



# Faces of AGENT ORANGE

Minnesota



## MAYNARD KADERLIK

By Jim Belshaw

Joshua Kaderlik came home one day from his fourth grade classes in Minnesota and said to his father, Maynard, "Dad, I'm really dumb."

It was not said jokingly. It came from the little boy's heart. He meant every word of it. And every word of it stunned Maynard Kaderlik. The words carried a sadness that defied description or definition.

"That one really hit home," Kaderlik said. "All his life, he has been degraded by other children who did not realize his learning disability."

It would hit home again when Kaderlik read the book, *My Father, My Son*, by Admiral Elmo Zumwalt. It was then that Kaderlik began making connections between the difficult lives led by his children and his exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam.

Adm. Elmo Zumwalt had ordered the Agent Orange defoliation to protect riverine sailors and others from attacks along the heavily vegetated riverbanks of Vietnam. Zumwalt's son was one of those men. After Vietnam, his son developed two kinds of terminal cancer, and his own son was born with a severe learning disability.

When Maynard Kaderlik, president of the Minnesota State Council, read the book, he took note that each boy was the same age and that each father had served in the same area of Vietnam. Kaderlik served for two years off the coast of Vietnam and another year in the Mekong Delta on riverine duty with the Navy and the 9th Infantry Division of the Army.

"Zumwalt felt the spraying took his son's life," Kaderlik said. "When I was there, it was pretty obvious what had been sprayed. Something that had been green was all gray and dead. We drank the water on the rivers and bathed in it."

Kaderlik's health had been good until 2010, when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer, a disease connected to Agent Orange exposure. He believes his children paid for that exposure long before that.



Joshua Kaderlik, 1994



Melissa and Jayda

## The Kaderlik's story continued...

Josh had always had a rough time in school. He is 32 today, and the road has not gotten any smoother.

"Today, he still struggles in the workforce, which can be very cruel," he said.

In addition to being born with a dislocated hip requiring him to wear a metal brace to put the hip back in place, Josh was born with a severe learning disability. After the day he came home to announce that he was "really dumb," Josh's parents decided to transfer him to a Catholic school, though the expense was difficult to bear.

The Catholic school tailored Josh's classes to his abilities, and within a year his father saw changes.

"It helped a great deal with his self-esteem," Maynard said. "After one year, it really soared."

His daughter, Melissa, did better in school than Josh, but had her own problems, too. She is the mother of Jayda, Maynard Kaderlik's granddaughter. Jayda has been diagnosed with autism. Kaderlik pays for the insurance that keeps his granddaughter in a program offering therapy eight hours day, five days a week.

"It's a challenge for her mother and her grandpa," he said. "But she's getting better. I pay for the insurance so she can be in the program, and I would spend my last nickel to keep her in it. She is such a loving and thoughtful child. For her, learning has been a huge challenge. The cost of the program is very high, but I'd do anything to help her."

As it is with so many other Vietnam veterans whose children and grandchildren have struggled with exotic diseases, learning disabilities, and other health problems, Kaderlik finds it difficult to face the prospect that it was his exposure to Agent Orange that afflicts them.

"It makes you feel bad that her disability was caused by my service in Vietnam and what my country sprayed on us when we were there," he said. "She's [Jayda] going to be a wonderful person in this world."

He has no doubt about the U.S. government's responsibility, not only to its veterans, but to their children and grandchildren.

"We went off to serve our country, and now our government that ordered the spraying should take care of the children and grandchildren of the veterans, because it's affected us in one way or another," he said. "The veterans are in the fourth quarter of their lives, but the children have their lives ahead of them. They should be compensated monetarily and receive the special care and education they need so they can survive in the world."

*Significant numbers of Vietnam veterans have children and grandchildren with birth defects related to exposure to Agent Orange. To alert legislators and the media to this ongoing legacy of the war, we are seeking real stories about real people. If you wish to share your family's health struggles that you believe are due to Agent Orange/dioxin, send an email to [mporter@vva.org](mailto:mporter@vva.org) or call 301-585-4000, Ext. 146.*



Jayda

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