

Being an army child through and through, I was use to the constant abandonment from my father as he went on tour and the endless flood of tears from my heart broken mother. I remember one time he went away to Iraq for 6 months and that was hard, and not just for me.

The night before he left, my household was overwhelmed with tears and anxiety. It was not like my father was a rookie at the whole war thing though, so that eased the worry a bit. He had fought in the Falklands War, the first Gulf War and the second Gulf War! He came out of those with no injuries, just gold disks with the queen on them that were just bigger than a two pound coin, that my brother kept on his wall above his bed to remind him of his hero. I was young all those times before and had a recollection of a frail, old man with amnesia. Despite the brief encounter with reassurance, I still worried. I was fretting over the daunting question. 'Would he survive this time?'

The sense of loss that flooded my still immature brain was saddening. The whole concept at to why my father had to leave me for half a year to fight, rebuild and communicate with Iraq was beyond me, and the only way we could communicate was with these 'blueys' (A 4 size pieces of blue paper that you can send free to and from Iraq to keep in touch with your loved one). The morning he left was not actually that hard. I mean, I don't think it had sunk in yet. We said our goodbyes and gave our final Kisses, not to mention sobbed some more. Just at that moment it dawned on me. What if he forgets me. What if he gives up because he feels he has nothing to fight for.

I remember telling him to wait there at the bottom of the stairs as I fled to my room in a frantic searching spree. Like an owl at night plucking mice from the vast meadow floor, I rummage around looking for something. Any thing! I found a little red sharpener. I ran downstairs to meet my awaiting father and held out the minute red sharpener. I was expecting a let down like, "I'm not taking a sharpener with me", but no, I got a heartfelt look of understanding. He bent down to eye level, looked at me and spoke softly words that I held him too. "I'll treasure this until I come home". With this I knew, he wasn't going to leave me.

He waved goodbye and headed to camp with everything on. I mean everything! Two times my own body weight on his back and that was one of three bags.

After three weeks from him being away and us having a family of three, we resaved his first bluey. Remember how I said they were nothing. I was so wrong. I waited and waited. Longing for those treasured bits of blue paper more than archaeologist wanted to find gold.

The consideration my father put into his blueys was unprecedented. He sent my mother, bother and me one each to make us feel extra special. My mum was all about how much he loved her and thought about her all the time. My brothers was about he is the man of the house and to look after his girls that short of this. Mine was about what he got up to. Every time I read one of his letters I would picture his face in my head. I think that if I didn't picture his face I might forget what he looks like and that was a prospect I didn't to obtain. One time I replayed back including a blue smartie. You know, as you do, thinking it will still be a blue smartie when he gets it. No, the next letter I got from him told me how the smartie was lovely but he had to peel the

unrecognisable, alien, brown blob off his paper to eat it. Those were fun times but the good times were sourly waded down by the bad ones.

I used to watch the news hoping to see my dad as a hero and not in a sultrier draped box heading home to be buried under ground and forgotten by everyone but me. The tails on the 5 o'clock news of "five British soldiers killed in bombing raid" and "3 rifle men kidnapped by Iraqis" was terrifying. I became so paranoid that that one of them would be my own dad that my mum banned me from watching the news until he came home.

This anxiety reached a peak on the run up to Christmas. It dawned on me that we would have to have Christmas without him. I would beg and plead with him in the following 'blueys' I sent, but all were gently let down with phrases like 'I'm home in January for 2 weeks' or 'My R and R soon'. 'R and R'? The whole thing was confusing until he explained it to me as a "2 week break half way through my tour". Yeah, it would have to be between mine and my brother's birthday, that makes it all better now. But "seeing him is seeing him" my mother proclaimed.

That Christmas I got a present of a life time.

The tree was up and the Christmas decoration were all there, but the family spirit was gone. It was like with out 1, the others (being us) cant go on.

On the 22nd of December me, my mum and my half sleeping brother went to the airport to pick up my uncle from a business trip. Or...so we were told... Bizarrely enough not even the slightest thought entered my head that the person we were picking up was my dad.

So there I was standing in Edinburgh airport board out my tiny brain staring at the ceiling, wondering when we'll get home and what's for tea, When I picked out a face from the oncoming crowd. It made me skip a heart beat and take a double look for certainty. Bald. Tired. Wearing camouflage and the biggest grin on his face since my brother was born.

Looking back, I felt like some kind of military robot with target capabilities, scanning for my target then finally catching sight of him in my crosshairs. Suddenly my brother screamed "dad" so loud that ever couple within 50 meters turned, looked and smiled. I twisted round to look at my mum, still stunned with disbelief and she said "I thought you'd like it". I smiled back at her and began to run towards the man who's whole existence was playing in my head for the last 2 and a half months. I ran like a hair, running dodging, leaping with joy. Finally I was about to get a hug from my dad which, I felt, I waited an eternity to get. I glanced left and spotted my brother also dodging his way through the vast and what seemed total idle crowd toward him. I reached him first and he held out his arms to me, disregarding his bags for a hug from his two kids.

That moment was amazing. It was tranquil, still and so special. All the way home we talked and talked, our cheeks aching from smiling so much. The whole week with him was great. Well, the only bad thing was that it had to end. He explained the reason for coming home early. He had entered his name in a draw along with hundreds of other

hopeful soldiers to come home to their families over Christmas and New Year. When my dad won he decided that he would just take the one week over Christmas and somebody else could have the one week over New Year.

I was so happy that he was here for Christmas that I didn't mind how long or short I would see him for.

I was always told by my mum that we had angels looking out for us, but I never did see that. Now I believe it. They were looking out for me and my family through those difficult months.

When my dad came home for good, he was all tanned and peeling. That wasn't the only obvious difference though. He had put on weight. You'd think that being in a hot, dry climate would make you thinner. Not to mention all the exercise you have to do. Well, my dad spent most of the time sitting in the camp shop and looking after the Iraqis soldiers. The only other time he was out of there was when he went on patrol. They were amazing stories he told, about the bullets flying like fire works, and the tanks rumbling as if they were bears. Also he had a 'pet' over there as well. He called it Godzilla. It was a lizard longer than the size of his arm.

Other kids with parents in the army I knew were sad, lonely but proud as well, so I comforted them and they comforted me and we shared stories of what our dads got up to. It was good meeting new friends with parents in the same place and doing the same thing as mine.

If my dad ever had to go again, I would be half as worried, but ten times as proud.