15 YEARS OF WAR

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How the longest war in U.S. history affected a military family in love, loss, and the cost of service

Kristine Schellhaas

1

Reality Check

★★★

The day I realized I'd fallen madly in love with a man in uniform, I never imagined that I'd find myself sitting at his side, hunkered down under a highway overpass, waiting and praying to escape the fury of the F4 tornadoes nearby.

We were somewhere between Chicago and Sioux Falls–halfway between Virginia and California on one of countless such relocations at the Marine Corps' behest. The car swayed side to side for hours while the storm raged around us. All we could do was keep our kids calm, and try to find the humor in our situation.

Eventually I got to a point where I closed my eyes and considered just how exactly I'd gotten myself there. Love. It's a funny thing. It had taken me places I never thought I'd go; it let me to do things I never thought I'd do.

I met Ross in 1996. I was a wild 19-year-old, living it up in the summer after my first year of college. Sergeant Ross Schellhaas had just finished a four-year enlistment, and was certain the Marine Corps was a memory he could only see in his rearview mirror.

He took me to the Western Idaho Fair on a date, and somewhere between the funnel cakes and Ferris wheel, I began to fall in love. I have so many great memories from that time in our life. Ross was laid back, caring, and funny. Our sarcastic wit fit together well, and being with him was just easy. Of course, his well-built six-foot frame didn't hurt his chances either.

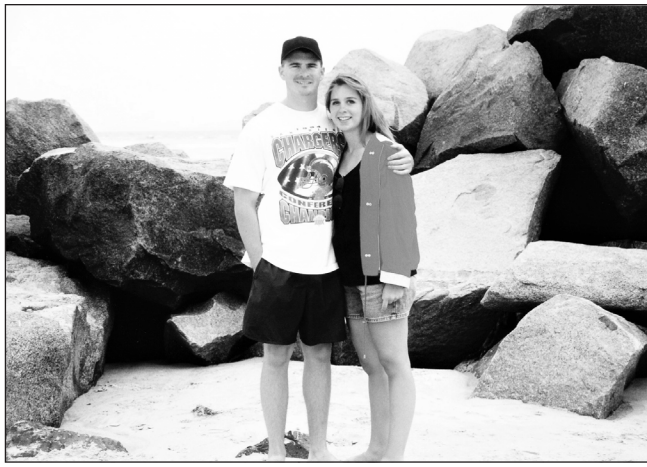
But soon the nostalgia of the Corps began whispering to him like the Siren she is. He joined the Marine Reserves and signed up for an officer training program. I had no idea what that meant. We were young, determined, and ready to see where life would take us.

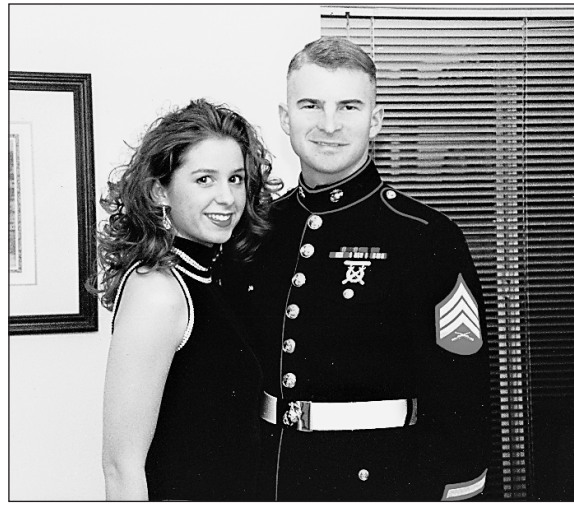
Several years later, we graduated from college. I moved to Arizona for work, and Ross returned to life as an active duty Marine in 2001. Those five years together brought an engagement; he was

the best man I knew, and to me, it would be worth any sacrifices and hardships to be with him.

I was working full time, waiting for him to graduate from a school in Quantico, Virginia. I didn't know it then—and I wouldn't have believed it anyway—but it was the first of countless days, weeks, and months I would spend waiting for my Marine.

It was also the first time I'd played the military waiting game, knowing we'd be moving soon, but not knowing where—in my mind, it could have been anywhere in the world. I woke up each day mentally checking off another box. I kept telling myself it wouldn't be much longer. Soon. Soon we would be together again.





