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Funny greetings

Comedian tapes messages for troops in Afghanistan

By Amanda Dyslin

The Free Press
MANKATO —

If you could see Matthew Morris' little face, you'd understand Tammy Nerby's obsession.

Morris — a Marine serving in the Middle East and just one of six troops Nerby has adopted — looks like he's about 12 years old. This year was the first time he's been away from his parents in Colorado during Christmas and the first time he missed elk-hunting season. And it just breaks Nerby's heart.

"I feel like their mom," she said.

Nerby is a Twin Cities comedian who stumbled upon a blog last fall with a reference to "Soldiers' Angels," an online nonprofit organization started by a mother of a soldier that allows people to adopt a troop serving overseas. The foundation has grown to include thousands of adopted soldiers worldwide.

Nerby became fixated after she adopted a troop in Afghanistan who told her the need of Afghani children was immense. A Marine told her the children needed coats, so she went out and bought dozens. One asked for bags of rice, so she picked up a box at the post office and shoved in as many bags as she could. Next came backpacks and pens.

"I was obsessed with it," said Nerby, who will perform with Wild Bill Bauer at the Holiday Inn Friday night.

Nerby's project broadened. She has adopted six soldiers, three in Afghanistan and three in Iraq. Three she adopted at www.soldiersangels.com and three she adopted on www.anysoldier.com, an organization that serves the same purpose.

"I was so impressed by her gesture," Bauer said. "What we have forgotten is there is a war going on in Afghanistan."

Photos



This still is taken from a movie comedian Tammy Nerby made to send to her adopted soldier serving overseas. Nerby has been recording greetings from herself and her audience members after her performances to send to troops since December. She will do the same at her Mankato show Friday. Submitted photo (Click for larger image)

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Nerby soon discovered her care packages, e-mails and letters to her six boys went far beyond just them. Other soldiers around them would correspond with her as well, and she realized how many people's lives she was touching through her efforts.

"These guys are so appreciative of everything you send them," she said. "I say to people all the time, if you're against the war, I don't care. The fact of the matter is they're there."

As Nerby is a comedian and is exposed to a great deal of people when she performs, she got the idea to broaden her correspondence with the soldiers through video. Her first adopted soldier's name is Robert, so following a show she headlined at the Minnesota Comedy Club in Maplewood in early December, she taped a greeting from herself and a few audience members to send to him.

"He just loved it so much and went on and on about it," she said.

In the short movie are silly shout-outs from shy Midwestern men and women, a couple of whom Nerby couldn't help but tease a little bit. Nerby's humor makes the video greeting unique, and she said Robert passed the tape around to a lot of his buddies.

"I pulled one woman on stage and I made fun of her a little bit," Nerby said. "After I did that, nobody seemed to want to come up. ... They really do want to say something, but most people are, like, terrified."

Since then she's made another tape at a private party performance which she addressed openly to all soldiers. She plans to make another tape at her Mankato show Friday night, so she encourages anyone interested to stay after the show and say hello to the soldiers.

"I let 'em do whatever they want," she said.

As far as Nerby's humor is concerned, her comedy is family oriented. She tells stories more than she makes jokes, which is in the vein of Louie Anderson, who also got his start in the Twin Cities area.

"My family is nuts," Nerby said. "I do a bit about being Minnesotan and having a name like Nerby and trying to make it in Hollywood."

After growing up in Rochester and acting in the Twin Cities, Nerby lived in Los Angeles from 1986 to 1990 where she did mostly production work for television shows. She injured her back during a car accident and moved back to Rochester and later the Twin Cities, where she began her career as a stand-up comedian about 12 years ago.

"It was so funny because once I started doing stand-up, you

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write your own material — it's just you," Nerby said. "That to me was much more challenging than acting."

Nerby has performed at comedy venues nationwide and on "The Comedy Gallery TV Show." She's been on many commercials ranging from K-Mart to McDonalds to Best Buy.

"She's biting funny," Bauer said.

Nerby met her husband in 1999 while on tour doing stand-up on military bases in Germany. He said it was love at first sight, but for her love happened through e-mails during the following months.

He has been serving in Kuwait for more than two years running a gasoline delivery operation. Despite her obsession with mailing care packages and videos to her six adoptees, Nerby said she never forgets to send things to her husband, too.

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