

Grieving Mother's Advice To Bush: 'Bring Our Boys Home'

By Hazel Trice Edney
NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The mother of an American soldier-killed in a recent missile attack on a CH-47 Chinook helicopter in Iraq has a message that she says President Bush needs to hear.

"If I could talk to the president myself, right now, I would tell him, 'Find a plan to bring our boys home,'" says Harriet Elaine Johnson of Cope, S. C., the mother of U. S. Army Specialist Darius T. Jennings. "They're telling us, 'We're going to kill your American soldiers,' and it doesn't seem like the American leaders are listening...Let us not use our babies at the expense of the country to try to prove some kind of power struggle."

Jennings was one of 16 U. S. Army soldiers killed when the helicopter was shot down Nov. 2 by a missile near Fallujah. His death

came less than two weeks before his 23rd birthday. Ironically, last Saturday, the day of Jennings' funeral, two American Black Hawk helicopters collided in midair and crashed near Mosul, killing at least 17 American soldiers who were aboard.

"I feel quite sure if they had some kids over there, they would have already come up with a plan," Johnson says. "From my understanding, I think all of [Bush's] kids are living. So, he cannot feel what I'm feeling...He'll never be able to feel my sympathy until he walks in my shoes."

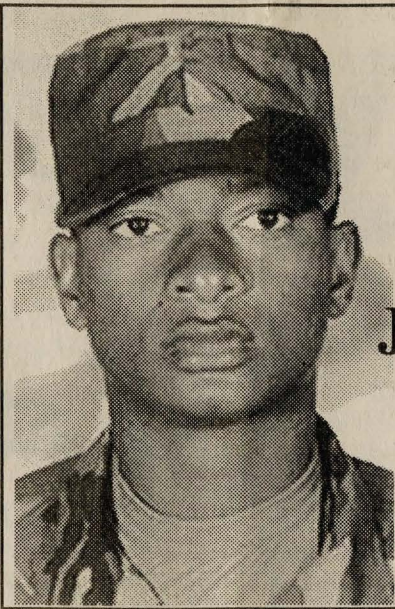
Pentagon Spokesman Maj. Steve Stover says the military understands the suffering of families of loved ones killed in the war.

"I know a lot of people ask us, 'Well, what do you think about being there?' Well, you know what? In those respects, we don't," he says. "We're soldiers. We go where we're

told. If the president tells us to go, we go. We trust our elected leaders, not only the president, but our Congress, who makes those decisions. We don't second-guess them."

Not only has Bush nor many Congressional leaders not walked in Johnson's shoes, they didn't take the risk her deceased son took, either.

Rather than serve on active



Spec.
Darius
Jennings

duty; Bush joined the Texas Air National Guard in 1968.

And he has denied widespread reports that he didn't report for drill duty from May 1972 to April 1973 while he lived in Alabama and worked on the U.S. Senate campaign of of former postmaster general Winton M. Blount. Bush says he fulfilled his guard service locally on weekends.

Vice President Dick Cheney used student and marriage deferments to avoid military service. None of the top Republican elected leaders served in the military. Neither Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, Senate Majority Whip Don Nickles, House Speaker Dennis Hastert, nor House Majority Whip Roy Blunt served in the Armed Forces.

On the Democratic side, Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle served three years as an intelligence officer in the U. S. Air Force Strategic Air Command, but neither House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi nor House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer served in the military.

Of the nine Democratic presidential candidates, only retired Gen. Wesley Clark and Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry served on active duty. Clark rose from an infantry officer in the army to company commander in Vietnam

to four-star general and supreme allied commander of NATO forces in Europe. Kerry was the skipper of a Navy swift boat in the Mekong Delta of South Vietnam. Both Kerry and Clark received the Purple Heart after being wounded in combat and both were awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action.

Rep. Dick Gephardt of Missouri obtained an education deferment, graduated then joined the Missouri Air National Guard like Bush. Connecticut Sen. Joseph Lieberman also got an education deferment, then got another deferment for becoming a father.

Both Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich and former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean were assigned draft lottery numbers, but were disqualified for medical reasons -

Kucinich for a heart murmur and Dean for back problems. North Carolina Sen. John Edwards was also assigned a lottery number, but the draft ended in 1973 before he was called. New York activist Al Sharpton turned 18 just as the draft was winding down. As for former Illinois Sen. Carol Mosely Braun, women were exempt from the draft.

Spec. Jennings' mother says she had spoken to him by phone only five days before his death. "My son was tired of being over there," she says. "First of all, I didn't raise my son in violence. He joined the Army. He knew that maybe there would have been war, [but] my son, the things he was seeing over there, he was not accustomed to. And it was really getting to him and he asked me for guidance."

"I said, 'Son, go to your chaplain.' So, he went to the chaplain and he came back and said, 'Well Mommy, I'm just ready to come home. And every time we spoke and when he e-mailed me, it was the same thing, 'Mommy, I'm ready to come home. You don't know what I'm going through over here. You don't see the things I see Mommy.'"

Jennings and his wife, Ari, 20, an airman in the U. S. Air Force, observed their first wedding

anniversary on Oct. 29. Now, there will not be a second.

"She's taking it day to day," says her father, Howard Young of Colorado Springs. "You know, it's a numbing experience."

The couple met while Jennings was stationed near Colorado Springs at Fort Carson, assigned to the 2nd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment.

"In the short time I've known him, he was a great individual, someone who was considerate as well as conscientious about servicing his country," recalls Young. "He was a very energetic and very respectful young man. And I was proud to have him as a son-in-law."

