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The Invisible Front: Love And Loss In An Era Of Endless War



Synopsis

The unforgettable story of a military family that lost two sons—one to suicide and one in combat—and channeled their grief into fighting the armed forces' suicide epidemic. Major General Mark Graham was a decorated two-star officer whose integrity and patriotism inspired his sons, Jeff and Kevin, to pursue military careers of their own. His wife Carol was a teacher who held the family together while Mark's career took them to bases around the world. When Kevin and Jeff die within nine months of each other—Kevin commits suicide and Jeff is killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq—Mark and Carol are astonished by the drastically different responses their sons' deaths receive from the Army. While Jeff is lauded as a hero, Kevin's death is met with silence, evidence of the terrible stigma that surrounds suicide and mental illness in the military. Convinced that their sons died fighting different battles, Mark and Carol commit themselves to transforming the institution that is the cornerstone of their lives. *The Invisible Front* is the story of how one family tries to set aside their grief and find purpose in almost unimaginable loss. The Grahams work to change how the Army treats those with PTSD and to erase the stigma that prevents suicidal troops from getting the help they need before making the darkest of choices. Their fight offers a window into the military's institutional shortcomings and its resistance to change—a failures that have allowed more than 3,000 troops to take their own lives since 2001. Yochi Dreazen, an award-winning journalist who has covered the military since 2003, has been granted remarkable access to the Graham family and tells their story in the full context of two of America's longest wars. Dreazen places Mark and Carol's personal journey, which begins when they fall in love in college and continues through the end of Mark's thirty-four year career in the Army, against the backdrop of the military's ongoing suicide spike, which shows no signs of slowing. With great sympathy and profound insight, *The Invisible Front* details America's problematic treatment of the troops who return from war far different than when they'd left and uses the Graham family's work as a new way of understanding the human cost of war and its lingering effects off the battlefield. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Mark Graham and his wife, Carol, lived an idyllic, if itinerant, life as an Army family. The charmed couple had three children, two boys and a girl. But tragedy struck after the two boys followed their father into the military: within nine months' time, their younger son Kevin killed himself while a college student and ROTC cadet, while older son Jeff was killed while deployed to Iraq. Because of the different nature of their two sons' deaths, it becomes clear to the Grahams how differently -- and shabbily -- the military, and even the public, treats the so-called "cowards" who take their own lives, as opposed to the "heroes" who die in combat. Major General Graham and his wife make it their life's mission to educate the public about the pervasive culture of the military that makes it hard to identify and treat depression and anxiety, traumatic brain injury and post traumatic stress disorder. Not only that, but they aim to change the deeply ingrained culture of the military itself, a rigid one that stigmatizes anyone who struggles with these demons. Author Yochi Dreazen follows the family's story from its beginnings until the present. The family's grief is so deep that even today, while speaking in public, the Grahams will break down in tears. Their daughter, Melanie, describes what it was like as a teen to experience the loss of her brothers -- and to be the one who discovers Kevin. Through the stories of other military members who kill themselves or attempt to, the author paints a damning picture of the military's response to this growing epidemic of hopelessness and despair. In Kevin's case, the military can't be entirely vilified. Mental health issues plagued both sides of the Graham family, predisposing Kevin to bouts of depression.

The army has not changed in many ways from the days of the brown boot army that my father served in to the days of the black boot army that I served in. These days of the camo boots still have many of the same problems, despite the army's feeble attempts to address them. Yochi Dreazen does a good job in summarizing and presenting examples of those who have suffered in recent years from the policy that you cannot show weakness and most of all you cannot give into your

emotions and depression. If you do, it means you are not a fit, top notch soldier and are weak. There have always been forms of PTSD, but under different names. My father, nor I would have never thought of saying anything to a doctor or a chaplain or an officer about our fears or any other emotion and feeling. Again Yochi Dreazen explores that problem, especially in relation to the suicide rate. The statistics today are horrifying and are given in this book. At many times more men are killed by their own hand, than that of the enemy. 'The Invisible Front' focuses on Major General Graham and his wife Carol. Their families did have a history of depression and the signs that were there before their son committed suicide are discussed and why they were overlooked. Kevin was taking Prozac and knew he would be kicked out of ROTC and not allowed in the army - he hung himself. Their other son, Jeff was killed by an IED. From that point on the Grahams committed their lives to help those who were suffering, including the families of those whose relatives had committed suicide. The military and the community's reaction is explained for many of those who died. General Graham embarks on a program to change the army's view and policies, some of which has been adopted.

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