

MOMSENSE

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From The Home Front

By Amy Murray

My (now) husband Patrick and I met 2 months before he deployed to Iraq for the first time in 2004. It was a whirlwind romance: I had no plans to fall in love with a Marine- I was living in Los Angeles at the time, working in a job I loved, perfectly happy with the way things were going. But love happens on its own timing.

When Pat deployed that August, he had the sweet idea to mark our monthly anniversaries with flowers. (Knowing him as well as I do now, I'm sure it was more his mother's idea than his own, but that's another story for another time.) It was a wonderful gesture, but at the time my desk at work was in the middle of a bustling office, and people would stand congregated in front of my cubicle while they waited to talk to the head of our department. Without fail, my flowers always ended up the subject of conversation, and the dialog often went like this:

Them: "Oh, beautiful flowers! Is it your birthday?"

Me: "No, it's my anniversary."

Them: "How sweet! How many years have you been together?"

Me, sheepishly: "Actually, just three (four, five, etc,) months."

Them, with a look of confusion: "Oh...."

Me: "Well, my boyfriend is in Iraq."

At that point I almost always got what I like to call Iraq Face. Iraq Face is initially surprise that then quickly leads into everyone's least favorite emotion: pity. Then they'd offer one of three responses: "That must be so hard," "I don't know how you do it," or "I could never do that."

While I'm sure their intentions were in the right

place, none of these phrases ever made me feel great. And now, 7 years and 4 deployments later, I'm still getting Iraq Face- it has just turned into Afghanistan Face, or Temporary Single Mother Face, or Moving Every Three Years Face, or Oh-Your-Husband-Missed-The-First-Seven-Months-Of-Your-Child's-Life Face. The list goes on and on.

I've spent a lot of time thinking about it over these past few years, and what strikes me the most is how differently people respond to my husband when he tells them what he does. He gets AWE. From men and women, across the board: awe and respect. And thanks. More than anything else- people just thank him, which is the perfect response- totally appropriate and always appreciated.

It's such a contrast from the response I, and many other spouses I've talked to get- the tone of voice is different. I think people often try to convey sympathy but it often feels like pity- and no one wants to be pitied- particularly for something most of us are so proud of. Our husbands serve- and we are so proud of them- but we serve, too, and we're proud of that. We're proud of the way we keep our families going when our husbands are gone, and of the way that we keep our marriages together despite long separations, and especially our strength.

So my challenge is this: change the way you think of the sacrifice that military families make. For some ways you can support military families, see the suggestions from some of our own on page 3. But above all else, just remember that the best thing you can say is so very simple, and is exactly what you'd say to our husbands: Thank you. That's all we really need.