

**Lead by Example**

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NURS 6017: On the Homefront: Supporting Veteran and Military Families

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"Every father should remember that one day his son will follow his example, not his advice."—  
Charles F. Kettering.

This quote by Charles Kettering speaks to the idea that a father's actions speak louder than his words and the importance of leading by example. When my son, A1C Ethan Rossignol, was asked about his earliest memory of being brought up in a military family, without hesitation, he answered, "My dad is my earliest memory of the military; he is the image of the military for me."

Ethan was born at a military hospital in England at RAF Lakenheath nineteen years ago and has only known life as part of a military family. He now serves in the United States Air Force (USAF) as an Air Traffic Controller, monitoring the airspace where his father, MSgt Bradley Rossignol, functions as a C-5 Flight Engineer. This paper aims to provide my husband's unique perspectives and experiences of a successful military career and my son's perspective of growing up in a military family and as a newly enlisted military member. My husband recently celebrated his twenty-third year in the USAF on the day our oldest son graduated from Air Traffic Control Technical School. Both independently conducted phone interviews provide a continuum of lived-in military life experiences and perspectives on military family attributes and military culture consistent with the modules in our course.

Joining the USAF at seventeen, my husband embarked on a journey that would take him through his entire life. His earliest memories of the military are from his first day of boot camp at Lackland AFB, where Military Training Instructors ordered him to rise hours before the sun. He recalls the Air Force symbol on the water tower, reminding him of the new path and new way of life that started on that day under the beaming Texas sunrise. Throughout his career, he has

served in nearly every capacity: Active Duty, Traditional Reserve, full-time Reserve ART, full-time Reserve on orders, and as a civilian. He will be the first to tell you that joining the military was the best thing he ever did twice: joining Active Duty, leaving Active Duty, and re-joining as a traditional Reservist.

Although my husband did not grow up in a military family, the influence of the high school Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) helped him to understand the opportunities the military would provide far beyond the available opportunities in Mississippi, where he grew up. He acknowledges that military life is not for everyone and expressed feeling fortunate for our marriage, my commitment to veterans and service members, and the support we have provided to one another for twenty-one of his twenty-three years of service. Throughout his career and marriage, we have experienced countless moves, permanent change of station (PCS), temporary duty (TDY) assignments, and deployments. My husband believes one of the USAF's core values of "service before self" is the foundation for developing resilience and adaptability in military families like ours.

Becoming parents at a young age while stationed in England without family nearby was one of the first significant challenges we experienced as a military couple and family. We leaned heavily on our group of friends, who were around ten years older than us, to provide social support and enhance our overall well-being. According to the Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey (2019), belonging is a subjective sense of membership, influence, shared emotional connection, and integration and is essential to the overall well-being of military families. Active-duty families have an advantage in building a sense of community when living on or near a military base.

My husband believes when it comes to Active Duty, personal choice is merely an "illusion." In his opinion, serving in the Reserves offers more freedom of personal choices compared to Active Duty, but it comes at a cost. When my husband left Active duty, he did not initially plan to enlist as a Traditional Reservist. Consistent with the literature reviewed in our course, his experience transitioning from Active-Duty service to civilian life was complicated. He stated that the loss of job security, lack of available full-time employment as a Reservist, and the cost of healthcare insurance are part of difficulties of leaving Active-Duty service. Guard or Reserve families may live further from base and have more difficulty with finding local resources, support services, and military-culturally competent school systems.

Unfortunately, the experience of moving and going to a new school is unavoidable for most military families with school-aged children. Ethan described various levels of support within each school he attended. His experience is that the high school near the base where we are currently stationed provided the most support to military kids. Some of the available supports at school are military family life counselors, military affiliated group counseling and special days dedicated to military kids. According to Ethan, moving around so much and changing school was "not ideal," but he said that experience was the second hardest aspect of being in a military family.

As we have found with much of the literature in our course, deployments and reintegration can cause significant challenges for military families. Ethan described the most difficult aspect of growing up in a military family was not being around his dad as much as he would like. After asking what advice Ethan would offer kids coping with parents being deployed, he said the best way to cope is to talk to someone you trust about how you feel. Talking to the other parent, a trusted teacher, or another adult will help reaffirm that their deployed parent does

care about them, which is why they are doing what they must do serve our country provide for their family. Ethan's advice to military kids is to look up to their parent who sacrifices their personal freedom to protect our freedom by serving in the military.

It is important to consider the perspective of service members when thinking about deployment or military missions. When asked, my husband said, "life goes with or without me while I am deployed or on missions." An added stress for him is when he is going to "dangerous places to do dangerous work." The normal stress is when he is missing out on family time. He finds it challenging when he is not able to attend events, practices, birthdays, holidays, or dinners with family due to military commitments. He believes time is the most valuable asset, and one of the costs of being in the military is giving up time to meet the military mission. He said it is difficult not being home to help us, but having support and understanding at home helps relieve the stress.

Despite all the challenges military members and their families experience, my husband continues to affirm the value of the military in providing the foundation to help anyone succeed. He believes the discipline, compliance, and transformation that occurs after completing Basic Military Training provides the toolkit for a successful military career as intended. Although joining the military at a young age has inherent difficulties, the structure and benefits provide a sense of stability as one enters adulthood. Ethan agrees that the predictable paycheck on the first and fifteenth of every month just for showing up at work must have made our life as a military family much easier knowing we have a steady income.

One of the proudest days of my husband's twenty-three-year career was the day Ethan began serving alongside him in the world's greatest Air Force. Ethan expressed that he would not be in the military without the influence of his dad, but his decision was made after years of

watching his father lead our family while serving our country. He has grown up realizing the ways in which the military has shaped all our lives and understands the benefits and difficulties that accompany the decision to enlist into the military.

Sending Ethan off to the military was the hardest thing I've experienced as a mother; harder than every time I have ever sent my husband off on deployment or training. However, watching my husband salute the flag across the parade grounds where he once stood during the National Anthem while we were at Ethan's Basic Military Training graduation was by far the proudest moments of my life. Home has always been where the Air Force sends us, and we are so fortunate that Ethan's hard work and excellence in ATC school provided him the opportunity for base of preference to be sent back to Travis AFB to be stationed with us.



## References

Blue Star Families. (2019). *Military family lifestyle survey*. Accessed March 29, 2024 from <https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/BSF-2019-Survey-Comprehensive-Report-Digital-rev200305.pdf>