2

Back to His Roots

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All I had ever wanted was to become a Marine. I signed up and left for boot camp after high school graduation in 1992. Like so many things in life, the Corps didn't meet my expectations—I had chased the *image.* I expected to be training, shooting, and deploying—I was left wanting. Despite making friends I knew I'd keep for life, I was nothing but dissatisfied with my time on active duty; the biggest upset was not facing combat. I wasn't thinking at the time that they were some of the most crucial years in shaping me into the person I would become.

I said goodbye to the Corps in the summer of 1996 and moved home with every intention of following in my mom's footsteps to become a high school teacher and coach. I enrolled in college, and put my Montgomery GI Bill benefits to good use. I reconnected with old friends, and looked forward to settling into the regular routine of a college student. And that's where I met Kristine.

I have to admit my first impression wasn't a good one. Sure she was hot, but I was convinced that she was a spoiled, high-maintenance chick because of where she grew up. Thank God I actually took the time to get to know her, because it didn't take long for me to realize that in addition to being exceptionally smart, Kristine was humble and down-to-earth. She was like no other girl I'd ever met, and it wasn't long before I was completely head over heels for her.

As good as my life at home was, after a while I started missing aspects of my life in the Marine Corps—mostly the closeness of the men I served with, and the very spartan life we lived. As time passed, I realized I wanted to go back and see once and for all if I could pass the test on the battlefield.

I joined the Marine Corps Reserves, a stepping-stone on the path back to active duty, and set my new goal of becoming an officer. Acceptance into the Platoon Leader's Course program meant I would

attend the Officer Candidate School (OCS), my time split over the course of two summers during my last two years of college.

After I graduated, I could then either accept or deny the commission. There was no guarantee I'd be able to secure an infantry contract like when I had enlisted; I would have to compete for it. I could land somewhere in the Combat Arms MOS community (Military Occupational Specialty—a job assignment in the military) with artillery, combat engineers, infantry, tanks or tracks, but I could also get supply, communications or one of 30-plus other MOSs. All I wanted was to go back to my infantry roots.

In June 2000, I accepted my Marine Officer commission, read aloud before witnesses and administered by my father, a Naval Academy graduate and retired Navy Commander.

Later that summer I returned to Quantico to complete officer training at The Basic School (TBS). I conducted an informal poll on the first day of class, asking how many ground contract men like me wanted infantry as their MOS. A little over half of the 25 eligible men in my platoon wanted it.

Many of them had a romantic view of what the infantry was like. I at least knew what to expect. Life in the field can be miserable, and it requires a particular set of attributes to be able to thrive in that kind of discomfort. It's not always the athletic guy, the smart guy,

In the field at TBS, The Basic School at Quantico, Virginia

the dumb guy or the strong guy who makes a good infantryman. It requires someone who is resilient and focuses outwardly when most tend to focus on their own misery.

Fortunately for me, we went through TBS in winter, and many who had their hearts set on joining the infantry quickly changed their minds after the first few field exercises. Going to the field is important for honing skills: conducting patrols, fire support methods, and offensive and defensive techniques.

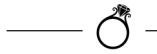
For many of them, it was their first exposure to basic Marine Corps elements: lack of sleep, dealing with the freezing weather, the annoyances of ticks, and all the other unpleasant things that came with infantry life.

Upon graduation we all created an MOS wish list for our job. It was left up to our leadership to slate us for positions about which they'd haggle and trade each of their Marines in order to fill the quota, similar to a sports draft. The higher we graduated in the class, the more likely it would be that we'd get our MOS. But just because we wanted it didn't mean we'd get it.

By the time we started filling out our wish lists, only six of the 25 men still wanted infantry. I was thrilled to be one of the three assigned; I hadn't rejoined the Corps to be anything other than a grunt officer.

I was selected by the staff platoon commanders in my company to act as the class commandant for Infantry Officer Course (IOC), the next phase of training for those who received infantry billets. I would be the conduit between the instructors and students at IOC. It was an administrative job of sorts. I would also be responsible for passing on information and making sure students were ready for instruction, that they were where they needed to be.

as an enlisted Marine with 1st Battalion, 1st Marines (1/1). He was a great Marine as well. If first impressions meant anything, I had the feeling I'd landed in a top-notch unit. I couldn't wait to dig in and be a part of it.



