

A REAL AMERICAN HERO

HAL AMES



Living on the gulf shore of the State of Mississippi seemed to be the best place for Craig and Lori Delaney to raise a family. After moving from Chicago a few months before, the change seemed to be having a positive effect on Craig as well as his family.

Craig had been in the military. During his time in the army, he was in the Special Forces, where he had been a scout, one of the most dangerous jobs in the army. He and his unit were responsible for locating enemy positions and then reporting details back to headquarters.

Many times, when they were between enemy lines, they had to fight their way out. During his time in the war, Craig was shot twice, but he survived. Several of his buddies had not been so lucky.

On one of his missions, his unit found a large camp of enemy soldiers.

While they were sending information back to their commanders, an enemy soldier on patrol came upon the spot where they were hiding. The man yelled out before they could silence him. A fierce gun battle began.

The only advantage Craig and his unit had was they were behind some large rocks on a hilltop, so they had the high ground. Before air support finally arrived, one of his best friends was killed.

His unit was good at finding serious threats, and because of this, the enemy knew who he was and hated him. There was a bounty on his life. They called him 'Dhi'bun' which translated means 'The Wolf'.

He was a hero.

While on duty, his fear was that he would never return to his family.

He served two tours of duty and received many medals for his bravery and loyalty to his country.

After he arrived home, at times he wished he was back with his unit. In some ways, he missed the action and the adrenaline rush of doing his job, but then the horrors of what he saw and experienced would come rushing back. The memories of being trapped under enemy fire, and seeing his buddies die, haunted him every day.

It was very confusing for him. He had become very close to his friends, and he missed their companionship.

Ever since returning home, he struggled with depression, and he had been seeing a psychiatrist. The doctor gave him medications that helped him cope with his life away from the war.

While he was living in Chicago, he had constant reminders of what he had gone through on the battlefield, which made him very suspicious of just about anyone he met. It was difficult because his experiences in the war gave him nightmares. The sounds of the city kept him in constant fear for his life and for the lives of his family. That is why they moved to the South, to get away from all of the noise and the hectic life in Chicago.

Now in the quiet of the countryside, he could relax and spend quality time with his family.

The people in the town were very friendly, but sometimes it was hard to understand what they were saying because the accent was so different from Chicago.

Craig and Lori had two children, a son named Phil who was thirteen years old, and a daughter named Kari who was eleven. He had missed most of their

childhood while he was serving his country. Coming home to live with them had been an adjustment. He had no idea how to deal with pre-teens, but he was learning.

They were living in a white two-story house about six miles from the center of town. The children rode the bus for over an hour to school every day. It was very different for them because the schools in Mississippi were smaller than the schools in Chicago.

What they liked most was that the weather was a lot warmer. They could play outside at recess almost every day except when it rained. They liked their teachers, but the students, because they dressed and spoke differently, constantly teased them.

Kari cried almost every night because she hated the teasing.

“Mom, the kids say I’m weird. They don’t like my clothes and they say I talk funny. Why do they do that?” Kari asked her mom.

“Children are mean to kids who are different. You’re just going to have to learn to fit in,” her mother tried to console her. “Kari, it’ll get better. Just give it some time. You’ll fit in soon enough.”

Kari didn’t believe it. She was sure she would be teased the rest of her life.

Phil didn’t care. He just ignored the kids and did what he wanted.

There was a girl in his class that liked him. They would sit on the steps at the school and talk. He liked the way she spoke and she liked the stories he told her. The other students teased them, but they just laughed.

There were times when people asked Craig questions about who they were and where they came from, but he didn’t want to answer, so he ignored the questions. The people in the town thought they were being rude.

Over time, the family began to adjust to life in the South. It was slower and quieter. They liked it that way.

Lori found a job at the café in the town as a server. She was able to learn a

lot about what was happening in the town from all the gossip. It was fun for her to tell the stories over dinner with her family. Most the time the stories made them laugh.

Craig got a job selling cars. Ever since he was a boy, he had loved cars. He knew every model and how fast it could go. He was a very good salesman, and the people in the town began to respect him. They had no idea what he had gone through as a soldier, mostly because Craig did not like to talk about it.

One day, a stranger walked into the car dealership and wanted to buy a car, with cash, which was unusual, but Craig went ahead and showed him several cars. After looking around for a while the man made his choice.

“I’ll take the red Corvette,” he said.

“Have a seat in my office,” Craig directed the man to sit in the chair in front of his desk.

The man sat down and then Craig took his seat at his computer.

“Okay, just a little information, and then we’ll have you on your way,” Craig said, as he got comfortable in his seat and then looked at the man across his desk.

“May I see your driver’s license?” Craig requested.

“No, I just want to pay cash for the car. Here’s the money. I won’t even bargain over the cost,” the man responded. He put a large amount of money on the desk, seemingly in a hurry to get the transaction finished.

Craig looked at the money and then looked back at the man, wondering where he would have gotten so much money.

“I have to get your personal information for the bill of sale. It’ll only take a couple of minutes,” Craig said apologetically.

“I said no. I just want to buy the car and be on my way,” the stranger repeated, pointing back at the money.

