

My Husband the American Hero

By Tracie Stern

What does my husband do? I am not entirely sure. I know he serves his country in the US Navy. I know he is a dedicated member of the armed forces and will dedicate at least 20 yrs to the country he loves. I know he is in danger all the time, do I know how that danger is presenting itself? No...I am on a need to know basis and for security purposes, I don't need to know.

There is an intense amount of pride that comes from being a military spouse. You have this beautiful person who wakes up at obscene hours to dress for a career that could kill them. They wear a uniform, which is very sexy if I do say so myself, and they wear it with pride. My husband has advanced to the rank of Senior Chief in only 13 yrs, which is a great accomplishment if you ask anyone who knows. How he got there, well that is our story.

I met my husband 9 yrs ago while modeling in Sydney Australia. He was on a port visit on the tail end of spending 6 months at sea. It wasn't love at first sight, but it was extreme like. He invited my friend Sam and I to Hawaii for a visit where he was currently stationed. I

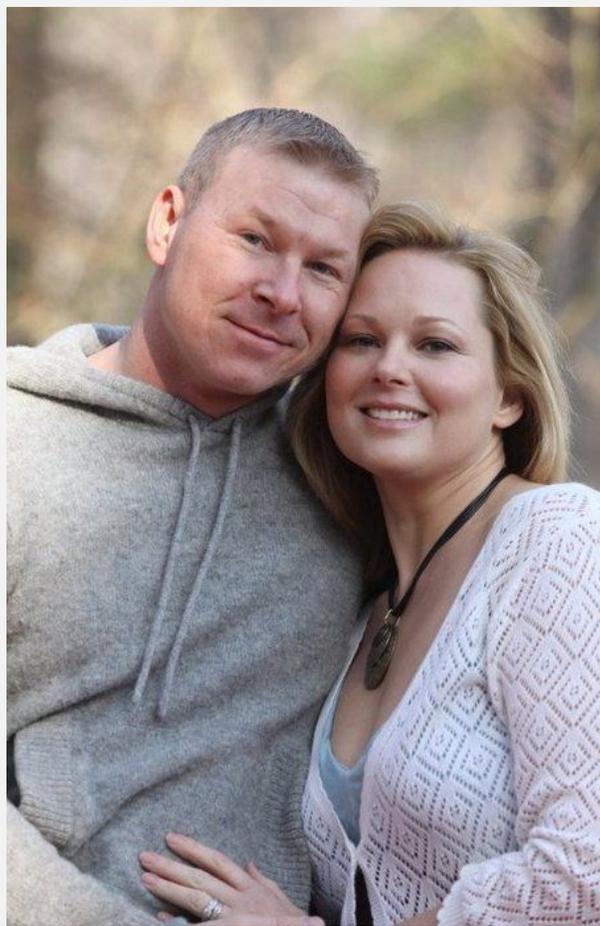
decided this was worth pursuing and so Sam and I flew to Hawaii and spent 10 days there. That is where I first said I love you. Little did I know then what those words would truly translate into.

2 children, 3 permanent changes of duty stations (meaning 3 moves including one overseas) and several trials and tribulations later we find ourselves in yet another turning point in our military lives together.

By military standards my husband and I are lucky. We managed to spend the first 8 yrs of our lives together hardly separated at all. The last year and a half however has truly made up for that.

Our first deployment as a family happened in June of 2010 where my husband was deployed for 6.5 months. 3 days before he left we found a leak in our pipes. After ripping out the ceiling in our basement, my husband had enough time to repair the leak

and clean up the basement but not enough time to put up a new roof. Instead we stapled white drop cloths to the rafters in order to camouflage the work area.



When the cold weather hit, our heating coils went out and our house leveled off at 60 degrees...it was freezing in here and my kids slept in layers...\$700 later and we had heat and a payment plan. He arrived back home 3 days before Christmas. This was the first time our 2 boys, then aged 6 and 3 had been without their father for any amount of time longer than a month. The first 30 days were the most difficult I think for all of us. I had ordered Daddy dolls for both kids, these are 17" stuffed dolls with a photo of their Dad on them. Each night our boys would fall asleep with their 'Daddy' by their side. We took 'Daddy' everywhere, and when the kids would fight in the car I would grab 'Daddy' and start swinging. This made them laugh and distracted them which stopped the arguing. And helped restore a bit of my sanity.

I continued to work. What does that mean. That is a loaded question..lol..I am a plus size model and a lifestyle consultant. My career involves travel as well as daily investments of time. If I'm not on a set I'm working on getting myself on a set. During those 6 months I shot 2 films, which required odd hours of child care, had 2 jobs in Chicago which again required me to travel. I would do photo shoots during the day and try to organize them during school hours so that I could be home after school. It's a very well oiled machine being a military family. On days when I knew I wouldn't be home to meet the bus, I would arrange for a friend or sitter to be at the house. Some days they would even have to pick up my youngest from preschool and then get home to meet the bus. My hectic schedule was adopted by my friends on occasion. Did I mention that our closest relative is 6 hrs away?

