

To Honor Our Fallen

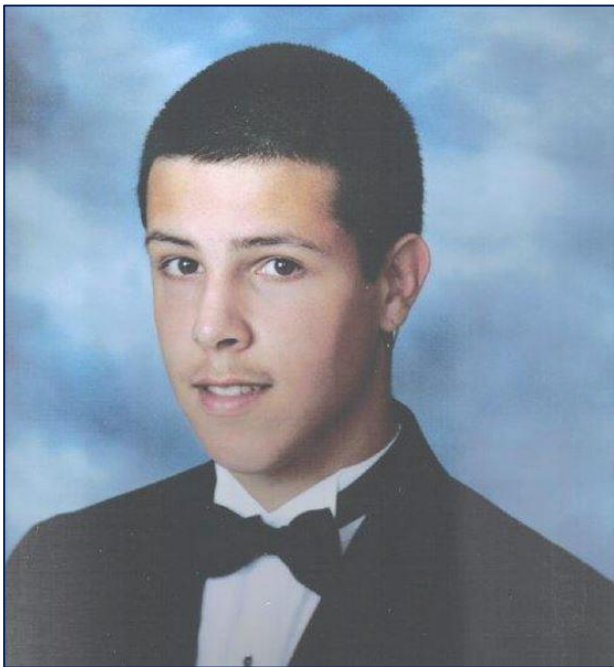
Angelo Zawaydeh's name is engraved on the Pacifica Memorial Monument, located at the western end of the parking lot of Pacifica's American Legion Hall—555 Buel Avenue, Pacifica, California. Angelo is one among fourteen remembered. The monument, dedicated on November 11, 2021, at 11 a.m., was built to honor Pacifica's Vietnam and Iraq fallen. Finis Vitae Sed Non Amoris.

November 11, 2021

The Story of Angelo Zawaydeh

1986-2006

BY JEAN BARTLETT



Angelo Zawaydeh, Terra Nova High School senior photo. Class of 2004.

Students Joe Quirarte and Angelo Zawaydeh used to have lunch together, every day, at Terra Nova High School in Pacifica. The two friends graduated in 2004 and in January of 2005, Angelo entered the U.S. Army.

It was in March of 2006, when Joe telephoned his mom, Debbie Smyser, in Pacifica. He was phoning to say, "Hello," to check in.

"It was Joe's first deployment," Debbie said. "He was on his way to Afghanistan."

"I had to tell Joe that Angelo passed," Debbie went on to say. "After I told my son, the phone went dead. Joe's phone had died. Joe called back collect from Afghanistan. He was heartbroken. I did my best to console him."

U.S. Army PFC Angelo A. Zawaydeh—Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) out of Fort Campbell, Kentucky—was killed on March 15, 2006, when his traffic control point came under mortar attack during combat operations in Baghdad. A Bay Area native and San Bruno resident, Angelo was just two months shy of his 20th birthday.

Joe asked his mom to buy a plant for Angelo's mom, which she did. The two moms then cried together.

"My son and I still talk about Angelo," Debbie said. "He will always be remembered."

The Story of Terra Nova High School student Angelo Zawaydeh
By Jean Bartlett ©2021

Angelo Akram Zawaydeh was born on May 27, 1986 in San Francisco to April Bradreau and Akram Zawaydeh. He was the first of their four children: Angelo, Francesca, Nicole and Dominic.

"I met Angelo at Ortega School," said Tony Lucia, who grew up in Pacifica.

While Angelo was somewhat shy, the two boys shared an enthusiasm for video games, especially role-playing video games.

In the earliest days of their friendship, the two did swordplay with sticks and cardboard, played hide-and-seek and always worked on their continued favorite, video-game role playing. As they got a little older, it was to the surf for bodyboarding.

Angelo was Jordanian-American, and Tony said Angelo's personality was a product of his Jordanian background in that he was a giving, caring and sincere friend. "He was always willing to share."

Well-liked in school, not much for speaking up in class unless he felt his input was absolutely necessary, middle-schooler Angelo thought that law enforcement and the military would be avenues he would pursue in his adult years.

