

When your Daughter Goes to War

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In 2012, I was asked to serve as the chairman of the advisory board to the Association of Naval Services Officers (ANSO), a distinguished organization dedicated to the empowerment of Hispanics serving in the naval services. Our daughter Eileen had recently graduated from grad school and she was working with us at *LATINA Style*. As the manager of our Military Hero Initiatives, she attended with me the national ANSO conference that took place in San Diego, California. It was a great conference where Hispanic women and men in our sea services had gathered from all over the world to develop their leadership qualities. The topics discussed were far-ranging and quite different from what you experience at a civilian conference. Little did I know that that decision would change our lives forever.

While there, I could see that Eileen was really enjoying herself and from time to time I would find her absorbed in serious conversations with the likes of Rear Admiral William Rodriguez, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Juan Garcia, Marine Major General Angela Salinas and many Latina naval officers. I was glad she had the opportunity to meet so many dedicated and interesting people.

Soon after, I got a call from my wife Lupita telling me that Eileen was considering joining the Navy Reserve. I responded to her that she was having a great time at the conference and that by the time we get back to Dallas her enthusiasm would have cooled off. "I don't think so," she told me, "You know how Eileen is when she makes up her mind to do something."

"Ok," I said. "I'll talk to her".

So over dinner I began to probe and test her resolve. "Are you really serious?" I asked. She said yes and enumerated her reasons why. Most importantly she said, "everyone I've spoken to knows what they are doing, why they are doing it and they want to serve our country. And they are proud to wear the uniform." "Well let's wait until we talk to mom," I said, even though I already had her response. "Ok then," I said, still thinking we had a long flight back and we'll see what she says when we get home.



We returned on Sunday, and on Monday she was at the naval recruiting station. When she came back home, she gave us the news that she had enlisted in the U.S. Navy Reserve. And just like that Eileen begun her amazing journey as a Naval Officer. So she went to work every day in her civilian job and spent her weekends in training.

Online courses, difficult than any graduate school work, had to be completed during the week. So in addition to her job she was a full-time evening student. She was exhausted but determined, and as you can imagine she aced all her courses, passed all her tests both academic and military proficiencies and then she was sent to Germany to train with members of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Everything seemed very difficult, but she was up to the task and was learning so much while becoming a remarkable woman and a naval officer. We were not prepared by what came next. Eileen decided to go on active duty and told us that she would be deploying. When her deployment papers came in, we found out she would be stationed in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. And so our family's journey begins.

We are now a deployed family in one of the most dangerous places on earth. I am amazed at the woman Eileen is becoming. We do not have to look far for heroes, she's ours. I see in her all the incredible qualities of her mother and I could not be more proud. Thanksgiving and Christmas are right around the corner, and like many of our military men and women, she will not be home with us. But we feel her presence around us all the time, so please join us in our prayers for her and all our brave men and women and for a prompt and safe return.