The cost of the haircuts was starting to add up.

Every Sunday, Ross had to stop whatever we were doing to go get one. Ten dollars each week, plus never being able to plan a weekend without the barber, inspired me to take matters into my own hands. Surely I could save us time and money by doing it myself. We owned clippers. I'd given haircuts before. How hard could it be?

"Are you sure you know what you're doing?" Even if I hadn't heard the concern in his voice, it was plastered all over his face in the mirror.

"Relax, I got this," I said.

It all started well enough. I got the top short enough, thanks to the clipper's attachments, and the bottom looked good since all I had to do was remove the attachment. Now I had to figure out the fade.

"Babe, please don't mess it up."

"Your confidence in me is overwhelming, you know. Can't tell you how much that helps."

"You know I love you, but it's been about 30 minutes since you started." He glared at me in the mirror. "Are you sure you're doing it right?"

I ignored his concerns and instead focused my attention on the back of his head. I tried every technique I could think of, but something still didn't look right.

Ross could see my face in the mirror. "Oh God, please tell me you didn't mess it up."

I squinted. "Well I wouldn't say I messed it up, exactly."

"Kristine, let me see." He stood up and snatched up a hand-held mirror from the bathroom counter. "No! I can't go to work looking like this . . . " He turned from side to side, examining the damage.

"Okay, so it wasn't as easy as I thought it would be, but it's not that bad." I did my best to stifle a giggle. I had finally figured out how to blend the longer hair on the top with the shorter hair at the back,

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This Is War

★★★

February 2003
Kuwait and Invasion into Iraq
Boise, Idaho

Some of our battalion loaded on to CH-53 Super Stallions, better known to Marines as Shitters because of the smoke that streams out the back of the helicopter. The rest of us climbed into CH-46 Sea Knights, known affectionately as Phrogs because well, they look like frogs.

We loaded up about 12 at a time, weapons in hand, eventually landing just outside the Kuwaiti Army's 6th Brigade base in Camp Bullrush. They had created a crude compound by piling up an earthen berm around the camp's perimeter in the middle of the wide open desert.

If we ended up invading Iraq, we were going to need all the help we could get taking our gear in with us. Camp Bullrush became the 15th MEU's new headquarters. General Conway, the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) commander, was waiting to address the US troops and Royal Marines.

Once the MEF Commander was done with us and we were let go, our scavenger hunt began. Because we were short one cargo trailer, the company gunny grabbed me; he knew I had friends at Camp Commando, and we started looking for a trailer for our Humvee to help carry our ammo and other mission-essential equipment.

Each day we discussed the invasion with one other, talking about what our roles might be. We worked on rehearsals, conducting as much realistic PT as we could in conjunction with fire, movement, and demolition classes. We crafted our orders so that we would be prepared for anything we could possibly imagine. All that was left to do after that was wait for orders to move out.

In the days that followed, I found myself glued to the TV. Every news station showed both live and recorded footage of the war. They announced that the 15th MEU was attacking the port city of Umm Qasr, Iraq. I was in shock when I read the ticker tape along the bottom highlighting Ross's company from the MEU. A British reporter gave the play-by-play as bullets flew right outside an Iraqi stronghold.

I sat watching a freaking *war* unfold *on television,* knowing that Ross was right in the mix. I could no longer pretend none of this would have a direct impact on my life.

Moments later I heard someone in the background call out, "Gas, gas, gas!" The camera panned and zoomed. There was an ominous white cloud on the horizon—all I could think was that now there were weapons of mass destruction at play. *Is this something that's going to forever change the physiology of my husband's body? Will we be able to have kids?*

Before he left, Ross and I had discussed storing his semen at a medical facility just in case something happened. We ultimately decided against it because it was completely outside the limits of our budget. We knew some of the costs of war—there were too many reports of men permanently injured by chemical agents introduced during Vietnam and Desert Storm. We weren't naïve; we knew there was always a chance that he could become terribly damaged from whatever he was going to face in Iraq.

The next scene on the newscast showed the Marines in Ross's platoon donning gas masks. Then something that looked like a bazooka was fired. The impact downrange blew up a large portion of the enemy's buildings. The reporter called the weapon a Javelin, and said that the Marines from his platoon were the first to use it in battle.

