

Army Strong
(written by a St. Joe student)

My heart was racing. Then, as they called his flight, it skipped a beat. My palms became sweaty and my flesh was white. It felt like ice in the middle of summer. "This is it," Dad said to my mom, two sisters, brother, and me. "Be a good gird," he whispered in my ear. Then he disappeared into the crowded airport. He wasn't leaving for the first time, or even the last, but the day he left for 18 months, July 5th, 2006, was the day that temporarily changed my life.

When he left in July, he went to New Orleans. There he was helping with Katrina. Two months later, he returned for ten days. Those were the shortest days of my life. Then, he flew over to Iraq.

Before school, the mornings were like kindergarteners on a playground. The four of us kids rushing around like a tornado, trying to get ready. Then we all piled into the mini-van and headed to school. Even though there was craziness in the morning, the nights were worse. My older sister finished her homework quickly and made us dinner. My mom got home around five and it seemed like sadness enveloped us like a blanket. Usually, mom went to her room after eating quickly and left us to ourselves. Even though I was only ten, I had to take care of myself at home. My older sisters were like our second moms. Then, when my older sister could drive, she took us where we needed to be. We all grew up a lot that year.

The news was never on. Well, not that Mom would let us see. I think she cried a lot; I know I did. The stupidest things would set me off. Those days were the worst. Somehow, we made it through. But, I'll never forget the first month or so, those were the hardest times of my life.

We talked to him a lot. On the phone and over Skype, but it wasn't the same. The holidays and birthdays were probably the worst. But, the best was when he came home. It was September, I think, and the ceremony was at Rupp Arena. The ceremony lasted forever. It was like waiting for rain in a six-month drought. But, in the end, it was worth it.

They say you don't know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have. When my dad leaves, my family and I have to be strong for him. We can't let the negative get to us and we have to look forward to his return. What he does is one of the most important things you can do for our country. So I have to suck it up and not only be strong, I have to be Army strong.