



From Iraq to Jammin' Java

After surviving a near-fatal injury in Iraq, former Fairfax High School student, U.S. Marine and drummer for Bandazian performs at Jammin' Java.

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In April of 2004, U.S. Marine Kevin Rumley was on a routine patrol in western Iraq to promote the new Iraqi police force, when circumstances forced his unit to change their route. The consequences were devastating.

"We ended up changing our plans and going around this graveyard and because we changed the way we were going, they triggered an Improvised Explosive Device (IED)," said Rumley, who is now 22. "My best friend passed right in front of me." Rumley's recollection of the events immediately following the explosion are hazy, but the Fairfax native said he remembers "going in and out of shock" during the helicopter ride to the hospital in Baghdad. Seriously wounded, Rumley was moved from Baghdad to Germany, and ultimately ended up in the Bethesda Naval Hospital and Walter Reed hospital.

"He nearly died," said Rumley's father John Rumley, a retired Fairfax County Police detective. "He went through so many things. They were going to amputate his leg, and now he's walking — he really is a miracle."

During his one-year stay at Walter Reed, Kevin Rumley had to undergo 18 major surgeries. Despite this, John Rumley said his son never showed any trace of anger. "When he was in the hospital he was never bitter," said John Rumley. "He would wheel around in his wheelchair and go and visit the other guys. He's got a great spirit."

NOW, TWO YEARS later, Kevin Rumley is healthy, happy and pursuing his lifelong passion.

"He's back on his feet, and one of his loves is music, and he's the drummer in a band," said John Rumley.

That band, Bandazian, is made up of Rumley and three of his longtime friends from Fairfax High School. The group is based out of Asheville, N. C. where Kevin Rumley is earning his master's degree in special education at the University of North Carolina. Bandazian is currently on a summer tour that will bring them close to home when they perform at Jammin' Java in Vienna this Saturday, July 7.

Kevin Rumley credits his close friends and fellow band mates for giving him the motivation to stay strong during his difficult year at Walter Reed Hospital.

"Tim Shull who plays bass, he would drive from Fairfax to Walter Reed at 4:30 in the morning everyday, because when I just had gotten back they woke me up everyday at 5 a.m. — so he would drive there every morning to be there when I woke up," said Kevin Rumley. "It was just amazing."

In addition, Shull, Alex Keena and Rick Powderly would visit Kevin Rumley regularly, engaging in various antics to keep their friend's spirits up.

"They would just do pranks and hide in closets — stuff like that," said Kevin Rumley.

THE FOUR FRIENDS first played together as students at Fairfax High School, and Kevin Rumley said they were initially stunned when he decided to join the Marines. "I just always wanted to ever since I was little," he said. "My dad was in the service and I remember telling my mom before she passed that I was going to be a Marine." Kevin Rumley's mother died in 2002, and John Rumley said his son recalls hearing his mother's voice ordering him to "get back down there" during the critical moments following the IED detonation in Iraq.

"It's really weird, but I do remember thinking that I didn't want to go," said Kevin Rumley.

So as it turned out, Kevin Rumley's friends did not have to wait long for him to return home. He was injured just three months into his tour in Iraq.

"After a year I was pretty much back where I started," he joked.

Once he was fully recovered, Kevin Rumley and his friends focused on their original dream of playing in a band together, and thus far, the pursuit of that dream has been going well. In 2006, Bandazian put out its first CD and last fall the group won a Battle of the Bands competition in North Carolina.

"It's just awesome that we have this opportunity to play together," said Kevin Rumley.

"I think we'd all love to tour and keep doing what we're doing."



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