Later that evening, I learned the pivotal role the port of Umm Qasr played strategically; it was crucial for bringing humanitarian supplies in and shipping oil out. While the Marines were busy fighting on land, it was reported that Navy SEALS and Special Forces were busy clearing mines and securing oil platforms and infrastructure that was endangered in the waterways so that humanitarian aid could be expedited. The Polish Special Forces and Marine Security Forces stationed in Bahrain seized some of the oil platforms outside the port as well.

The day after the invasion something unexpected happened.

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A Beautiful Gift

★★★

February 28, 2004
Fallujah, Iraq
Camp Pendleton, California

I drove Ross to 2/1's headquarters at Horno, where I could once again say goodbye and deliver my heart and soul into the Marine Corps' hands. It was a terrible thing to say goodbye, but the sooner he left, the sooner the countdown bringing him home could begin. We were both a little quieter than usual. The night before, Ross wanted to go out and celebrate his last night in town. I just wasn't up to it. I'd worked all day and I didn't have the energy. He didn't say anything, but I knew he wasn't happy about it.

It's not common knowledge that the workups prior to a deployment are a killer on relationships. Marines are never home during workup. Any kind of similarity to the regular routine is unheard of. Families are left feeling stressed and nauseated from all the confusion and shifting schedules.

I stood with the other families, waiting for Ross to get on the bus. I remember thinking that something seemed off. Instead of a quick and orderly line, there was some kind of delay. MPs stood at the front of the line shining a bright light on each Marine before they loaded their gear onto the bus. Nobody was saying much, so I just chalked it up to some Marine protocol that I wasn't aware of.

I debated on waiting for the buses to leave, but I didn't want to deal with the emotional rollercoaster anymore. I was trying to be brave, trying to convince myself everything would be okay. The reality was that Ross was leaving me to go to war again. I decided to take myself home instead, and throw a pity party for yours truly. After that, I was going to do things differently this deployment. I was going to connect with friends, help the battalion and other wives

city. He didn't have a lot of time to brief me on his plan, and I was left with the other two platoons to continue to clear and patrol our sector. I divided it in half: 1st Platoon operated in the southern half, and 3rd Platoon in the north.

Banner called via radio for the company to consolidate near the eastern entrance to the city sometime late in the afternoon. He gave me a linkup time of 2100, which I relayed via radio to 1st Platoon.

Well after sundown, it was time. I moved out to the linkup point with Lt Wade Zirkle. A Humvee armed with a mounted machine gun brought up the rear.

When we neared our destination I went to the front of the patrol to conduct the linkup with the Captain. "Pale Rider Six, this is Pale Rider Five. We're one hundred fifty meters from the linkup site, over."

No answer. I tried two more times, and still received no answer.

I saw movement to the south, near the main road. I took out my NVGs to get a visual. I used the standard nighttime visual recognition signal for conducting a linkup when radio communications had failed.

As I gave the last flash to say *we're coming in*, a hail of fire came down on us from behind and to our right. My Marines began returning fire. I dropped my NVGs and hit the deck, grabbing my radio to call for a ceasefire—I thought the unit from across the street was shooting at us. I couldn't see where the fire was coming from and I wanted to be sure it wasn't coming from one of our sister companies, just in case they had entered our area and confused us for the enemy.

Shots were definitely ringing from our friendlies, but when I looked closer I could see that they were firing to the immediate right of us, not at us.

As the fire we were under began to wane, I surveyed our position. Pfc Sandoval, the Marine manning the M240 machine gun mounted to the Humvee, was slumped over the cab of the vehicle, motionless. Smoke rose from his machine gun, the barrel almost white-hot from the high rate he'd been firing.

I ran out to check on him, yelling for Marines to assist me in pulling him from the vehicle into cover for triage. Lt Zirkle received the casualty and situation report from his squad leaders. Another Marine had been shot in the butt.

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Darkest Before the Dawn

★★★

September 2004
Fallujah, Iraq
Camp Pendleton, California

A suicide bomber drove his truck, armed with a five-hundred-pound bomb, straight into one of our company's seven-ton trucks. The truck was on its way to swap out platoons that were positioned along the highway north of Fallujah. The explosion blew the light armor clear off the vehicle, decapitating everyone on one side. The effect was so clean that it looked like a laser had traversed right through the midst of them.

