

COMMITTING TO SERVE AS A FAMILY

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Over thirty years ago, I said “I do” to an active-duty submariner. I had no idea what that would mean for me as a woman, wife, and mother. Nor did I have any idea what the next thirty years would look like for my family and how they would shape my family’s destiny as well. I did know that I wanted a life with the one I loved and to be the home he returned to in port.

I quickly learned military service is not something the service member does on their own; their entire family serves its country. The most obvious service is supporting your deployed service member and relocating throughout their career. However, the family is often involved in other, less visible acts. Over the course of my husband’s thirty-year career, I have had a very successful and rewarding parallel career in Child Youth Programs, the division of MWR that oversees activities such as child care and youth sports at military installations. I’ve also served as a member of the Command Support Team for several of my husband’s commands. All four of our children have worked for MWR on base, serving a multitude of roles we refer to fondly as “voluntold responsibilities.” Babysitting at Family Readiness meetings, mowing lawns when the command was deployed, and securing the homes of command families during typhoons and hurricanes are just a few voluntold examples.

Committing to serve as a family requires flexibility and rolling with the punches. Over time, military families must learn to adapt to new situations and to approach each situation with more than one plan. Often, this means developing several contingency plans. Military families must also accept the fact that their plans will change at least twice – if not ten times! – before actually happening.

Committing to serve as a family also brings many rewards. Our family has seen where history took place from perspectives the average American cannot share. We stood in Admiral Nimitz’s office, sharing the very spot he stood upon while watching the planes come over the mountains at Pearl Harbor. We’ve been in the basement of the Admirals House on Ford Island, where the gun turrets still exist, and where a makeshift hospital triaged those who were wounded in the

attack. We’ve been humbled on Asan Beach, where seventy years ago the battle began for Guam’s liberation began. A day trip on a Dependents Cruise nuclear submarine was the norm in our family. Serving as a family also afforded my children the opportunity to attend top notch DoDea Schools and travel to places like Japan and Korea to play sports.

Committing to serve as a family can also be very stressful. Communication is crucial for the family’s survival and the maintenance of its mental health. It’s important for couples to prioritize talking often and truthfully – and to understand that no one is a mind reader. Somewhere around the eleven- or twelve-year mark in my husband’s career, we both started calling out pre-deployment stress for what it was. When it struck, one of us would call a time out and acknowledge that we were reacting to the stress, and we talked it out. I also learned to navigate the many emotions that my children faced as their father deployed and tried to stay ahead of and plan for the challenges by acknowledging they existed.

Committing to serve has been an extremely rewarding experience for our family; it’s established our legacy of service. The military taught us to be flexible. It instilled a sense of pride in serving others. Both of my sons now serve, as does my son-in-law. We also have friends around the world, which is a gift that outweighs anything monetary. The journey afforded us opportunities that many Americans never have, along with many challenges that most Americans never face. And we would do it again in a heartbeat.



Jill Marini, Veteran Spouse, and family



The purpose of Military REACH, a project of the DoD-USDA Partnership for Military Families, is to bridge the gap between military family research and practice. Our team critically evaluates and synthesizes research in order to make it practical and accessible to military families, helping professionals, and military leadership. USDA/NIFA Award No. 2017-48710-27339