Jennings joined the Army three years after graduating from Orangeburg-Wilkinson High School. He had planned to enter college and become a photographer. Instead, he is among more than 400 Americans who have died in Iraq since the war began in March.

Johnson says she asked Sharpton to speak because of "personal reasons," but did not elaborate. Sharpton, who says he started preaching when he was four and was ordained five years later, temporarily set partisan politics aside Saturday to eulogize Johnson in Cordova, S.C., near Orangeburg. President Bush has sent letters to the families of those killed, but, unlike Sharpton, has yet to attend any funeral of U. S. service men and women killed in Iraq.

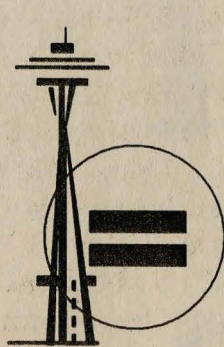
"It's important that the president mourn every loss of life. And to do so, is to talk about all the loss of life, and not to specifically look at one over the other," says White House Spokesman Dan Bartlett.

That provides no comfort for Jennings' parents.

"My inner strength is gone," says Harriet Johnson. "I'm getting strength from the Lord now. Just His strength is carrying me because mine was gone when I heard about my son's death."

It's time for the...

Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle's



4th Annual Breakfast

An event not to be missed !

Join us on: Friday, December 12th, 7:30 am - 9:00 am
(doors open at 7:00 am)

Location: Washington State Convention Center

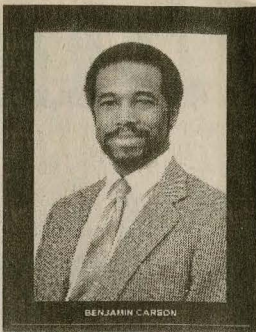
\$60 per ticket / \$600 per table of 10

To assure availability,
Reserve your tickets today.

events@urbanleague.org
206-461-3792 x 3009
www.urbanleague.org

Tickets are tax deductible.

\$5.00 parking for event attendees in Convention Center parking lots.



Keynote Speaker:
World Renowned
Neurosurgeon
Dr. Ben Carson

Please join us in celebrating the accomplishments of the Urban League this past year and learn about our current and upcoming activities.

The annual breakfast is our key fundraising event of the year.

Your patronage and support are the backbone of our organization.
Thank you.

Bring this ad in for \$2 off each ticket when you buy two or more.

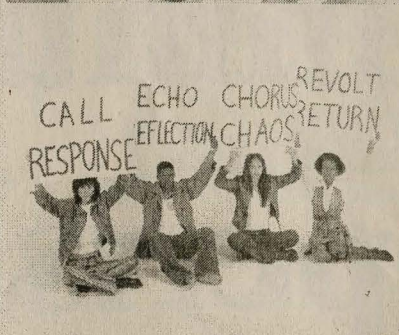
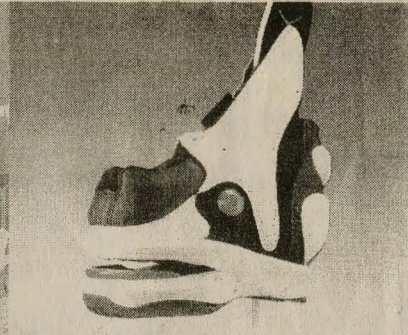
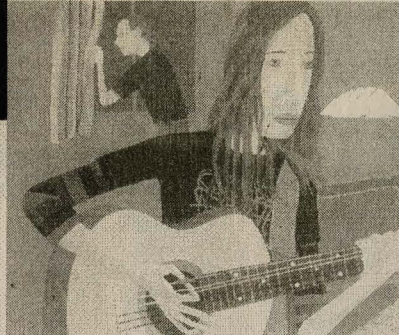
BAJA
TO THE WEST COAST AND
VAN CONTEMPORARY ART
COU
VER
Open Until
9 p.m. Thursdays
and Fridays!

OCTOBER 9 - JANUARY 4

This exhibition has been organized by the Seattle Art Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Vancouver Art Gallery, and California College of the Arts/Watts Institute for Contemporary Arts. The exhibition tour has been generously supported by the Puler Norton Family Foundation and the Canadian Department of Foreign and International Trade. Generous support in Seattle provided by PONCHO (Patrons of Northwest Civic Cultural and Charitable Organizations), The Seattle Times, Microsoft, and the Seattle Art Museum Supporters (SAMS).

100 University Street (206) 654-3100 www.seattleartmuseum.org

SAM seattle art museum



Build Your Tomorrow™

HFC and Beneficial understand that you're working hard every day to reach your goals. As you build your tomorrow, we'd like to help. Our Build Your Tomorrow™ programs offer free education tools and information you can use to achieve your goals. Here's how:

Take the Your Credit Counts™ Challenge!

Visit yourcreditcounts.com to learn more about the importance of your credit score and enter our sweepstakes for a chance to win cash prizes, including a \$25,000 grand prize.

Apply for a Customer Scholarship!

If you are an HFC or Beneficial customer, we've created a multi-million dollar scholarship fund to help pay for your education or your child's education. To apply for a scholarship of up to \$5,000 per year, stop by one of our HFC or Beneficial branch locations, call 1-877-525-8491 or visit www.scholarshipadministrators.net and enter code HFBEN.

As you build your tomorrow, HFC and Beneficial are here to help.

BUILD YOUR TOMORROW™
Financial Education Workshops & Resources
Credit Education Tools
Community Education Grants
Customer Scholarships

Beneficial