

N.J. fallen soldiers leave legacy of heroism, service and loss

By Mark DiIunno

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Aristide Economopoulos/The Star-Ledger

Enza Jacobowitz holds her nephew Lorenzo Marciante, 2, while looking out a door at her parents house in Jackson. Lorenzo's father ,Cpl. Luigi Marciante Jr., was killed in an ambush in Iraq in 2007.

Luigi Marciante Jr. lives in his son, Lorenzo, and in the hearts and minds of his wife, parents, siblings and friends. His name is memorialized on street signs and monuments in two cities and in the Elizabeth grammar school gym he played in as a kid.

But it's been two years since he died in the war in Iraq, and the hole he left in his family grows more everyday.

"The reality has set in. Louie is gone and we have to go on with life," said the soldier's father, Luigi Sr. "What else can you do?"

Every soldier killed in America's current wars leaves a legacy of heroism and service. But as these wars grow old, the lessons of the past war dead become painfully real: When a soldier dies, the loss to his family is forever and only deepens over time. Gone is the husband or wife, son or daughter, brother or sister. Also gone are future children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. The family portrait is forever never complete.

The Marciante family works hard to remember and honor their husband, son and brother. Magnetic ribbons, with Pfc. Luigi Marciante's picture, are attached to their cars. The walls of the family home in Jackson are covered with pictures. There are multiple copies of some, like Louie's official military portrait or the photo of the young soldier cradling his newborn son in his large hands. He came back from Iraq for 18 days around the birth in late summer of 2007. Lorenzo was born Aug. 25. His father died six weeks later, on Sept. 20, killed by a roadside bomb in Muqdadiyah. He was 25.

On the wall is a wedding picture of Louie and Stephanie. She was a soldier, too. They met at Fort Lewis, Wash., and were married 15 months before Louie died. She was a widow before 25.



On the fireplace mantel is the triangular cherry flag holder, which holds the American flag that draped his coffin. Inside are his medals, including the Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

Economopoulos/The
Star-Ledger

A memorial that
the Central Jersey Italian American Club
made to honor Cpl. Luigi Marciante Jr.
located next to their clubhouse in Jackson.

"Sometimes, when I look at all this and I think of him, my throat and my chest tighten," the father said. "I can't stay inside. I have to go out."

At his sister Enza's house, there is a boots-rifle-and-helmet sculpture, the symbol of war dead. The sculpture sits at the base of a large flag pole where the Stars & Stripes flies. At the base is a bronze plaque dedicated to

Louie.

Since her brother's death, Enza Jacobowitz has raised \$50,000 for the Achilles Track Club Freedom Team, which fits disabled veterans with race-worthy prosthetic devices or wheelchairs. She has 90 people working on her team and part of the money has gone to buy 10 race chairs. Each has Louie's name emblazoned on the back.

"He was an awesome guy," his sister said. "We don't want people to forget him."

The Marciante household in some ways revolves around Louie's memory. His wife, Stephanie, lives in Brick and the rec room of the home is filled with toys, a playground for Lorenzo. The boy has his hair cut soldier style and he points to the pictures of daddy through the house. Some of the pictures are of daddy's funeral. The flag-draped coffin, the military honor guard, the Elizabeth police motorcycle escort, the Jackson police and fire departments lining the cemetery. There is a picture of Gov. Jon Corzine with the widow and parents. There is a picture of the graveyard, resplendent with red, white and blue flags of all sizes.

Each month. Luigi Sr., and his wife, Maria, go to a survivors group meeting at Fort Dix.

"It has been very useful," Luigi Sr. said. "It helps you face the reality."

Reality. There's that word again.

For Maria Marciante, the reality is that she lost a son but at least gained a grandson.

"I see these other Gold Star mothers, and their children died at 20, 21, 22. Those children hadn't begun to live. At least Louie found a wife and had a son. At least he left someone to connect us to him."

Still, the pain in her life is "indescribable." Louie was the youngest of four. Her baby. The others are healthy and moving down the timeline of life, as expected, but without their brother. There are weddings, and grandchildren, and family pictures everywhere. The house is often full, and happy with noise.

Then the reality sets in.

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