An investigation was immediately conducted because of the atypical circumstances. Ten of the seventeen men inside the truck were killed: three Iraqis and seven Marines.

One of the survivors, and the only one not to be evacuated out of theater, had bent over to pick up his spit bottle for his chewing tobacco at the precise moment the bomb exploded. It might be the one time I can honestly say chewing tobacco saved a life. The man to his right was killed instantly. The guy to his left was struck in back of the head and suffered a significant brain injury. He was flown back to the States to learn how to talk again.

Lt Wade Zirkle was on the front passenger side of the truck, and suffered horrific burns. One of the seven Marines from our company killed in that blast held the morbid, heart-breaking title of being the one thousandth KIA in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Too many Marines were dying. The casualty reports created a small mountain of paperwork on my desk. No matter how many I read, I couldn't stop the heart palpitations as my eyes scanned

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In a Van Down by the River

★★★

January 2007
Camp Pendleton, California to Fort Benning, Georgia

The coming of the new year meant it was time for us to move. It was our fifth move as a family. Ross's assignment would take less than one year, but living that amount of time in an RV as a family brought a unique set of challenges.

This was the farthest move as a family we'd ever done. It's a huge bummer that the government doesn't pay to ship cars, especially when families move from coast to coast. The small allowance for mileage doesn't begin to balance what it would cost to ship a vehicle. As a result, we had to fork over $1,200 to ship my SUV from California to Georgia.

We were grateful that Ross's dad Rick drove his truck from California to Georgia and met us there. It's really expensive moving all the time; some things the moving company wouldn't pack and move for us. Anything flammable had to be thrown out, which included almost every garage and yard supply item we owned. We had to throw away or give away refrigerator and freezer items. Of course all of it had to be replaced once we got where we were going.

Unpacking boxes the movers had packed was like Christmas: you never knew what you were going to find. But those surprises come at a cost. You hope it's your stuff. You hope it's not broken. And you hope the movers haven't stolen the good stuff. Then of course there are the items rendered unusable by the move. We'd have to replace everything that had been was ruined or broken, and the allowance provided was never enough to break even.

With the RV, at least we'd get to keep some of our condiments.

Packing was difficult; I had to figure out what a year's worth of necessities might be. I brought clothes for George for the next five

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Stranded in the Desert

★★★

August 2007
Twentynine Palms, California

As our time in Georgia came to an end, Ross received orders to join 2/7 (2nd Battalion, 7th Marines) in Twentynine Palms. There's a saying in the Marine Corps: a Marine's first drive into Twentynine Palms should be at night so that his spouse can't see what she's getting into. At night there will be all kinds of twinkly lights, maybe even the remnant of a spectacular sunset to the west.

Well, Ross—always a man of adventure and daring—didn't subscribe to that rule.

As we drove our motorhome through the bends and crests of the desert roads, all the while watching civilization dwindle from visions of emerald golf courses into stark desert surroundings and backwater dwellings that looked more like meth shacks, I wondered what I had gotten myself into.

When we turned down the main drag, I'm pretty sure Ross felt my eyes burning a hole through the side of his face.

He looked at me. "What?"

"You can't be serious," I said.

"What are you talking about? This place is gonna be great."

"No. Here's what will happen, Ross; I can already tell you. You're going to dump me in the middle of the desert with your two young kids while you get to live your dream, ride off in convoy and shoot big guns on the Marine Corps' largest training base. That seems real fair."

"My two kids, huh?" He paused. "I dunno, babe; all I can say is that I've heard everybody cries when they get to Twentynine Palms but that they cry when they leave, too. Maybe you'll learn to love it."

