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CFAY

Weekly

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## Driven to Heal: How Community and Cars Helped a Navy Gold Star Survivor Cope with Loss

**Story by Garrett Cole, CFAY Public Affairs**

In 2017, the Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS John S. McCain (DDG-56) collided with a Liberian-flagged tanker off the coast of Singapore and Malaysia, east of the Strait of Malacca, killing ten sailors. The tragedy impacted not only the families of the fallen but also Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) in Japan, where the ship was based. However, this tragedy also highlights the importance of resilience through difficult times and the crucial role that the community plays in supporting those affected by the loss.

Riho Findley knows the importance of community firsthand. Findley's husband, Navy Electronics Technician 1st Class Charles Findley, was one of the ten sailors who died in the collision. After her husband's passing, Findley struggled to cope with her loss and find a way to keep her husband's legacy alive. She found solace in her husband's passion for cars and became involved in the Yokosuka car community.

"My husband was already into cars as a hobby from when we lived in Okinawa," said Findley. "He already had a project car, a Nissan 180SX that he built the engine for, did the tune-ups, and acquired the parts he

bought from different car shops. All of the engine parts he did himself, along with the 180SX body. He also did some welding from videos he watched online. He then got all the pieces of the car and put them together, and finally got the car running. Then we got orders to come to Yokosuka, so we had the car shipped here."

The two used their hobby in order to connect, both in their relationship and the car community in Yokosuka.

"We really started to get to know the community, and after the accident, they helped me figure out what I should do with the car," said Findley. "Plus, they've been living in Japan for a long time and know all of the local car stuff and the knowledge from working at the shop."

Charles Findley's passion for cars and involvement with car enthusiasts in Yokosuka has helped her through the grieving process, provided a sense of belonging and camaraderie, and allowed her to connect with others who share her late husband's love of cars.

"The Auto Hobby shop helps with the base car shows and specifically the 2022 Friendship Day Car Show," said Findley. "I got involved back in 2019 to help because not many of the staff speak Japanese, so I began to help as a translator. When all of the car owners come to bring their cars on base, I try to help get all of their paperwork in order. When we first started, there was a lot of paperwork, but now it looks like they are streamlining the process."

Findley's assistance with the base car shows and the Friendship Day Car Show has helped make her an asset. Through her efforts, she has made connections with various people on base, which have helped streamline the process of getting the cars on base.

"I've had to make my own connections especially since I started working on the car show stuff and the



*Nissan 180SX. (Photo courtesy of Nissan)*





**2022 Friendship Day Car Show. (Photo by MWR Yokosuka)**

translation assistance. I've gotten to know a lot of people on base like the facilities people and the special events people. There was a lady before who used to do all the translations, but I was asked to step in. It's not easy to get these cars on base, it's not like us having an ID. There's a lot of paperwork and we go through it and help it all get organized to send back to security to allow the cars on base."

The success of the car shows has also allowed Findley to help organize other events, such as the holiday parade through Ikego and the main base.

"We had a good turn out and the base CO and CMC rode around with us through housing," said Findley. "We also had a guy dressed up as the Grinch and some fire trucks join us. The event was actually bigger than we expected."

Findley's commitment to the military community goes beyond her involvement in events. As the

spouse of someone who died while serving in the military (commonly referred to as a Gold Star spouse) she understands the challenges of being overseas and losing certain privileges such as a P.O. Box and driver's license. These struggles are shared among other Gold Star spouses, emphasizing the significance of community, and having a support system. In the aftermath of a tragedy, finding purpose and belonging can seem impossible, yet for Findley, it was her husband's passion for cars and the Yokosuka car community that helped her through the grieving process. Her involvement in the community not only kept her husband's legacy alive but also provided her with a support system that helped her cope with the challenges of being a surviving spouse overseas. Through her efforts in organizing car shows, making connections on base, and assisting other surviving spouses, Findley has become an asset to the military community in Yokosuka.

For more than 75 years, CFAY has provided, maintained, and operated base facilities and services in support of the U.S. 7th Fleet's forward deployed naval forces, tenant commands, and thousands of military and civilian personnel and their families.



**2022 Friendship Day Car Show. (Photo by Garrett Cole, CFAY Public Affairs)**

UPCOMING EVENTS

MARCH 2023

**American Red Cross**

EMAIL: [YOKOSUKA@REDCROSS.ORG](mailto:YOKOSUKA@REDCROSS.ORG)

PHONE: 046-816-7490

FACEBOOK: [YOKOSUKAREDCROSS](https://www.facebook.com/YOKOSUKAREDCROSS)

**March 9<sup>th</sup>**

Learn hands only CPR.

Location: Red Brick Area

**March 16<sup>th</sup>**

Learn how to assemble emergency kit.

Location: Red Brick Area

**March 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Learn about Red Cross Service to the Armed Forces (SAF).

Location: Red Brick Area

**March 30<sup>th</sup>**

Learn about Red Cross Resiliency Programs.

Location: Red Brick Area