

My father taught me that being scared is OK. He said that being brave did not mean being fearless. To be brave means that you fully understand the possible dangers ahead and the potential consequences of your actions, but choose to face those fears anyway.

As a young man, I spent six years in the U.S. Marine Corps, serving in the Persian Gulf, Somalia and Haiti during times of conflict. And yet, today, every time I walk into my Best Buddy's room I am humbled by the bravery displayed by my friend and his parents. The personal battles they face every day are as gut wrenching as any military armed conflict. The decisions they make – based on limited information with unpredictable complications – are as tough as any platoon leader ever faced. The resilience, vigilance and fortitude I witness in my Buddies and their families is far greater than any other I have seen; and all of it with tenacious hope against discouraging odds. If you asked a Marine general to commit his troops to a war he only had a 60 percent chance of winning, he would look for another option.

But there is often no other option for these children and their families. They have chosen to stand their ground here at the Duke PBMT unit, and fight.

It is a great honor and a privilege for me to volunteer for these small heroes. Sharing the lives of these patients and their families, joining them in their struggles and hopes, to help out wherever we can is the worthiest endeavor I can imagine. These are the bravest people I know.

Deric, Best Buddy Volunteer