It took all I had not to laugh in his face. "I hope you're right,

39
Girl: A Giggle With Glitter on It

★★★

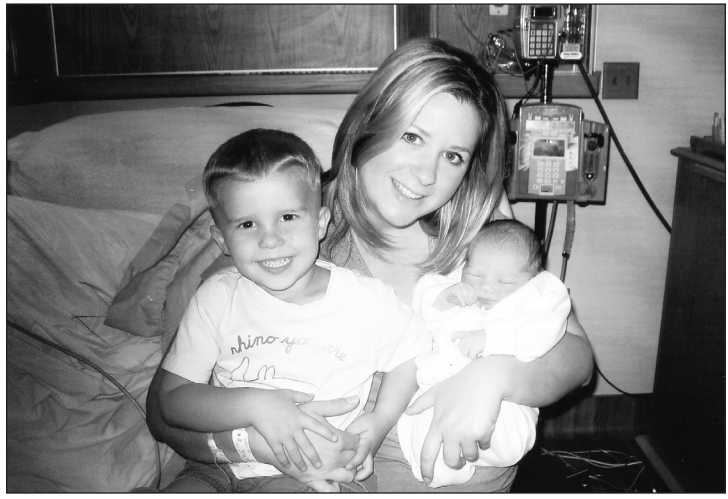
September 2008
Now Zad, Afghanistan
Twentynine Palms, California

We welcomed our sweet Grace into the world at 8:20 p.m., and my mom cut the umbilical cord in Ross's stead.

I sent out a Red Cross message so that Ross would know we were well, and to call us when he had a moment. He called an hour later, thanks to Amy, who emailed her husband, LtCol Hall, to let Ross know. The minute I heard his voice, the tears started. I held the phone up to Grace's ear so that her daddy could welcome her into the world.

It was in that moment that I realized I needed to stop the what-ifs and start celebrating life again. I wanted to start a new life with our family, live life to the fullest, bring happiness into our lives.

A short 24 hours later I was on my way home, thankful to be away from all the beeping machines and the constant string of interruptions.



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Hey I Just Met You and This is Crazy

But She's My Momma and I'm Your Baby

★★★

November 2008
Camp Bastion (Leatherneck) Afghanistan
Twentynine Palms, California

Before we began the journey home, both First Sergeant and I talked through what it was going to be like readjusting to home. We encouraged Marines to tell their stories, to talk about things that were bothering them, or things that they were having difficulty processing. I knew this deployment had left its mark; what was worse for many, its true impact wouldn't fully manifest until we were home. In Now Zad alone, battalion documents showed 181 killed, 87,000 pounds of bombs dropped from aircraft, 2,200 mortar rounds expended, and a great number of missiles, rockets, and guns fired from aircraft.

When we reached Manas, the Marines were given authorization to drink, but they were limited by base regulations to a strict two-beer maximum. It was good relax, without having to worry about anything. It had been months since we'd had that kind of luxury. Along with great chow and cheap (legitimate) massages, our time in Manas offered space for the continuation of reintegration discussions, and some cooling-off time. We even played some dodge ball at the gym, trying to return to a bit of normalcy.

Out of the 175 Fox Company Marines who had deployed, 54 were awarded Purple Hearts. Two men had made the ultimate sacrifice. Some of Fox Company's wounded warriors were with us wives stateside, waiting to welcome their brothers home. In true Fox

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Let's Meet in Our Dreams

★★★

January 2010
Okinawa, Japan
Twentynine Palms, California

We immediately began training. One of the first courses we took was Helicopter-crew Air Breathing Device (HABD) training. If a helicopter ever crashed at sea, the HABD would provide about 15 minutes of air, so that we could find an escape hatch and slowly make our way to the surface. It consisted of a day in the classroom and a day at the pool.

After that, we set out to deal with the issuing of weapons. It required an update of the rosters, then each rifle had to be zeroed (by firing it at a range). It was a lot of busywork in addition to the almost overwhelming logistics of preparing two thousand five hundred people—and millions of tons of equipment—to go to sea. There was no time for libbo. Even regular downtime was scarce. Everyone in leadership worked 17-hour days.

MEUs that leave from the States don't have to do all this: just the Okinawa 31st MEU. The stateside MEUs use each unit's own equipment, so they don't have the myriad of logistical issues just before embarkation that rotational units have to deal with. Just one more reason the nickname "Thirty-worst MEU" stuck.

The 31st was constantly rolling in and out: it was three months back, three months out, three months back, three months out, and on and on. The cycle never really ended. After a while, the command element Marines became ambivalent and comfortable—sometimes too comfortable—with their routine. They tended towards an attitude of hearing but not listening, notching their belts with how many offloads they'd done because those notches were what they most cared about. Whenever we suggested a better or more tactical way of doing things, the MEU's permanent staff ignored us. They

> tired of the missed holidays, missed birthdays, missed anniversaries, missed pregnancies and births. I'm tired of doing everything myself, basically acting as your personal assistant.
>
> I have lived the same day continually, with miniscule differences. My life with an eighteen-month-old and five-year-old is completely exhausting.
>
> I'm just tired of everything, and I miss you, my husband. This too shall pass.

