

IN MEMORY OF  
CORPORAL CHANNING DAY



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## **ROSEMARY DAY**

Interview by Katy Regan

Rosi, from Comber, Northern Ireland, lost her daughter, Corporal Channing Day, serving in 3 Medical Regiment, when she was killed on patrol in Helmand, on October 24<sup>th</sup> 2012.

Even as a wee girl, Channing always wanted to win. Even before she went into the army, her local gym held a competition for holding one of those medicine balls and doing squats up against the wall. Of course she would not be beaten. Channing would have stayed there for two days if it meant winning, she was that determined. They said she was like a wee Rottweiler on the football pitch. Leslie and I got married in 1986. We had Lauren in '85, Channing in '87, Laken in '88 and Aaron in '89 so we had a few busy years! All my girls were tom boyish and into sport, but Channing in particular. She played football and gymnastics for Northern Ireland; football and rugby for the army on first team level. She just loved her sport. She also liked to party with her girls and was always the last one on the dance floor. She was full of life and direction, with her whole life mapped out; but she was cheeky too. She would wind the others up when she was home, then she'd be "bye!" Waving through the window at them, leaving me to sort out the arguments! She was great at giving advice. Even now, her little brother Aaron says if he has problems, he can hear

her telling him what to do. "I just wish I could talk to her," he says. Channing's Dad was in the army, so from when she could walk, she would put Leslie's beret on, and say, "Dad show me how to march." From nine years old, she pestered us to join the cadets until we gave in at 12. She wanted to join the engineers originally, straight after school, but you had to be 164 cm and she was only 162 cm - she was heartbroken. So we looked at being a combat medic but Channing thought that would mean working in a hospital at first, and that was no good, because she wanted to use a gun and be with the lads on the ground. After research, however, we realised it was very much a job on the ground, so that was what she did.

Leslie had been in the army and he'd been safe, so I didn't think anything would happen to Channing. I was more worried about her going on a plane to England and getting through six weeks of basic training to be honest, because whilst she was brilliant at sport, she was the sort of child you'd worry about getting on and off the right bus. During training, she became very friendly with Ella Dlugosz.

They went on their first tour of Iraq together but Ella was killed. That was the first time it hit me: this can happen. Channing was distraught. She hadn't thought being in the army meant she could die, she thought she was infallible, but after Ella's death I think she realized that this can happen to any of us. Still, from leaving home as a shy 17 year old to when she died, she just blossomed. At 25, she was just coming into her own and being a confident young woman. She went on her first tour of Afghanistan but she didn't tell me much detail about what was going on. But then one day, I saw a post on her Facebook page from a friend of hers saying that she was in a book about something that 'had happened in Afghan.' So I ordered this book and read about the incident: Channing had been on patrol when one of the lads had stepped on a landmine and his leg had been blown off. As a medic, Channing had had to deal with that, and reading it really hit me, this wee girl that you brought up and protected all those years is under fire by the Taliban whilst you're sitting here eating your dinner. You can't process it, and it doesn't feel right - but this was her

job and she loved it. She'd actually saved this man's life too. The doctor had told the major that the medical care she'd given that day, was as good as a doctor. Channing hadn't mentioned any of this to me of course. Her attitude was that, when she was at work she was at work, and when she was at home on leave she wanted to be a girl again. I think because she knew what she was getting into on the second tour, she was more nervous. I just sensed something was different. The picture on the sofa was taken on the last day of her leave; just us having a last cuddle. When she left that day, she gave me a look as she was going out the door. Our eyes met. It was the sort of look we'd never given each other before - almost as if, we just knew...

She hugged Aaron and he told her to look after herself. After she left, he came downstairs and said, "Mum, you will never see her again." And I said, don't be so silly, Aaron please don't say that." But he said, "I am telling you, we're not going to see her again" and he was right; he sensed something too. On the day we found out, I'd been at the funeral of one of the old ladies who used to come into the hair

salon where I've worked in the mornings for years. I'd not heard from Channing that morning, despite leaving a message for her on Facebook, and remember sitting in the church and not being able to stop thinking about her. I got home and the first thing I did was to check my private messages but there was nothing. I just thought, she was out on patrol. I clean at a school in the afternoons and I remember we mopped the floor and there were two big white feathers on the bottom of the stairs and I thought, 'white feathers, that's strange.' First thing I did when I got home was to check my messages again, but there was nothing so I messaged Channing saying "I hope you are ok, I love you, get in touch." We'd just finished dinner that day when there was a knock on the door. Leslie got up to answer it but just came back in, with his hands on his head. I said, "who's at the door?" He went back out, then came back again, followed by two men. I thought Aaron had been in trouble with the police - nobody was talking - but then, the penny dropped. I said to them, "please tell me that she is just hurt" but they shook their heads. Aaron,

who had been sitting there, went into the street, hysterical so I had to go and see to him. My cousin who lives close heard Aaron crying and came running over to take him away. I can't remember what I said to the two men, then, I just remember them leaving. In the immediate weeks that followed, my brain went to complete mush but because I have three other children and Leslie, and my mum who is 82, I had to carry on, I had to have the kids believe I was coping. The repatriation was horrendous. We were still in shock but we all went along together to Brize Norton to watch her come home. It was terrible; it mentally and physically drains you.

