

Last week, while traveling to Chicago on business, I noticed a Marine sergeant traveling with a folded flag, but did not put two and two together. After we boarded our flight, I turned to the sergeant, who'd been invited to sit in First Class (across from me), and inquired if he was heading home.

"No", he responded.

"Heading out?" I asked?

"No. I'm escorting a soldier home."

"Going to pick him up?"

"No. He is with me right now. He was killed in Iraq . I'm taking him home to his family."

The realization of what he had been asked to do hit me like a punch to the gut. It was an honor for him. He told me that, although he didn't know the soldier, he had delivered the news of his passing to the soldier's family and felt as if he knew them after many conversations in so few days.

I turned back to him, extended my hand, and said, "Thank you. Thank you for doing what you do so my family and I can do what we do."

Upon landing in Chicago the pilot stopped short of the gate and made the following announcement over the intercom:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to note that we have had the honor of having Sergeant Steeley of the United States Marine Corps join us on this flight. He is escorting a fallen comrade back home to his family. I ask that you please remain in your seats when we open the forward door to allow Sergeant Steeley to deplane and receive his fellow soldier. We will then turn off the seat belt sign."

Without a sound, all went as requested. I noticed the sergeant saluting the casket as it was brought off the plane, and his action made me realize that I am proud to be an American . So here's a public *Thank You* to our military Men and Women for what you do *so we can live the way we do.*

signed: Stuart Margel -- Washington , D.C.

Also, here are two very touching photos honored at this years International Picture of the Year.

## First Place

**Todd Heisler *The Rocky Mountain News***

**When 2nd Lt. James Cathey's body arrived at the Reno Airport, Marines climbed into the cargo hold of the plane and draped the flag over his casket as passengers watched the family gather on the tarmac.**

**During the arrival of another Marine's casket last year at Denver International Airport, Major Steve Beck described the scene as so powerful: "See the people in the windows? They sat right there in the plane, watching those Marines. You gotta wonder what's going through their minds, knowing that they're on the plane that brought him home," he said. "They will remember being on that plane for the rest of their lives. They're going to remember bringing that Marine home. And they should."**

First Place



## Second Place

**Todd Heisler *The Rocky Mountain News***

**The night before the burial of her husband's body, Katherine Cathey refused to leave the casket, asking to sleep next to his body for the last time. The Marines made a bed for her, tucking in the sheets below the flag. Before she fell asleep, she opened her laptop computer and played songs that reminded her of 'Cat,' and one of the Marines asked if she wanted them to continue standing watch as she slept. "I think it would be kind of nice if you kept doing it," she said. "I think that's what he would have wanted."**

Second Place