It was incredibly difficult to have a discussion about the strength of our marriage via email. I needed to see his face, hear his voice. Marriage to my Marine was so much more difficult than I would have ever imagined.

Maybe it's because when kids are involved, our responsibilities are tied to something bigger than ourselves. No matter what, we're expected to figure it out along the way, and we've only got one shot to make it happen. We have to give our all, all the time—we're parents for life. It's exhausting, especially when your partner is constantly away training or deployed.

Marriage is different, in a way, because when it gets too difficult it can end in a divorce. We have to make a choice to work with our spouse over and over again, sometimes day by day. We have to want to be with the other person; we have to place their needs as a priority in life, sometimes above our own. There are so many factors that make for a successful marriage, but for Ross and me, the one thing keeping us together was forgiveness.

We were successful because we trusted each other, and we didn't keep score. We didn't bring up the past unless it was pertinent to the conversation. Love has seasons, and frankly, sometimes it's hard. We learned to accept flaws, to keep pushing through pain. We saw each other at our worst, our darkest selves, and instead of allowing that to fester into malcontent, we chose to use it to cultivate a deeper love for each other. We resisted the off-chance temptation to run away from problems, from each other; we resisted the lie that something else might be satisfying. We both knew that this fragile thing we had was worth saving.

We learned to say, "I'm sorry" and, "I still love you." We savored the small things. We made moments matter. We laughed,

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A Rainbow of Chaos

★★★

Summer 2010
Okinawa, Japan
Twentynine Palms, California

Ross was finally home.

It was time to pack again: the eighth move since we'd been married. This time I made sure to ask the movers, "Please don't send any felons to pack our belongings this time. The last ones weren't able to get on base; one of them was actually apprehended at the gate."

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The Secret to Getting Ahead Is Getting Started

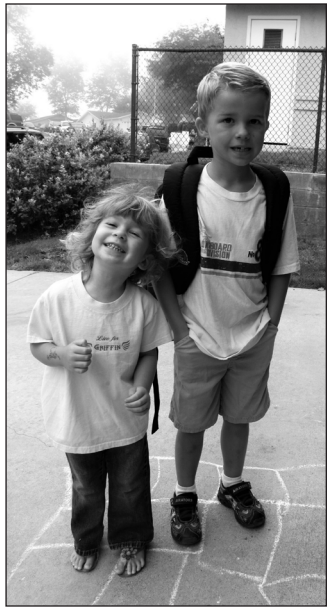
★★★

Fall 2011
Camp Pendleton, California

The summer months flew by. As flip-flops flopped and watermelon seeds dropped, I realized I had with USMC Life the makings of my own perfect job. And I didn't even have to leave the house to do it.

I come from a family of entrepreneurs—both of my grandparents had owned their own companies. I wasn't sure, though, if I was cut out to be one, too. The timing was right, though, once the kids were back in school. *What do I have to lose?*

Grace began her morning preschool program once again. I used that time to work on USMC Life. I spent hours writing about life as a military spouse; I networked, built partnerships, taught myself about SEO (Search Engine Optimization), learned how to build a website, and more.



There was much to learn, but I was incredibly motivated. My three precious hours of daily quiet time flew by. Before I knew it, my phone alarm would ring, reminding me that it was time to pick up Grace from preschool. Some afternoons, she and I would run errands, swing by a park or meet up with some friends for a play date. We'd make it home just in time to meet Ryan walking home from school.

About the Author

Kristine Schellhaas's success as an entrepreneur and nationally renowned advocate for military families is the result of her unwavering passion, fearless commitment, and unique authenticity. Kristine has spent nearly two decades with her Marine, and has dedicated thousands of volunteer hours helping military families through five wartime deployments.

Born and raised in Boise, Idaho, Kristine currently resides at Camp Pendleton in Southern California with her husband, two children and dog. In her spare time Kristine enjoys reading, as well as celebrating life and red wine with friends.

To book Kristine for speaking, or to discover more about the author, please visit www.kristinespeaks.com