Tony reflected on what was lost the day Angelo died.

"The world lost a very caring, sincere, hospitable, generous and future-family man when it lost Angelo Zawaydeh."

* * *

"I met Angelo when we were around 15 at Terra Nova High School," Kevin Campos said. "We both didn't have athletic wear for Phys Ed so we ended up sitting out. I was listening to heavy metal and so was he. We started talking about music and from then on we were friends. He was just an all-around good dude."



Terra Nova High School, Pacifica, CA. (Photo from TNHS Class of 2004 classreport.org.)

Kevin ticked off the top picks on their metal playlist: Korn, Adema, Slipknot and Mudvayne.

"We played a ton of video games. Angelo loved Final Fantasy VII and we would just sit and not say a word, playing games for hours."

The two friends also used to head to the mall, with a follow-up of skateboarding at a park. Angelo was an avid skateboarder – he'd been skateboarding since he was 9 and had mastered numerous tricks. They also liked to have BB gun shootouts in their respective yards, which, just thinking about, still makes Kevin laugh.

"Angelo and I never had a ton of cash but my parents remember how much the grocery bill was! We would sit in front of the TV with a gallon of milk and two or three boxes of cereal. The next thing you know, we finished it all.

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For a skinny guy, he could put the food away. We attempted the 1-Pound Burger Challenge at Fuddruckers in Daly City a couple of times. But he never could finish it."

Then there was driving nowhere in particular, just for the joy of the ride.

"His parents brought him an Infiniti G20 and he loved that damn thing. He was a risk taker and a speed demon," Kevin paused to laugh out loud. "We almost met our end a few times in that car!"

Angelo's heart was huge when it came to pets.

"He had a Siberian Husky, Shadow, that he adored," Kevin recalled. "And he spent so much time at my house that he and my cat Moe became best buds. The three of us would hang out all the time." (By the time Angelo signed on with the Army, Shadow had a three-month-old puppy, Oso – one more "best bud" to add to Angelo's list of furry friends.)

Megan was Angelo's girlfriend. Angelo and Megan dated almost the entire time Kevin knew Angelo. Kevin's girlfriend back in high school was Christina and she and Megan were best friends. Megan and Angelo split up shortly after Angelo joined the Army.

The biggest influence that sent both young men off to serve their country was the September 11 attacks.

"I had always wanted to join the military," Kevin said, "but that day solidified it. We were all angry and wanted to get revenge on those who attacked us."

In March of 2006, Kevin told *San Francisco Chronicle* staff writer Steve Rubenstein, "We thought if we're going to live in this country and raise our families here, we had to do something before we started our lives. We decided that America was worth fighting for."

Angelo's parents told the *Associated Press* that their son brought up the idea of joining the military when he was 16. They were against it and said, no. They worried not only about the danger their teenage son faced going to war, but they were additionally deeply concerned about his participating in a Middle Eastern war. Angelo's dad is Jordanian and his uncle was a member of the Jordanian Parliament.

His parents hoped he would go to college. They encouraged him to go to college. But when he turned 18 he told them, "I can't sit in the classroom anymore. I need to get up and do something."

At the age of 18, the decision was Angelo's to make.

Out of the different branches of the U.S. military, why did Angelo choose the Army?

"I truly believe he did it for the signing bonus," Kevin said.

There are a number of articles from 2004/2005 which discuss the Army's then struggles to meet its overall target recruiting quotas. In response, the Army offered enlistment bonuses and re-enlistment bonuses.

In March of 2006, Angelo's dad told the *San Mateo Journal*, "For the Army and Armed Forces in general to give a \$15,000 signing bonus to an 18-year-old is a bribe. They should be ashamed."

"At that stage of the war we were losing a lot of guys and recruiting was down," Kevin noted. "I think Angelo wanted the money to buy a ring for Megan and to start a family. He also wanted to serve his country. We were gonna join the Marines together, but I think that huge chunk of cash to an 18-year-old was the final deciding factor for him. The Marines wanted him badly, and wanted him to be an officer. But they weren't offering anything to join at the time. Also he was stoked to be Airborne and the Marines don't really have airborne troops. As I recall, he was even talking about applying for Ranger school."