“How can I register the car to you?” Craig asked, very curious at the man’s

refusal.

“I don’t care about that. I just want the car. I’ll get a title later. Here, take the money and just give me the key,” the man insisted.

“Just a moment, I need to check something with my manager. I’m not sure where the extra key is at,” Craig responded as he got up from his chair.

Craig left the man sitting at his desk and went to the back office to talk to his manager.

He knocked on the door of his office.

“Come in,” came a voice from inside.

Craig opened the door, walked in, and then closed the door behind him.

“There’s a man out there who wants to buy one of our most expensive cars and he wants to give us cash. What should I do? You told me during my training we were to use caution when someone wants to buy a car this way, right?” Craig inquired of his manager Bill.

“You’re right.” Bill responded. “Do you have his personal information?”

“No, he won’t give me any information. He just wants to buy a car and leave,” Craig responded.

“Maybe I should call the sheriff and have him come by,” Bill suggested as he picked up the phone on his desk to make the call.

Just then, the man opened the door and walked into the office.

“Is there a problem here? All I want is to buy a car. Can we get on with that?” the man said and then noticed Bill on the phone.

He asked, “What are you doing?”

“Ah, ah... I was going to call my wife,” Bill quickly responded.

“I don’t think so,” the man stated. “I think you need to hang up the phone, NOW!”

Bill slowly lowered the receiver back into its base, but as he did, he pressed

the mute button. The police officer on the other end of the line heard everything that was being said in the room.

“Now, do I get to buy the car? Or what?” the man said irritated at the situation.

Bill looked up at the man to explain the problem. “Well, you see, we have a law in this state that you have to provide your personal information in order for us to sell you a car. That way we can process the application for the sale and then send you the title,” Bill explained.

“I told your salesman, I don’t need the title now. I can do that later. Now, just give me the keys to the car. Here’s the money. I’m paying cash so there should be no problem,” the man insisted.

Bill looked over at Craig, who just shrugged his shoulders, not knowing what to do or say.

Just then, the sound of a police siren came from outside.

The man turned around and saw a police car, with its blue and red lights flashing, pull up in front of the building.

“Did you call the cops?” the man yelled at Bill.

“Ah.. no. It must have been one of the secretaries. She might have overheard our conversation,” Bill suggested.

“Why would she call the police?” the man shook his head in disgust. “Now everything’s a mess. I just wanted to buy a car and now the cops are here,” the man said, and then he pulled a gun out of his belt and pointed it directly at Bill. “That was a big mistake!”

Then the man noticed the red light on the phone.

“*You* made the call! That was really foolish of you,” the man said very angry. Bill sank in his chair. The man turned and then pointed the gun at Craig.

“Why couldn’t you have just let me have the car? Now, I’m going to have to

kill both of you. I'm not going back to jail. I'll die first," the man stated panicking at his situation.

Sweat was running down his brow and his hands were shaking as he pointed the gun directly at Craig.

For some reason Craig didn't act scared. He just stared deep into the eyes of the man holding the gun in his face.

"May I ask you a question?" Craig asked.

"What do you want to know?" he responded.

"Did you serve in the army?" Craig asked the question.

"Yeah, how do you know?" the man answered, a bit surprised at the question.

"I saw your tattoo on your arm. I served in the same battalion," Craig said, pulling up the sleeve on his shirt to show him the same tattoo.

"We might've even been in the same place at the same time," Craig stated, still talking, hoping to calm the man down.

"I know it's difficult coming home and not knowing what we're supposed to do or how we're supposed to act, but why would you want to kill me? What did I do to you that makes you so angry at me?" Craig tried to reason with him.

"I just wanted a car, so I could get out of this place. My car broke down about a mile from here.

"I'm headed home to California. I need to get home," the stranger answered.

He looked around the room visibly upset and scared.

"You've made me very angry, and I don't like to get angry," he seemed more nervous as he lifted the gun at Craig's face again.

Craig did not flinch. He held his ground and looked at the stranger in the eye still trying to calm him down before he did something very stupid.

"Why were you in prison before?" Craig asked.

The man rubbed his wrist on his forehead to wipe the sweat away.

Then he answered, “I robbed a bank to pay for my medical bills. They caught me and then I was in the state prison for three years. Now all I want is to go home!”

“What is your name?” Craig asked.

The man ignored the question and looked around the room.

Then through the window in the office, he saw two of the employees run out through the door to the police outside.

Then a big van with a dish on top of it pulled up. It was a mobile news truck.

Bill and Craig did not move, they did exactly as they were told.

“Come on man, this is not going to end well for you. Just hand me the gun so we can put this behind us,” Craig begged.

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Meanwhile, Lori was working in the café. The TV on the wall was showing the story of the situation at the car dealership. Some of the patrons of the café were watching what was happening.

Lori didn’t pay much attention until she realized the video showed where Craig was working. She stopped what she was doing and leaned against the counter staring at the TV. Everyone in the restaurant became silent.

The reporter began to give her report of what was going on inside the dealership.

“We know that there are at least two people being held hostage by an unidentified man. The employees who managed to get out of the building have told us that the sales manager and one of the sales people are in an inner office and the man is threatening them with a gun.”

