

MAGAZINE

# 2010 GOLF GUIDE



# Chicago Tribune

SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 2010

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EARLY EDITION ★★



WEATHER



Complete forecast, PAGE 29

# The cost of war

## 3 million

Number of veterans in 2009 getting disability compensation, a 24 percent increase from 2003

## 500,000

Number of veterans' claims awaiting approval; veterans advocate groups say it could be as high as 1 million

## 1 percent

Amount allocated to care for veterans in the \$944 billion that Congress approved to fund the global war on terror

WORKING ON VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES LOSING from brain injuries and back problems to cancers and mental disorders.

The Tribune's analysis of 200,000 claims in the backlog shows that nearly half take longer than 120 days, with thousands of claims

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# An unexpected gift of love

By **Barbara Brotman**  
TRIBUNE REPORTER

Carolyn and Brian Schroeder never imagined this kind of baby photo album.

"Don't take this the wrong way," Brian said to photographer Todd Hochberg. "We want to see the pictures, but there's a part of me that doesn't want to see them."

Hochberg murmured reassurance. He handed over a black album. Carolyn took a steady breath, and opened it. And then, in its pages, the couple's baby once again lived, and once again died.

In arresting black and white photographs as beautiful as they are heartbreaking, the Schroeders, of Palatine, cradle Anna, who was born with a genetic disorder and died after 16 days. Her brother Liam, 7, clutches her like he will never let her go.

"There's the blanket," Carolyn said. "I made that — a little pink blanket. I was making a bigger blanket for the stroller and car seat. But she didn't need that."

"And that's the little outfit. Remember? I didn't want her to die in the clothes from the hospi-

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Todd Hochberg's photography leaves families a special reminder of a child's life and death



Carolyn and Brian Schroeder, with son James, look at an album from Todd Hochberg, left. The Schroeders' daughter Anna was born with a genetic disorder and died after 16 days. MICHAEL TERCHA/TRIBUNE PHOTO

# Pictures an unexpected gift of love

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tal. We had so many pieces of clothing at home, but when we left for the hospital I forgot the bag. I was so mad. So we came in and drove around to find a baby shop."

She and her husband turned pages in silence broken by occasional sniffing. Their son James, 10, knelt on the floor of the meeting room at Children's Memorial Hospital. Carolyn put her arm around him.

"We're all doing this together, right?" she murmured.

She turned to Hochberg. "These are really amazing," she said.

And for the album they would have given anything not to receive, the Schroeders thanked him.

For more than 12 years, Hochberg, of Evanston, has been documenting the deaths of babies. He does so at the request of parents who learn of his services from chaplains, nurses and bereavement coordinators at area hospitals. As they hold, bathe and baptize their children, he quietly takes pictures. He sometimes returns several times over weeks or months to follow the unfolding story, which often ends when parents decide to remove their child from life support.

It may seem unbearably



Carolyn Schroeder holds Anna as son Liam reads to the family. Families photographed by Todd Hochberg agreed to share his images to help others. **TODD HOCHBERG PHOTO**

 **Families say goodbye**  
More of Todd Hochberg's pictures at [chicagotribune.com/bereavement](http://chicagotribune.com/bereavement)

sad work. Hochberg has witnessed hundreds of babies' deaths, sometimes two or even three in a day.

But to Hochberg, 54, photographing babies who are stillborn or the short lives of those born with catastrophic medical problems is a way to help their suffering families and also

an affirmation of life.

In the brief time parents have with their children — sacred time, one grieving mother calls it — he sees moments of deep connection.

"Grief has a way of breaking down everything else," he said. "Our humanity just shines."

For shattered parents, his photographs are treasure.

"When you go through a trauma like that, sometimes you look back and it's surreal," said Pamela Van Tassel, of Plainfield, whose daughter, Ava, died in 2007

within hours of her birth. "Did that really happen? And — yeah, I really did carry her. She kicked the crap out of me in the womb. And then I delivered her and she was gone the same night.

"But she was there."

So was Hochberg, with a manner parents say is unobtrusive and comforting.

"There was this presence that came into the room. I don't know how else to describe it," said Lynda Cafasso, of Oak Park, whose baby was stillborn four years ago. "It was a kind-



Dawanna Parks said she didn't look at the pictures from Hochberg for two years. But the images of her and Christopher Vaval holding baby Christopher Jr. are beautiful and she's grateful to have them, she said. **TODD HOCHBERG PHOTO**

ness ... a feeling of respectfulness."

