

# WISH #14

## WELCOME HOME SPC RODRIGUEZ



January 8, 2010

On a May afternoon in 2002, Melinda Erner left her New Jersey home and took her little sister to an arcade in Manhattan, NY. They were playing games and enjoying themselves, when suddenly Melinda was bumped into by one of the employees, who had been walking backwards and didn't see Melinda.

After saying sorry a million times, Angel Rodriguez asked Melinda for her phone number, only to be rejected. About a week later, Melinda went to a club in the New York, and there he (Angel) was again. Unbeknownst to Melinda, one of her friends gave Angel Melinda's phone number, and she received a call from him the very next day. After talking for hours on end, Melinda agreed to dinner. By Valentine's Day of the following year, Melinda and Angel were engaged, and by April 15, 2004, the couple was married.

No one thought it would last. They were young and it all happened so fast. A year later, their daughter, Sophia, was born. Sophia was 6 weeks premature, and had a few setbacks, but she was stubborn (as she still is today) and got through it just fine. By August 15, 2006, Melinda gave birth to their son, Nicholas. He, too, was early but only by 3 weeks and was perfectly healthy.

That same year, Angel decided to pursue something he had always wanted to do – serve his country. He enlisted in the Army, and was sent to his first duty station at Fort Bragg, NC.

Angel and Melinda planned for Melinda to return to work after one year of staying home with the kids. Unfortunately, Melinda was diagnosed with degenerative disc disease in two of her discs, along with annular tears in three of them, which made working almost impossible. At times, just caring for their children was painful.

In January 2009, Angel, now a Specialist (E4), was deployed. It was very hard for Melinda to deal with, so she put everything in storage and moved the kids and herself home to New Jersey.

In September, Melinda returned to Fort Bragg, NC, to get the house ready for Angel's return in January 2010. With Angel still gone, it was too painful for Melinda to open the boxes of Angel's clothes, so she continued to store them in a closet. Three weeks before his return, Melinda began moving the boxes in the house to wash and put his clothes away only to find that most of them were covered in mold. Melinda was mortified. She contacted the storage place, but per her agreement, she only had 30 days to make a claim, and that time had passed. With the holidays, ongoing bills, and her children needing new clothes (due to ongoing growth spurts), Melinda knew she couldn't afford to replace the clothes and sobbed knowing her husband would have no clothes when he came home.

### THE WISH

Melinda shared her story with Wish For Our Heroes, and told us that Angel has always been a selfless father and husband, and she felt terrible that he wouldn't have any clothes upon his return. So, the Foundation presented Melinda with a \$500 gift card to Wal-Mart, to replace Angel's clothes and to purchase some new clothes for their children. Wish For Our Heroes hopes this small gesture will relieve Melinda's burden, and will help provide Angel with a warm welcome when he returns.

Angel plans to stay in the military as long as the military will have him. He loves his job and the pride it gives him. He is currently trying to enroll in college so he can eventually become an enlisted officer. Additionally, Melinda is hoping to have surgery on her back by this summer, which will hopefully allow her to also begin college and return to work.