The reporter stopped talking and read a paper someone gave to her.

She continued, “It appears that Bill Collins and Craig Delaney are the hostages. The name of the man holding them hostage is still unknown.”

She stopped for a moment, while someone talked to her. Then she began again.

“We have a report that the man holding the hostages may be Greg Bodette, an escapee from the state prison in Parchman. A car, reported to have been stolen in Mobile, has been found about a mile from here, parked along the highway. They believe Bodette used it to make his escape.

“There is also a report that he may have robbed a bank after his escape. We’ll give you more updates as they become available,” the reporter finished.

Lori panicked. What was she going to do? She decided she needed to go to the dealership to see if Craig was okay. Just as she was about to leave, the sound and the flash of a gun firing from inside the car dealership was seen on the TV, and then another.

The restaurant went silent. What just happened?

Lori ran out of the café toward the sales lot. She had never run so fast in all her life. All she could think about was her husband.

“He was gone so long to war and now he’s facing death in his own country. How can this be? It just isn’t fair!” she said to herself as she ran.

She was crying and her tears were running down her face. She didn’t even notice the people standing on the street as she ran past them, pushing them out of the way.

As she approached the car lot, she saw many police cars. The State Police had arrived and there were several more news trucks outside. An ambulance rushed past her. All she could think about was Craig and if he were alive or not.

When she finally got to the car lot, a crowd had gathered just beyond the police cars. She pushed her way through the crowd trying to get to her husband.

Just as she was about to run into the building, a police officer stopped her.

“Where are you going young lady? It’s dangerous in there,” he said as he grabbed her arm.

Lori struggled to get free, but the officer was too strong.

“I asked you, where are you going?” he asked in a stronger voice.

“My husband is in there. I need to help him!” she yelled at him.

“It’s too late. Everything is over,” he answered back.

“Over? What do you mean over?” she asked.

Out of the building came a rolling cart with a black body bag on it. The bag was zippered closed.

Lori fell to her knees and covered her face with her hands.

“Oh my God! What am I going to do?!” she sobbed.

Then a second cart came out. She looked up, hoping for good news.

Laying on the cart was Craig. Walking beside him and holding his hand was his boss Bill.

Lori got up and ran to Craig. She looked into his face.

“Are you going to be okay?” she asked.

He smiled up at her.

“Yes, I’ve been hurt worse before,” he answered.

Bill spoke up, “Your husband is a hero. He saved our lives.”

The emergency technicians then placed him into the ambulance. Lori climbed in beside him for the ride to the hospital.

On the way, Craig told Lori what had happened.

“He had the gun on me and I tried to talk him out of shooting us. When he looked over at Bill, I jumped at him, but unfortunately, the gun went off and a bullet hit me. When I fell on top of him the gun went off again, only this time he shot himself,” Craig told her of how he had been injured. “I never expected to

come home and then almost die.”

The news of what Craig did spread across the state. His record in the war was also broadcast. Everyone was surprised they had a real American Hero living in their town.

VOCABULARY (*Match the word to its definition*)

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|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. threats _____ | a. police officer |
| 2. medals _____ | b. unable to hear |
| 3. companionship _____ | c. unkind, impolite |
| 4. constant _____ | d. danger, warning |
| 5. recess _____ | e. joke, pester, bother |
| 6. rude _____ | f. hurt, wounded |
| 7. transaction _____ | g. never ending |
| 8. sheriff _____ | h. awards for courage |
| 9. mute _____ | i. break, time to play, vacation |
| 10. injured _____ | j. purchase, bargain, business deal |

TRUE / FALSE

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Craig and Lori have two children. | T / F |
| 2. Craig's family was from St. Louis. | T / F |
| 3. The family moved to Mississippi. | T / F |
| 4. Craig was in a war. | T / F |
| 5. Kari had a boyfriend. | T / F |
| 6. Chicago was a very noisy place. | T / F |
| 7. Lori worked in a café. | T / F |
| 8. Craig died at the dealership. | T / F |
| 9. Greg Bodette was the sales manager at the dealership. | T / F |
| 10. The news said Craig was an American Hero. | T / F |

MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. Where did the Delaney's live before moving to Mississippi? _____
 - a) Boston
 - b) Mobile
 - c) Chicago
 - d) Iraq

2. What was the name of the son? _____
 - a) Lori
 - b) Phil
 - c) Kari
 - d) Craig

3. Why did Kari not like school? _____
 - a) She was shy
 - b) The children teased her
 - c) She was so smart
 - d) Her brother teased her

4. What did Craig do for work? _____
 - a) sold cars
 - b) sold insurance
 - c) sold TV's
 - d) sold Jewelry

COMPREHENSION: *(Write a complete sentence to answer the question.)*

1. Why did the Delaney's move from Chicago?

2. What happened to some of Craig's war buddies?

3. Why was Craig afraid when he came home?

4. Where did the family move to?

5. Where did Lori work?

6. Who was older, Kari or Phil?

7. What did the man want when he went to the dealership?

8. What kind of car did Greg Bodette want to buy?

9. What did Bill do when Greg Bodette walked into the office?

10. Who died?