Yet he is not strictly an observer.

"He's not just a photogra-

phers in his work, and found it when he shadowed a chaplain at work.

He knew she had been photographing babies after death for families

## Column B

ness ... a feeling of respectfulness."

Yet he is not strictly an observer.

"He's not just a photographer; he's an advocate," said Deborah L. Davis, who has written several books on parental bereavement and has gotten to know Hochberg at conferences.

"If a nurse comes in and says, 'Let me wash your baby for you,' he will say, 'What about mom? Would you like to wash your baby?' He will kind of redirect the nurse to providing the support the parents need."

Hochberg has had extensive training in grief and bereavement, and uses it even after he has finished taking pictures. When he met with the Schroeders to give them their album, he asked how they were doing.

And for more than an hour and a half, they told him. The feeling of unreality, the dread when they encounter someone who doesn't know and is about to ask cheerfully about the baby, the room with all the pink clothes and the door kept closed — they spoke, and Hochberg listened.

When they fell silent, Hochberg said quietly, "I'm sorry for your loss."

His photographs are different from the formal portraits made by photographers who volunteer through the Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep Foundation.

Such portraits are almost too pretty to reflect the reality, said Kristin James, coordinator of Children's Memorial Hospital's Heartlight grief program, which offers Hochberg's services. And portraits don't capture the love and relationships of a family.

"What most parents talk about is, 'Did I do everything for them?' Their biggest fear is, 'Did I love them enough?'" she said.

in his work, and found it when he shadowed a chaplain at work.

He knew she had been photographing babies after death for families, as many chaplains and nurses have done for years. He also knew that such photographs had a history. While trying to come to terms with a loss of his own, a divorce, he had begun collecting antique photographs—including Victorian-era formal portraits of parents with their dead children.

When he accompanied the chaplain as she counseled a family whose infant was dying, he asked for permission to take pictures and found the experience so emotionally intense that afterward he and the nurse from the neonatal intensive care unit were in tears.

He began photographing other families losing children. Five years ago he left his job at Advocate Lutheran General to do so full time, in what he calls Touching Souls photography.

It is a labor of love, not financial reward. Parents are not charged; his work is supported by donations. At Children's Memorial and Advocate Health Care, where he has contracts, support comes from their charitable foundations.

He does not have children of his own. He was drawn to

*"There was this presence that came into the room."*

— Lynda Cafasso, whose baby was stillborn four years ago

## Column A

In Hochberg's pictures, they see that they did.

Initially, however, they are often taken aback at the idea of someone taking photographs. "I was really kind of grossed out by the thought of it," Van Tassel said.

She can't count how many times she has given thanks that she changed her mind.

"They're gorgeous," she said through tears. "They're all over my home. Framed.

"She's my baby. It's sad and horrendous that she died, but I think the greater tragedy is not having anything to hang onto. ... His photos really honor her life."

It took Dawanna Parks, of the Little Italy neighborhood, two years before she could bring herself to look at the pictures Hochberg took of her and Christopher Vaval holding their son, Christopher, Jr., after he died at 2 months.

When she did, she found them beautiful, and herself grateful. "I was starting to forget what he had looked like," she said. "The fact that we have the photos can bring it all back. But not in a bad way."

Hochberg first photographed a child's approaching death when he was manager of photography at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital. He had been looking for more meaning

## Column C

this work partly out of a desire to understand parenthood, which he now witnesses at its deepest extremes.

"I can't possibly be in the same space they are," he said. "But it's in the connection that I invite where I find spirit coming in."

He keeps his own spirit from being overwhelmed with an approach born of his study of Buddhist practices: He lets the emotion wash over him, witnessing pain without absorbing it.

"That doesn't mean it doesn't wear on me. It does, and how could it not?" he said. "I still have tears when I'm photographing. ... But I don't carry it home as much anymore."

Hochberg gives classes on photography to hospice and palliative care clinicians, and speaks about his work to national conferences on death and dying.

His photographs are in the permanent collection of the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film. They were displayed last year at Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Feinberg School of Medicine.

And one of his pictures is in 6-year-old Elliana Van Tassel's bed, along with her stuffed animals. It is a framed photograph of Ava, her lost baby sister. She sleeps with it every night.

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