

## **I am an Army spouse, hear me roar!**

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Empowerment is defined as having the right to make one's own choices and of having the ability to act on them. It can also be defined as a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs.

An Army spouse is a pretty amazing creature. He/she can do so many things and is most often **left (vs. forced)** to do them on his/her own. That concept has been referred to as a "single-married person." The life of a soldier's wife is anything but mundane. There is always an adventure around the bend. So, what is it that makes these creatures so amazing? Who inspires them to do what they do? What is empowerment by their definition? In a nutshell, what makes them say "I AM AN ARMY SPOUSE, HEAR ME ROAR"?

Sarah, an Army wife of six years says her most empowering experience happened when her family was stationed in Germany and her husband was deployed to Iraq. She decided to go to the States for a visit. She drove 3 1/2 hours from their post to Frankfurt to catch a military (MAC) flight. She had to wait over 12 hours with her 10 month old to find out if she'd even made the flight. She and her son climbed into the giant C-17 and strapped into the cargo seats. She describes it as daunting and thrilling all at once. They flew 12 hours to get to the Air Force Base which was 2 hours from her parent's house. Then, they did it all over again to get back to their home in Germany. She says she was so nervous being around so many strange Airmen and Soldiers. When she finally got home, she couldn't help but step back and marvel at what she was able to accomplish on her own.

For most, Sarah's experiences would be more than just empowering, it might be too much to undertake. Empowerment comes in many different forms. Army wife Heather's moment came in changing her car battery during her husband's deployment. "My vehicle needed a new battery. So I purchased a new one and replaced it. I'm feeling good. Then, due to the negligence of one of my sons, that battery was drained and I had to jump start my Suburban with my husband's truck--and I didn't get electrocuted or blow anything up!"

To some it can be as simple as figuring out something they would normally have had to ask for help with such as putting together a desk, mowing the lawn, or cleaning the garage. It doesn't have to be miraculous to everyone; it's all relative.

In these stories, empowerment seems to come naturally to the Army spouse. In speaking with spouses about what allows them to gain this strength and bravery to tackle such "assignments" you find that they are sometimes utilizing more than just their inner strength and determination.

New Army spouse Melissa says she relies on the encouragement, knowledge, and mentorship of those that have come before her. She seeks information from those just like her, only experienced. Many spouses turn to online venues such as message boards for support and encouragement. Mike, an Army husband for seven years says,

“When my wife is deployed I lean heavily on the Family Readiness Group (FRG). They are an excellent source of support and information.”

Mentorship, message boards, or the FRG, the general consensus is developing a network of people and resources on which you can rely is key. It is unrealistic for a spouse to automatically and immediately know the ins and outs of military life. Having the courage to research and find the resources and information is empowering in itself. Once armed with the information these spouses, no matter how seasoned they have become, have the ability and the information to gain mastery over their lifestyle.

All would agree, empowerment, to an Army spouse, is doing and succeeding at something outside of your comfort zone. That moment that you say “I AM AN ARMY SPOUSE, HEAR ME ROAR” is a moment you will always remember and celebrate. It is the moment you felt you made your own choice, acted on it, and gained mastery over your own affairs.