Against the War ([www.ivaw.net](http://www.ivaw.net)), Military Families Speak Out ([www.mfso.org](http://www.mfso.org)), September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows ([www.peacefultomorrows.org](http://www.peacefultomorrows.org)), Veterans For Peace ([www.veteransforpeace.org](http://www.veteransforpeace.org)) and Vietnam Veterans Against the War ([www.vvaw.org](http://www.vvaw.org)).

## ***Silence of the Dead, Voices of the Living***

*Silent March on the National Mall, Washington, D.C.*

### **AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW:**

The following members of **Military Families Speak Out** ([www.mfso.org](http://www.mfso.org)) and **Gold Star Families Speak Out** ([www.gsfsfo.org](http://www.gsfsfo.org)) — organizations that represent families with loved ones who died, are serving, awaiting deployment/redeployment, or have been injured in the war with Iraq — will be participating in the silent march and rally on Saturday, May 13, and are available for interview.

To schedule an interview with these or other military families, contact **Katya Kruglak, (703) 304-5075, or Nancy Lessin, (617) 320-5301**

### **ANNA BERLINRUT — MAPLEWOOD, NJ**

***“This war is not making us safe.”***

Anna Berlinrut of Maplewood, NJ, comes from a military family that dates back to the Civil War. Her great-great grandfather served in that war; her grandfather served in World War I; her father served in World War II; her brother recently retired as a 30-year Air Force Veteran; her son’s father served two tours of duty in Vietnam; her son now serves in the Marine Corps Reserves. He is currently serving his second tour of duty in Iraq. Anna is speaking out against the war in Iraq, a war that she believes is neither a just nor an honorable war. “This war is not making the U.S. safer, and it is destroying the credibility of the United States world-wide,” Anna explained. The war is also very personal for Anna. “When I hear of a Marine’s death in Iraq, I pray that is not my son,” said Anna. “Then I realize that what I’m hoping for means it will be another mother who has lost a child. That is not acceptable. Bring them all home now!”

### **H. ELAINE JOHNSON — ORANGEBURG, SC**

***Lost son in mission “unknown”***

Elaine’s son, Spc. Darius Jennings, age 22, was killed in action in Iraq on November 2, 2003, when his Chinook helicopter was shot down, taking his life and the lives of fifteen other soldiers.

The war in Iraq has also been devastating for Elaine’s community: “There were four soldiers from the same area as my hometown killed in a short time, and Darius was one of them,” she said. “This has been a great loss for the community and has hit hard, because a lot of young men go into the military.”

Three graduates of Orangeburg-Wilkinson High School (South Carolina), where Darius went to school, were killed in Iraq in the space of just three months. Ms. Johnson, who works at an industrial plant in the Orangeburg area and is a member of **Gold Star Families Speak Out**, spoke out immediately after her son’s death, questioning why U.S. troops remained in Iraq. She publicly challenged Bush a week after Darius was killed, questioning why he could come to South Carolina for a \$2,000-a-plate Republican fundraiser, but could not bother to contact her and offer his condolences.

“I forced the president to meet with us,” she said. “I asked him why soldiers like my son were still dying in Iraq, and he said ‘to finish the mission’. I asked what the mission was, but he was already leaving the room.”

### **KAREN MEREDITH – MOUNTAIN VIEW, CA**

**FOUNDER OF GOLD STAR FAMILIES SPEAK OUT**

***“If I don’t speak, how will people know what it feels like to be a Gold Star mother?”***

On Karen Meredith’s left ankle is a tattoo of a heart surrounded by a gold star. Though the tattoo looks bright and cheerful, it is in fact a somber reminder of tragic loss. In May 2004, Meredith’s only child - Lt. Ken Ballard - was killed in Iraq at the young age of 26. At that moment, her life as a Gold Star mother began. Her decision to become actively involved in antiwar efforts came a short time later, at Ken’s funeral at Arlington Cemetery. “I looked down at his grave,” recalls Meredith, “and I said, ‘If I don’t speak, how will people know what it feels like to be a Gold Star mother, to walk this path?’”

Founder of **Gold Star Families Speak Out**, Meredith has been actively involved with the American Friends Service Committee's *Eyes Wide Open: The Human Cost of War* living memorial. She has been a featured speaker at numerous peace events throughout the country. Last September, she was in Crawford, Texas, for *the Bring Them Home Now Tour* that traveled the country before arriving in Washington, D.C. for United for Peace and Justice's End the War on Iraq mobilization. In March 2006, California's 22nd Assembly District named Meredith "Woman of the Year" for her tireless efforts as a peace activist to end the war and bring American troops home.

Initially, the U.S. military told Meredith that her son had been killed in action. However, after a fifteen-month battle with Army officials, Meredith discovered that Ken had in fact died as a result of wounds from the accidental discharge of a machine gun on his tank. "I was stunned and appalled that the Army took 15 months to tell me the truth," she later remarked.

### **SUE NIEDERER — TRENTON, NJ**

#### ***Arrested for reaching out to another mom –First Lady Laura Bush***

Sue Niederer never expected to be an activist. Though she strongly opposed the war in Iraq from the start, she didn't take part in protests and never spoke publicly about her views. The death of her son, 24-year-old Lt. Seth Dvorin, changed all that. On February 3, 2004, Seth was sent to search for improvised explosive devices - a job for which he lacked both training and equipment. He did not return. This tragic event was a catalyzing moment for Sue.