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Kevin did join the Marines, March of 2005. He was deployed to Ramadi, Iraq in 2008-2009. Now working in security and living in San Mateo, CA, Kevin served in the Marine Corps until 2013. He exited the Marines as a Corporal E-4 and an Infantry Squad Leader.

Angelo entered the Army in January of 2005. In September, Angelo was sent to Iraq.



The insignia of the 101st Airborne Division ("Screaming Eagles.")

"I took him to the airport when his pre-deployment leave was over," Kevin shared. "It was his last moments home. I remember taking him to SFO and giving him a big hug and then watching him head into the airport. That's the last time we saw each other."

Angelo's mom told the *San Mateo Daily Journal* that when her son left for Iraq, he really believed he should be there. He believed he was there "not to stop people, but to stop evil."

Angelo struggled with what he believed and what he saw in Iraq once he was there. But he stood proudly with those he served with – as a patriot, as a defender and as a friend. And he would, as always, keep his attitude upbeat. All of his family members and friends, and many of his neighbors and teachers, would later praise him for his innate ability to spread smiles and his constant willingness to lend a helping hand. And Angelo made plans while he was in Iraq. Once he finished his four-year obligation, he was going to college to study law enforcement or law.

His immediate plans were to come home on mid-deployment leave. He was scheduled for two weeks in May. With his 20th birthday on May 27, his family had big celebration plans in the works. Additionally, his sister Francesca was graduating from South San Francisco High School in June and then heading off to UC Santa Cruz. That was also included in those celebratory plans. Angelo's father said Angelo had it all worked out that he was going to teach Francesca to drive during his time home and take her around her new college campus.

And then the unplanned, happened.

As the article in the *Military Times* reported, Army PFC Angelo A. Zawaydeh, 19, died Wednesday, March 15, 2006, serving during Operation Iraqi Freedom. "He was manning a machine gun atop a tank at a Baghdad traffic control point when he was killed by a bullet in the neck."

Kevin was at home when he missed the call from Angelo's family's home number.

"I got excited because I thought he was home early. I called back and his little brother answered and handed the phone to his mom. I could tell something was wrong right away and then she said, 'Angelo's gone.'"

Angelo's parents heard of their son's death on the eve of their 21st wedding anniversary.

Two hundred people attended the service for Angelo at St. Thomas More Catholic Church in San Francisco. He was laid to rest at the Greek Orthodox Memorial Park in Colma, CA. While his parents were not for the war, they were both very proud of their son for his service, his heroism and for his true gift of being such a good human being. Angelo was recognized at his service for "saving many lives that day."

"Angelo was full of love," Kevin said of his best friend. "He never said anything bad about anyone, just a real genuine nice dude. And he always put everyone else before himself – something people have lost these days it seems.

"He was in fact, the best dude I've ever known. He was funny as hell and very, very compassionate and caring. He was the kind of guy who would literally give you the shirt off his back if you were in need. He was always there to listen to your problems and give advice. And if you didn't wanna talk about it, he would just be there.

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"If Angelo were alive, he'd want this mad world we live in today to chill out and to remember, that we are all in this together. He was a positive vibes kinda dude. He was more than my best friend. He was like a brother."

U.S. Army PFC Angelo A. Zawaydeh's awards and decorations include: National Defense Service Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal and the Combat Infantry Badge. Posthumously, he was awarded the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star. While he was survived and mourned by his parents, siblings, extended family and friends, before his own death, he deeply mourned the death of his grandmother, Helene Bradreau, who died in December of 2004.

There is one more engraved piece of metal, in remembrance of Angelo.

"A couple of years ago I realized that the anniversary of his death had passed and I had forgotten," Kevin Campos said. "It disturbed me. I know things change with time but I never expected to forget my best friend. I got this bracelet made and it hasn't left my wrist in over two years except to shower. It's a constant reminder of Angelo and his sacrifice."



Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco. She is additionally the author of two historical biography books on some of the more than 370,000 interred at Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery in Colma, CA. Visit her website at www.bartlettbiographies.com.

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