

*The only thing we've found
that makes the emptiness bearable
is each other.*

—from the movie *Contact*

Chapter 4

Post-deployment...and Beyond

Reunion and Reintegration

The good news is...your spouse is coming home! The bad news is...your spouse is coming home! Getting back on track might not be as easy as it sounds.

This is the one area where I found that the most changes have occurred over the past two years since the writing of the first book. Reunion and reintegration has started to take center stage in the life of a deployment. And so has redeployment. At first, families would “stick it out” thinking that it’s only going to be this one time. That’s been a rude awakening. Going through two or three deployments is becoming more and more common. Even through the unknowns, the families I’ve met have stepped up to the challenge and continued to work harder and stronger to keep this from taking a permanent toll on their family. What do they say helps them the most? Being “proactive” instead of “reactive.” They know more now about what it’s going to be like, and they know where to go for information. They know they have to take charge of their own lives and create

the best environment they can for those around them. One woman specifically told me that things really did change when she stopped feeling sorry for herself and started making memories for her family!

Something else that happened since 2003 has been the overwhelming amount of information I've accumulated from myriad sources pertaining to this post-deployment phase. While it's great to know more so that I can help more, I approach this section feeling like I just have to share everything with you! Now we all know that's not only impossible, it's inappropriate. I had to keep telling myself that I'm not a psychologist, but I am a person who's had the privilege of talking with hundreds of people who have been going through this. My job is to share the things that these real families have done to make reunion easier, and that's what I will spend most of these pages doing. Just because I'm not a counselor doesn't mean that I can't bring you advice from one or two. I'll be doing that, too.

I found many good resources to help with challenges like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), reunion advice for families and communities, deployment cycle support, and transition for active duty service to civilian life. Rather than provide synopses of these programs, I've listed many of them in the "Resources and Support" section of the book. One booklet that I really did like is called *"Reintegration: Beyond Reunion – A guide for service members and their families."* Ask your support office if they have a copy for you. If not, you can order them by calling toll free 1-800-628-7733, or visiting www.channing-bete.com, and asking for item number PS92753.

Here's something fun and interesting to begin with. Often during the breakout sessions at family readiness conferences, we ask the spouses in attendance, "What is something you're concerned about with your spouse coming home?" The responses are always wonderful. Here is a countdown of the six most common responses:

6. Living together again and feeling nervous and uncertain about it.
5. Getting him/her into the routine again with the children's activities; i.e., sports, homework, school, and social events.
4. Getting used to becoming independent, and having your husband coming back and taking over.
3. Having another adult in the house.
2. Discipline—the children are not accustomed to Dad being "the boss" again.

and my all time favorite...

1. Coping with snoring!

Hopefully we'll find ideas or advice to help with as many of these concerns as we can. Although I don't know about the snoring.

It All Starts at the Airport

The schedule for returning home starts at the airport and the first ride home. It seems like a good place to start with the next four contributions.

195 When meeting your serviceperson's plane, have a really large poster board with their name on it so they can spot you...because the soldiers "all look alike in uniform!" Decorate the poster with your own flair.

196 Have the unit create a welcome home banner with ALL the soldiers' names on it and make another one with the names of the fallen soldiers. This is a recognition that often passes us by at the return home.

197 This is called "Every Step You Take, I'll Be Watching You." Find places to post signs along your loved-one's route from the airport (or base) to home. Some examples of signs to make and hang are "30 miles to Love"... "20 miles to home cooking" "10 miles to the remote"... "2 miles to hugs", etc. You'll think of some great ones.

198 When pulling in the driveway, he will see 100 yellow ribbons tied to the trees in front of the house, and perhaps he'll hear the yellow ribbon song, too!