



British Military Lifestyle Re

LET ME TELL YOU A LITTLE ABOUT OUR FAMILY. There's Paul, my husband; he commands one of our four training establishments for our enlisted soldiers. He's been an officer for 21 years and in that time has served overseas in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and Northern Ireland. We've been together for almost 20 years (married for just over 16), although if you add up his nights away

from home on operations and exercises we have probably spent about 4 years apart. We have two wonderful boys. Maxwell, 11, is at boarding school (he was born while we were in the US - Paul was at CGSC and SAMS in Leavenworth, Kansas) and Nathaniel, 7, who attends a local school (he was, to his disgust, only born in Salisbury, UK). I'm Karen, a primary school teacher, wife, mother and home maker. Being a teacher has enabled me to find employment wherever in the world we've been posted - quite handy really. And finally there's our dog, Doughnut. We love border collies, and Doughnut is our third. Max and Jasper (our previous collies) are sadly no longer with us, but were such a part of the family that we flew them to Kansas; they returned having explored almost as much of the USA as we did!

The one thing that you can definitely say about military family life is that it is never dull. Varied, yes. Exciting, yes. Sometimes challenging, and frustrating on occasion. But never dull. And I reckon that is the same for military spouses the world over; I may be a British camp follower, but I believe I share many joys and challenges with my American counterparts.

So over the next few paragraphs I hope I can share with



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you some of the joys of our way of life, but also some of the challenges, too. I believe that to enjoy being a military wife you need to have an open mind and both a sense of adventure and humour. Many of my civilian friends looked horrified when I told them we'd just received our most recent orders and that we'd be leaving leafy Surrey (one of the counties, akin to your states) to go to Kuwait in August next year. My news was normally accompanied by a long pause

and then, "How do you feel about that?" Well, in a word we are "excited." What an adventure - new people to meet, new countries to explore. How could we not be thrilled? Though I'll happily admit that what I perceive as thrilling though is not everyone's cup of tea, and many of my civilian friends don't see the opportunities, only the difficulties. Where will you live? What about your job? What do your parents think? You've probably heard the same ones.

warding for Family

KAREN BLAKESLEY



Both Paul and I are only children. Our parents are elderly and not in good health. It would be wonderful to be closer. I particularly felt the current distance we live from our family hard earlier this year when my mother was diagnosed with cancer for the second time. I so wanted to be there for her, see her, and also support my father. Although the UK is much smaller in size, our road system and congestion mean journeys take much longer than you think. Thankfully my Mum is made of

strong stuff and beat cancer for the second time. This was the one time I wished Paul and I lived closer to family.

Over the years we've been lucky enough to enjoy overseas postings to Cyprus, Germany and America. Maxwell was born during our two years in Kansas and I can honestly say it was my favourite posting. We visited 31 states and made some wonderful friends. Inevitably there will be places you go that you don't enjoy as much. In these instances, I think it is important to find sports clubs, social groups or employment to help you settle. As a teacher I am fortunate to have always been able to find work when I've wanted it. I know many other spouses are not as lucky, it depends on your role. Indeed, it isn't uncommon now for military spouses in the UK to be 'married unaccompanied', where the spouse and children stay in their own home, in one location while the serving member of the family works elsewhere and commutes home when they can. This allows for job security and advancement, an opportunity to own your own home and stability of education for any children.

There are many challenges with military life. Sadly some employers don't see the unique skill set military spouses have in addition to any professional qualifications. Our lifestyle means we are not resistant to change, we are mentally strong and resilient and have a breadth of knowledge and experience in our chosen field that comes from working for different organisations in varied locations. For instance, I have now worked in every school class, Reception through to Year 6 (5-12 year

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We Represent

We represent the ones who leave and fight

For the freedoms we hold dear, our inalienable rights

We represent the brave, the strong and the true

We represent the red, the white, and the blue

We live and move, and move and live

To places unknown and hard to forgive

We make new memories but when the time is done

We pack up all we've got and move on

We do this constantly, showing little fright

For change is the battle we must fight

MYA W.

Age 15, Stacey Jr./Sr. High School

I have moved about 11 times in my life that I can remember. My challenges are loss of friends, loss of confidence, and anxiety. My solutions are talking to my parents, kind new people, and God. I joined S2S to help lost kids like me adjust, make a difference in someone's life, to be kind, and make new friends.



