



Kindness Trumps Outrage

A few years ago, reaction to the outrage emanating from the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, became the impetus for the creation of the Patriot Guard Riders. Topeka, Kansas is home to homophobic propagandist [Fred Phelps](#) [1], who gathers church members together at military funerals to harass families for "allowing" their sons and daughters to serve in the United States military.



[2]The [Patriot Guard Riders](#) [3], sympathetic to the families whose loved ones have died in military service, work to help these same families realize that they are not alone. **What makes this group unique and powerful is that they are everyday motorcyclists who have taken as their mission to escort fallen soldiers from the airfields to the burial grounds, where they form a protective shield around the bereaved families.** Amazingly, this volunteer group of compassionate motorcyclists has grown to 193,000 in just five years.

The poignant and heart-felt stories written by various Riders - part of a new Ellen Frick documentary, [Patriot Riders](#) [3] - chronicle the emergence of a new kind of kindness and patriotism in America. **As one Patriot Guard Rider says: "you don't have to be religious or be an atheist to be in the PGR. You can be a hawk or a dove. You don't have to be a vet. Heck, you don't even have to ride a motorcycle."**

The Patriot Guard Riders tell us of a solemn journey astride thundering motorcycles to the sometimes silent, sometimes turbulent funerals of young soldiers killed in action. Their journey tell the story of a tragic truth: **Soldiers are dying and families are suffering, and an unlikely but powerful bond is growing between the riders and the grieving families.**

Patriot Riders is a story about fellowship, about community, about kindness, about veterans, about the effects of war on the home front, about riding, about what it means to be an American. And every once in a while, there comes a bitter-sweet story like the one that follows that puts a smile on your face! Their story also prompted the 2006 passage of the [Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act](#) [4], signed by President George W. Bush. The act bans protests within 300 feet of national cemeteries - which numbered 122 when the bill was signed - from an hour before a funeral to an hour after it. Violators face up to a \$100,000 fine and up to a year in prison. This must have annoyed Mr. Phelps!



Now, if that's not a safety net stretching from here to eternity, we don't know what is! Our PSN hats are off to the bikers of the Patriot Guard Riders! Tom Bellomy, a PGR member, tells us: "My first ride was in Concord,

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N.C. in 2006. The hearse passed our Guard flag line on the way into the cemetery, but no family cars or Patriot Riders followed. After a delay, the bikes rolled by with very nicely dressed passengers on the back of their bikes. **We later found out that the limo had broken down and the family members exited and asked to be taken the rest of the way on the bikes. After the grave-side service, they asked to be ridden back to the church by those same bikers.** ~~The family said their son must have arranged the break down so they'd have something to laugh and smile about that day.~~

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