

## **Friends Are Our Chosen Families**

I was given a quote this week by my new friend Susan, "Friends are your chosen family". This is when I started to really think about the way that military families socialize differently.

It's true, friends are our chosen family. I can make a bet that most of your friends are your military friends. Mine are. I choose them, they choose me. Somehow in this odd and challenging lifestyle, we bond as if we were always together, like family.

I find it very funny when I look at the past ten years I've spent as an Army wife and think of the friendships I have made. They are untraditional, some unlikely, and most by chance or necessity of companionship. There is a certain "challenge" to meeting friends as a military spouse. First, you're faced with the new location every few years. You're also faced with the diversity of the people you meet and finding someone with which you can relate. The best part is though, that you have an instant "common thread" of which to rely on. You're all in the same boat. You're all fighting the same "battle" and there is a certain necessity of friendship that makes the bonds much easier to form than they are in civilian life. The worst feeling in the world to any military spouse is being far away from your family, only having your husband, and then he gets deployed. In my experiences the fear of that happening gives me the courage to venture out, put myself in uncomfortable surroundings so that I can eventually make this world we live in a comfortable, livable place.

We have our friends from ROTC (Reserved Officers' Training Corp) and college. Those friends knew Kevin and I when we were twenty-one and twenty-two. They were the "before you had kids" friends. The ones you went out with on Friday nights, the guys I cooked for because I was the only "girl" (bear with me as I paint you a picture of dorky single ROTC guys all *hooah* about Army life – needless to say I cooked A LOT of dinners), and the ones that attended our wedding and I am sure tried to talk Kevin out of taking the plunge. It's so funny to see all of them all grown up with families now. We all still email to keep in touch and of course spend moments reliving the past.

Then we have our friends from our very first duty station, Fort Hood, TX. I remember the day I met Erin and Clay. Clay and Kevin were "butter bars" (second lieutenants) in the same unit together. Erin and I neither one knew what we were getting into with this Army life but we decided we'd venture it together. That made a huge difference in our ability to "brave" the whole new world. They too, were "before you had kids" friends but since Kevin and I were the first ones to have a child, they were our cheerleading team when we entered parenthood. Now, they are one kid ahead of us and still going strong.

My best friend Cindy, I met at the Hinesville, GA Wal-Mart while standing in line to pick up pictures. She had her son in the cart, I had my daughter. We were both about ready to

pull our hair out. Turns out after the kids started eyeing one another we started talking. They played and we learned that she and her husband were from the Midwest as well. I'd complain that the Wal-Mart picture line was long, but it gave me one of my best friends. So how can I? To this day Cindy, her husband and her son visit us every weekend (well, when he's not deployed). We have formed a nice little family. We even ended up getting pregnant about six weeks apart with our second babies. It's a bond we know will last a lifetime.

Then there are those friends you wonder how you ever lived without and know that you couldn't make it if you hadn't found them. These kinds of friends you can count on when a storm starts to blow. They are the kind you know would be right beside you to celebrate an accomplishment or an occasion. They are also the ones that will love you for being you even if you aren't being that loveable. Those friends are my Tina and Luke.

Tina and Luke were our neighbors at Fort Stewart. Our relationship started with me going across the street to invite them to dinner only to get caught up in traffic coming back from Home Depot and missing my own dinner date. They showed up at our door and no one was home. It's a good thing they can be forgiving. Through two deployments, a move, and even meeting each other's families we remain the best of friends.

These are the people that I would consider my family. They are chosen. They came from cookies, a simple hello, a trip to Wal-Mart, an FRG meeting, or maybe even by chance, but they are family all the same.