

## **Izzy Dolls Bring Humanitarian Comfort**

A contribution towards humanitarianism and caring for children who had been caught up in areas of conflict around the world was started by a Canadian Military Engineer in the early 1990s. These dolls are now a legacy to the late Master Corporal Mark "Izzy" Isfeld whose idea it was to provide these simple dolls to children who were innocently caught up in war.

During his first mission to Croatia on a peacekeeping tour, when Mark had noticed a child's doll lying on a pile of rubble from a bombed house he thought of the need to re-connect a child with the joy that comes from a doll. His mother related to his thought and started to crochet some small dolls that Mark would distribute as he moved among the children affected by the war around them.



Mark Isfeld was with 1 Combat Engineer Regiment and on his third peacekeeping tour when he was killed in a mine detonation on 21 June 1994. After his death, his unit gave the name "Izzy" to these little dolls and continued to distribute them. Izzy Dolls have since brought comfort to over 1.3 million children worldwide who were suffering because of war or natural disasters.

For more than a decade after his death, Mark's mother Carol continued knitting the dolls and Mark's colleagues distributed them. Several friends and other mothers across the country learned of the initiative and joined in. Carol posted the doll pattern on the Internet web so that anyone could make them and send them to Canada's troops deployed around the world. The network of participants grew.

In 2005 Shirley O'Connell joined the project and brought the idea of expanding the distribution of Izzy Dolls to also bring comfort to children suffering because of natural disasters. A collection network was established throughout Canada with the assistance of members of the Order of the Eastern Star. This single network has collected in excess of 70,000 Izzy Dolls. The Canadian Military Engineers Association assisted with the organization and helped distribute Izzy Dolls in Mark Isfeld's memory.

The distributing agencies have since broadened and children around the world have received Izzy Dolls for comfort from additional groups like the Toronto International

Police Officers in Afghanistan, ICROSS Canada, Canadian doctors on short-term medical missions, and various Canadian charities.

With the untimely deaths of Carol and Brian Isfeld in 2006 and 2007, respectively, Shirley O'Connell provided the leadership for the continuation of Mark Isfeld's legacy and they call her the "Izzy Doll Mama". The Izzy Dolls continue to bring comfort and smiles to the faces of the little children around the world in Mark's memory.