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olds); in village and inner-city schools worldwide, and in wealthy and deprived areas. We can multitask, be a single parent, hold down a job, support other wives and still hold an impromptu dinner party for twelve in the evening. It's also not just professional skills we develop either. Over the years necessity has pushed me to learn skills I may not otherwise have considered. While Paul was deployed I had to fix an inner tube on Maxwell's tyre, maintain the vehicles and house we own.

For me, the challenges of military life are housing and schooling. I do miss my own home. With each move comes the familiar questions: How large is the house? Is it in a good area? What are the local schools like? What state of repair is it in? In the UK the answer to these questions varies greatly and is one of the frustrations that I mentioned earlier. As an example, after phoning in about a corroded radiator recently we had an initial visit from a plumber to confirm that it was indeed corroded and that we needed it replaced! We have now waited for 3 weeks for the radiator to be purchased and now awaiting to time when they can fit it.

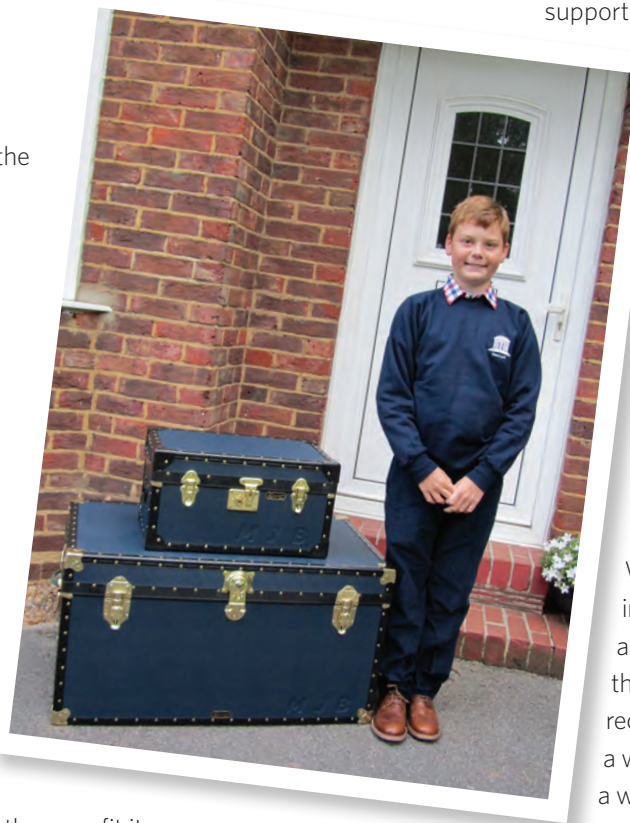
As for schooling, well, we are not lucky enough to have an organisation such as MCEC who champion military support programs in schools. Depending where you are posted, you may be in a school of entirely military children or be in one where the military are truly in the minority. The later ones frequently have no concept of how to support military pupils and our unique way of life. One school denied my application to take Maxwell out of school for the day to meet his father when he returned from 6 months in Afghanistan! And on our last move we were not allocated a place for Maxwell in the school opposite where we were living despite there being space available for both boys (only Nathaniel was offered a place). There is a 'military covenant' which should

prevent this from happening although in my experience its implementation can be patchy.

My disillusionment with the "teeth" of the covenant, coupled with the knowledge that Maxwell would change schools every two years, led to our decision to send him, then almost 10 years old, to boarding school. This is not unusual for the British military. We don't have an organisation such as MCEC who offer such fantastic programs as *Student 2 Student*, *SchoolQuest* and transition consultants to assist families. And although our government recently recognised that military pupils need support and offered schools additional

funding for any military pupil in attendance, many schools, unfamiliar with military life, are uncertain how to spend it.

We spent a long while choosing the boarding school for Maxwell. It had to have a family feel as this would be his second home; it needed lots of other boarders around at weekends, plenty of sports available and academic support for him as he is dyslexic. We found all this at Sandroyd in Wiltshire and the military assists us with the costs. He has thrived there. He is in a class of 15, receives one to one support twice a week for his dyslexia and has a wealth of opportunities that he would not have access to in the local



school. He comes home every three weeks for a weekend and his younger brother is keen to join him there when he's older. Nathaniel will be coming with us to Kuwait and is excited to be attending school there; he's looking forward to learning Arabic and enjoying the warm weather.

I love being a military family. The comradery amongst spouses, the opportunities to travel and the pride I feel in the job my husband does. The frustrations of the housing system are continually being challenged at every level and with boarding schools we have found a way to ensure our boys have the best possible education no matter where in the world we are posted. **With military life, the joys far outweigh the challenges and I am both proud and happy to be a military spouse.**