

Young Lives, BIG Stories Contest

by Kassie

What does it mean to be a military child?

I sit at the table and look at the mountains, and I think of seventeen years of knowing nothing but the Army. And I wonder what it means to *not* be a military child, since this may be our last year in the Army and I don't want to leave it, and I don't know what it means to not be a military child.

But what it means to be one, I do know, and because you asked, I will tell you.

It means two countries, six states, eight churches, eleven houses in seventeen years. It means friends that are really pen pals, because you know their handwriting better than their faces. It means traveling all over the country and it means international flights that are truly miserable. It means speaking two languages and learning a third and not being scared to try something new because being a military child and being scared to try something new are not compatible. It means learning to love a place just in time to leave it, and loving places so much you wish you could stay. And it means not really wanting to stay anywhere, at least not more than three years, and being just as glad when the movers bring your stuff as when they come to take it, and hoping that they don't pack porcelain dolls and power tools in the same box and then label it "books."

It means back-to-back deployments with TDYs in-between, and Thanksgiving at the Cracker Barrel because it's too lonely at the house without Daddy. It means everything that may break or malfunction or possibly go wrong will do so, but only during a deployment. It means he's been gone for more birthdays than he's been home for. It means emails and Skype and the miracle of FaceTime. It means going to the memorial right inside the gate at Ft. Carson when you're only five and not understanding anything about it except that the names on it are Daddy's soldiers. It means deployments from a non-deployable unit at a TRADOC base and being absolutely the odd ones out.

But lest you were to get the idea that I don't like this wild Army life, trust me...it's also FRG parties to make giant welcome home signs. It means welcome home ceremonies at midnight screaming in joy outside in the dark. It means flying in a C130 and touring an F15. It means Veterans Day parades and watching fireworks from the roof and crying every time you hear "The Star-Spangled Banner." It means going places you could otherwise never go, seeing things you would otherwise never see. It means freedom, and it means knowing you had a part in it, that it's the Land of the Free because of the brave and you know who the brave are.

It means no matter how much you hate deployments, when someone asks what you'll miss about the Army, you'll still say... "Everything."