

Home from A1

knew he would have to play a part in turning things around for this family.

The War at Home

In addition to the house's condition, Bush was further motivated to help upon hearing Jayson's story.

Jayson is a disabled veteran of the Iraq War. He had already served in the U.S. Marine Corps when he chose to answer President George Bush's call for a troop surge in the Iraq War and at 34 years old, he went overseas as an infantry medic.

During training in Kuwait, he participated in a Humvee Egress Assistance Trainer, a simulation of a vehicle rollover which allows crews to rehearse and physically execute the necessary steps required to survive an incident.

While upside down in the simulation, Jayson was unbuckled improperly. The fall caused severe injuries to Jayson's jaw, teeth, eye

muscle, brain and herniated three discs in his neck and two in his back.

Some of these injuries had not fully manifested, however, and Jayson told his doctor that he was set on following this team into Iraq and was prepared to go in against medical advice. He was written prescriptions, filled out an incident report and was on his way across the border within hours.

"Had I known, I probably would've stepped out," Jayson said of his more serious injuries. "I didn't realize I was that injured."

While out on a mission, Jayson was injured again in a non-combat incident with a gash to his leg. Despite attempts to treat it, the wound became septic and the resulting necessary surgery paralyzed his foot.

To date, Jayson has had 48 surgeries related to his injuries and continues to have extreme nerve pain — pain so intense he has had bouts of vomiting. He also has an implanted spinal cord stimulator that sends electrical impulses to out-

pace the pain signals to his brain.

This, paired with a traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), made returning to life at home in 2010 a challenge.

One day in 2011, his inner struggle put him on the verge of committing suicide.

"I was tired of being a burden and hurting people," he said.

A fortuitous knock at the door that moment by Jayson's parents diverted him from a tragedy and toward a path of recovery.

Fortune turned again that year when an eight-week old puppy came into his life. Jayson channeled all his energy into training the golden retriever Arrabelle as a therapy dog. At first a project in his own recovery, the training became an area of passion for the veteran.

Jayson eventually created a pack of four service dogs, which he uses in his volunteer work with Creslane Intergenerational Reading Collaboration, a program which helps kids in grades K-3 learn to read. The canines attend reading sessions with the children, teaching them about the role of service dogs and providing some their own therapeutic moments.

"I found the dogs really calmed kids down. It's incredible," Jayson said.

From Jayson's project, the Southmayds eventually launched their own business, SouthPaws LLC, which trains service dogs to meet the needs of their clients.

Jayson has also logged hundreds of hours to peer mentoring with the Veterans Treatment Court, a specialty court which helps set veterans on more productive paths if they are in legal trouble due to mental disorders or drug addictions.

Jayson lamented that veterans are generally not taught how to return as a citizen, forcing them to fight another war at home,

but the counseling received through the program can greatly aid with reintegration into society.

"It's a way to make them accountable, too," he said, noting the authorship it instills in those who receive treatment.

"The thing that saved me was my work with the kids, my peer mentoring with Lane County Veterans [Treatment] Court and the dogs," he said, crediting his survival also to the deep patience and compassion of his wife Misty, who has cared for him through his trials.

"She's an angel," he said.

Unhoused, but Undaunted

By January 2019, the family had just gotten their finances in the black for the first time since Jayson returned from the war. They even made plans for an anniversary celebration and family vacation in March.

But just as things were looking up, life threw a curveball when last year's historic snowstorm brought four trees down onto the family's house. The final tree penetrated the roof and came crashing into the living room, sending the family diving into adjacent rooms for safety.

Power was out and rural roads were blocked. The family decided to hook up the generator and ride out the storm.

That night, Jayson and Misty brought their children into their room as it was the only place in the house to sleep where they were sure no trees could come down on them.

Then Misty awoke to the sound of the carbon monoxide alarm going off.

She managed to rouse her husband and the two attempted to articulate the situation to each other but found it near impossible to string sentences together as their speech had already begun slurring.

"I've never been so scared in my life," recalled Misty.

They hurried their chil-

dren outside into their Jeep, drove into a field, rolled down the windows and turned on the heater.

Jayson remembered his medical training on carbon monoxide.

"Five hours after you're out of the exposed area, it's still 50 percent in your system," he said. "You can still die."

The family spent the night in the field, Jayson staying awake to monitor his family and keep them from nodding off.

With some roads cleared the next day, the Southmayds drove into town for supplies, but the snow began falling again with an expected eight more inches on the way. Not willing to return to be trapped in a damaged house, they found a hotel.

It would be a further 14 months of hotels, rentals and RV trailers before the Southmayds entered their own home again.

With an estimated \$226,000 in damages and a little under half covered by insurance, Jayson and Misty opted to save on construction costs by enlisting the help of friends to tear the house down to its studs to prepare it for reconstruction.

The Southmayds had also entered into a deal with a contractor acquaintance who the family would not name for this story, citing legal reasons.

From its skeletal state, the contractor directed a team to work on the house's foundations, plumbing, electrical, roofing, siding, trusses and finally sheetrock before walking off the job in March, stating he could not finish the project for the original price.

The home was still unequipped for a family to live in, so family friends through the Creswell Church Christ volunteered to paint the subfloor, install cabinets and appliances and make other cosmetic finishing touches.

On Easter Sunday, after more than a year without a permanent home and mov-

ing 11 times, the Southmayds moved into their reconstructed home — but it wasn't long before they began noticing problems.

"We started noticing little things here, little things there," said Misty. "Then bigger and bigger things."

Jayson and Misty brought the issues up with the contractor but could not get them rectified.

Communication between the Southmayds and the contractor finally broke down after the family received a bill in June for \$162,000 instead of the expected \$94,000. In the same message, they were notified that the contractor could not provide permits because none were required for the work.

The Southmayds also learned that no county inspector had been to the house during the construction period.

Despite the frustration, Jayson and Misty turned to the building code institutions rather than seek legal recompense.

"One thing that's weighed on my heart is how hateful and angry everyone is right now," said Jayson. "Right now is the opportunity to show mercy. Now more than ever."

In July, after exhausting other options by sending the contractor numerous certified letters, the Southmayds were put in contact with Bush, who is the building official for Cottage Grove, Creswell, Veneta and Coburg.


Bush's initial assumption that the case was an exaggerated disagreement quickly evaporated when he saw the extent of house's problems.

In addition to wires hanging out of the wall, a host of other issues were found such as the roof slumping, weak foundations, a leaking sewer pipe and a lack of nails on the house's siding, which cause the panels to slap the side of the house when the wind blows, triggering Jayson's PTSD.

See **VETERAN 6A**

NOTICE OF URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION VACANCIES

The City of Cottage Grove Urban Forestry commission will have two vacancies to this volunteer body at the end of this year. The Commissioners are appointed by the City Council. The Urban Forestry Commission meets once a month on Monday afternoons. People interested in applying for these positions need to complete a Volunteer Appointment Application available at the Public Works & Development Department at City Hall or online at www.cottagegrove.org. Incumbents are eligible to apply for these positions. The deadline for receiving applications is **November 20, 2020 by 5 p.m.** For further information please contact the Public Works & Development Department at 942-3340.



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