Since Seth's death, Sue frequently has taken part in events opposing the war - including her well-publicized confrontation of First Lady Laura Bush at a rally that ended in Sue's arrest. "I wanted to confront Mrs. Bush because she, too, is a mother," Niederer recalls. "I thought she might understand the pain we mothers are undergoing. I thought she might be able to hear me."

Sue has become an outspoken member of **Military Families Speak Out** and **Gold Star Families Speak Out**. Her experiences fuel her continuing efforts to bring an end to American military involvement in Iraq. "My goal is to bring the troops home as quickly as possible. That was Seth's wish," she remarked. "I can't save my son, but I can save someone else's son."

### **DEBORAH REGAL — PINCKNEY, MI**

#### ***Urgently needs war to end to get son home safely from Iraq***

Deborah Regal's son serves in the United States Marine Corps; he is currently serving his first tour of duty in Iraq. Deb Regal understands that while her son is fighting in Iraq, she is fighting to end the war there. "He understands what he does and he understands what I do," said Regal, a long-time member of **Military Families Speak Out** and a Pinckney schoolteacher. "He takes the oath that he was asked to sign very seriously. He views dissent within a democracy as essential."

She continues, "I acknowledge the personal sacrifices, training and dedication of our volunteer armed forces. It is precisely because I have this awareness, heightened from the perspective of a mother of one of those brave and skilled military personnel, that I say 'NO' to a war that is staged in defiance of international law and consensus..."

Deb joined **Military Families Speak Out** on January 19, 2003 — exactly two months before the U.S. invasion of Iraq began. "We have to make it clear," Deb said in March of 2003, "[that] we do not oppose our people in uniform, but the agenda of this administration. You can be an advocate for peace and a sincere supporter of our troops."

More than three years later, she is speaking out to bring her son and all of our troops home now, and take care of them when they get here.

## **ANNE ROESLER — SARATOGA, CA**

### *Dissent is patriotic*

For Anne Roesler, the war is a source of continuing anxiety and threat. Her son, a staff sergeant in the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, recently returned from his third tour of duty in Iraq, and there is no guarantee that he won't be redeployed for a fourth time. He has spent more than 550 days there since the invasion, and she says that, in the last 3 years, she has "watched him turn from a sensitive young man, who wore his heart on his sleeve and was in awe of being 'in the cradle of civilization' in Iraq, into someone who is filled with anxiety and so much anger that he can barely speak."

Anne questioned the war prior to the invasion and knowing that her son was somewhere in the Middle East the night the bombing of Baghdad began provided the impetus for speaking out against it. When asked how her son feels about her speaking out, she replies, "My son tells me that he and other enlisted personnel give up some of their rights when they join the military, in order to protect ours. Since he cannot speak freely, he encourages me to do so. What better way can I honor my son and all those who've served and died than to exercise my Constitutional rights?"

Anne, a long-time member of **Military Families Speak Out**, says that she will continue to advocate for an immediate end to the war, for all the troops to be withdrawn now, and for them to receive the care and support they need to reintegrate successfully into their families and communities.

## **DIANE DAVIS SANTORIELLO — PENN HILLS, PA**

### *Given incorrect information about son's death*

For Diane Davis Santoriello, her son's death in Iraq was only the beginning of her trauma. With less than one month left in his tour of duty, First Lt. Neil A. Santoriello, Jr., was killed by an improvised explosive device detonated near his Abrams tank. Though Diane and her husband were told by their casualty assistant that their son had died instantly, they later learned that he died two hours after the initial explosion. "We were given incorrect information about our son," Diane recounted. "We struggle daily because we did not see his body - we were incorrectly told that he was not viewable." Diane has worked relentlessly to "get to the truth" of her son's death and to improve the casualty reporting process so that other families won't have to go through the same painful experience.

A member of **Military and Gold Star Families Speak Out**, Diane opposed military action in Iraq from the start. She recalls that "the pain in my gut screamed at my head 'write about this war, speak out against this war!'" But Diane's love for her son kept her from getting involved; she didn't want to undermine her son's confidence. Looking back, Diane regrets not speaking out sooner. "But I speak out now," she asserts, "to protect the people still serving and to try to restore honor to our country."

## **CELESTE ZAPPALA — PHILADELPHIA, PA**

### *"I cannot and will not stop trying to speak the truth"*

Celeste Zappala lost her son, Sergeant Sherwood Baker, age 30, in an explosion in Baghdad on April 26, 2004. He was providing security for the Iraq Survey Group looking for weapons of mass destruction. Remembering that day, Celeste says that "it was just terrible, really the worst moment of my life." Celeste sees her activism as part of her duty to America. "I cannot and will not stop trying to speak the truth," she asserts. "This is the democracy we all live in, and we all have to be responsible for what is happening."

Celeste sees herself as "a person who has tried to live consciously, in a non-violent manner." She has opposed the war from the start and sees the fight for a humane and just world as her life's work. She is a long-time member of **Military Families Speak Out**, and now also a leader in **Gold Star Families Speak Out**. Drawing on the memory of her son Sherwood, who she calls "everybody's soldier, everybody's son," Celeste works doggedly to bring an end to the war in Iraq. "He really believed in America," she asserts. Celeste's persistence in speaking out underscores that she too shares this faith in America and that she will not relent until everyone's sons and daughters return home from Iraq.

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