On top of that I was also the FRG (Family readiness group) President for the ship. It was my job to keep the families of 260 sailors informed of the ships movement, where they had been, where they were going and most importantly when they would be home. Most importantly being there to offer morale and support. It was a good distraction and kept me very busy at times.

During the deployment my husband and I had a pretty good set up for communication. We could email and occasionally chat on a secure network. This really helped us stay connected mentally and allowed me to update him consistently on how the boys were doing. Our youngest for example went from diapers to potty trained during that deployment. Our son was a baby when he left and a preschooler when he got home. It was hard for him to watch his kids growing up without him. The difficulty wasn't all ours. My husband had to make adjustments coming home. He had to learn the habits of our kids all over again. I tried to help him by writing out a schedule of our day to day activities and habits so that when he got home he wouldn't feel like a stranger. My hus-



band also had to realize that our lives go on with or without him in the house. It has to. My husband transferred to a new command at the end of that deployment and this new command was already scheduled to deploy July 2011. Yes, 7 months after arriving home.

In January we took a family vacation to WV to go skiing. It was like he never left. We were able to function like our family always has. It took my husband a few weeks after that though to jump back into HIS life here at home. We have a lot of home projects that needed to be addressed and he wasn't moving very quickly on them...after all time was limited. March 3rd, my husband came home from work and said we needed to talk. That is never a good sign. We went into the bedroom and he said "We are deploying in 3 weeks." Libya. I cried. I hadn't recovered yet from the emotional drain the last deployment put on me, and my husband and I have barely had enough time to make up time...if you know what I mean. Now I had to prepare our family for another one. This one even longer than the last one. 9+ months. After my moment of weakness, I jumped in 'organized' Tracie mode. We needed to make sure this, this and this was fixed. The rest of the issues could wait.

We had to buy him new uniforms, personal care products, and other 'supplies' in order for him to be sustained for a few months on board. We had to break the news to our boys. Our oldest son, who has now had 2 birthdays without his father, started playing Jr. Farm baseball during his father's last deployment. He was signed up to play spring ball and Daddy was going to participate. We now had to tell him that Daddy is not only going miss spring baseball but also fall ball too.

This was the first time I seen my husband cry. We sat at dinner table cussing what he going to be doing and all of added things I to once again carry. Less than a week after he left, our oldest son lost his first tooth. A week or so after that he learned how



to ride his bike without training wheels. Nothing like rubbing salt in the wound. May 2nd my husband was flown home. During the tornadoes in Alabama he had lost 2 relatives and his command felt he needed to come home to grieve. This horrible tragedy was a devastating blow but also a blessing. We had 16 days with my husband that we weren't supposed to have. I thanked God everyday but also had this horrible feeling in my gut. Those 16 days allowed my husband to witness a few baseball practices, a 2nd tooth lost, he was able to see our youngest go to preschool and participate in picking him up and attending a class party. We also took a day and spent it driving his Jeep on the beaches of the OBX of NC.

Scott left for the ship on May 18th. Memorial day weekend our family pet of 10 years Simba died of kidney failure. One of the hardest things I've had to do in my lifetime was to make the decision to put him down, the other was to tell my husband. I thank God everyday for the support of my friends. Had my girlfriend not been by my side I would have been a lot worse off. Since then the tragedies and trials haven't stopped. Close family to my husband has been diagnosed with

terminal cancer and has been diagnosed with 6-9 months to live, my husband may or may not arrive before their passing. We are all aware of the helicopter crash that took the lives of several US Navy SEAL members. I was the one who had to tell my husband that his good friend was one of those SEALS who passed away. I still cry to this day.

When my husband returns in the New Year he'll have been deployed 18 months out of 24. After the wear and tear of doing all of the household maintenance, mowing the lawn, taking out the trash, cleaning up after Hurricane Irene, dealing with the heat going out, school days, baseball games on top of the normal daily adventure of raising 2 boys, the thought had occurred to me during the first 6.5 month deployment that "I can live without my husband". What I've learned during this deployment is that that statement is completely false. What I didn't realize is that everyday my husband is here. He is in every decision we make, every penny we spend, he is there

when my kids go to bed and I say "Daddy loves you" and he is there every

morning when I wake up and read an email he has written to me. The only way that I know he is ok. Last night was the first time I had actually cried because of the fear I haven't acknowledged that my husband is indeed in danger and his life is at risk every minute of every day.

What is a hero exactly? Is it the military member who has survived their family? Who has

missed birthdays, Christmas, births, deaths? Is it because they are left to deal with all of these tragedies and blessings alone? Is it the person who witnesses their friend die due to an enemy they swore to fight against? What about the family left behind? The one who has to wake up and convince themselves everyday that their partner is alive and well? Cutting the grass, putting out the garbage, getting the car repaired, making dinner every night, seeing their children grow up with a father but without one too?

My husband is America's hero because he is sacrificing his life with his family so that you can have one with yours.