The respect she had at her funeral was mind blowing. The streets were lined with people and they had given her a police escort to the cemetery. You couldn't hear a pin drop, all you could hear were the horses hooves when the cortege came down the high street. There were literally, thousands of people. Afterwards, I threw myself into fundraising for Combat Stress in Channing's memory and I went back to work. I thought I was coping, but then, in March this year there was a



remembrance ceremony at St Paul's Cathedral and after that, I had a sort of a breakdown – it was then I realized I did need help. I was crying from the moment I got up, to the moment I went to bed. I went to work, I'd cry there, but then I would come home at 5.30pm and go to bed, crying. This went on day after day. I just got to the stage where I could not stop physically crying, and I was getting myself in a complete state. Poor Leslie got the brunt of it; I was a nightmare, and it was actually Aaron who said to me, "look you're hurting, but dad is hurting too and you have to try and lay off him a wee bit..." Leslie's way of dealing with was to go and spend time with his horses, whereas I just stayed in the house and cried. One day Captain Poat called me to see how I was doing, but I just cried throughout the whole conversation which is when he realized I needed help. I got some counselling from a lovely woman called Nicky from a charity called Soldiers in Mind. We talked every day on the phone. She suggested I go to the doctor and get some anti depressants, which I did, and I feel like I'm coping better, at least I'm not living on my nerves

all the time. For me, everything now, is about keeping Channing's name alive. Before her death, I'd never have done things like this, because I hate having my photograph taken, but I have to do these things for her; I want the next generation coming up to see what these young people died for. I never want her to be forgotten. If there had only been Channing I would be in the cemetery with her; if I didn't have my three other children to keep me going, I would honestly not be here and that is the truth. I don't blame the army though, as the 8 years that Channing was there were the best years of her life, and both the army and the medical regiment have been so helpful. They still care about the welfare of our family.

I like Channing's things around me but I don't want this whole family to be about her death – we have to try and live on. So whilst I have a few photographs of her, I have photos of the others too, because I don't want the kids to feel when they sit here, that all they can see is Channing, because they miss and love her, just as much as us. I use Channing's handbag now, and I have a bed settee upstairs, with

a throw and pillows on it, that she had on her bed at camp. To know it was Channing's cushion or scarf, that a part of her is still with you, is really important to me. Sometimes I have a squirt of her perfume and I can smell Channing. It makes me cry, but I still like to do it. When a fallen soldier leaves Afghanistan, they fire shells in their memory and make a cross out of those shells, so I have that on display. Channing was shot whilst out on patrol. She'd been sent out to give Afghan police medical aid with a soldier called David O'Conner. They'd had to bed down on the floor at one point, and two Afghan guys had come running for them and opened fire. One killed David O'Conner, and it was when Channing was moving forwards to help David, that she got fatally shot too. Sometimes when I close my eyes, all I can see is what happened. But then, I also have so many lovely memories. Leslie is a real TV buff - he likes to watch Sci-Fi which always wound the girls up, and so when, say, Leslie had gone to the bathroom, Channing would hide the remote control down the side of her knickers. Leslie would come back into the

room and say, "That hand control that was there...?" He would go back up to the bathroom looking for it, and we would all be laughing. Channing had a great laugh. I wish she was still lying on the sofa, laughing. When she was hungover, she would put the throw around her and say "someone make me a cup of tea! Daadddd!" She'd go out partying with the girls, then wake Leslie up at 3am and ask him to pick her up - he always did. Some nights I have to be exhausted before I can go to sleep. I used to go to bed at 10 and sleep till 8am but now I can be awake in the garden at 3am. I go over and over it in my head, where did the bullet hit? Was it just a bit above her body armour? If she had been a bit taller, would she still be here now? Nothing changes, of course, it is just the way you think.

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**ABOVE**

*Before:* "Our last mummy and Channing cuddles before leaving for Afghan." At home in Comber, Northern Ireland, 2012.

**NEXT PAGE**

*After:* Recreated in the same location, 01/09/2015.



Before They Were Fallen deals with remembrance. Louis Quail and Katy Regan use the power of photography and testimony together, to link memory, the passing of time and loss to create a body of work which pays tribute to all those British soldiers who gave their lives in the Afghanistan conflict.





**B E F O R E**

**T H E Y**

**W E R E**

**F A L L E N**

**LOUIS QUAIL**

**WORDS BY  
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