
EARNING THEIR WINGS



John and Mollie (in her new outfit) on their big day

Military Dress Rehearsal

MOLLIE MILLER, CLIVE, IOWA

My husband, John, an Army pilot, deployed four times in our 14 years of marriage. During the first three deployments, I stayed at the installation he deployed from. But for John's last tour, our two kids and I moved closer to family. I worried about fitting in, after not living in a civilian community for 13 years.

I needn't have worried. We found a top-notch pediatrician, a new neighborhood full of little girls my

daughter's age and plenty of friends for me. One day, toward the end of the deployment, my mom and I stopped in a dress shop so I could find something special for John's homecoming ceremony. When I told the sales associate what we were looking for, she ushered me into a fitting room with an armful of dresses.

Two more saleswomen joined in, presenting me with jewelry, shoes and stockings. I felt like a new bride. And why not? The nerves, the excitement, the

ceremony—welcoming the love of your life home from war is a bit like your wedding day all over again.

A welcoming community of civilians made John and me both feel like we had come home.

To Cap It Off

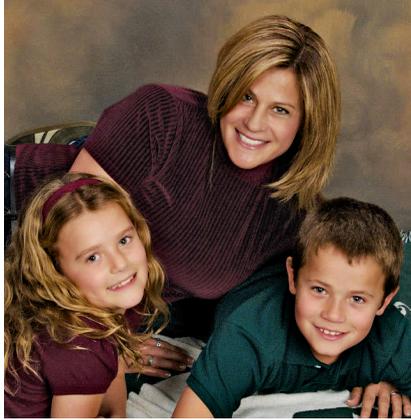
KELLY GALLAGHER, SCOTIA, NEW YORK

Three thousand miles was a long way, so my New York State family rarely saw my cousin Domino, who lives in California. When she

EARNING THEIR WINGS

came for a visit one summer with her kids, Desirae, 12, and Nate, 10, I hated to see them go. How would I ever get to know these West Coast relatives better?

For Christmas that year they sent us a package. According to the card, Domino, Desirae and Nate had gone for a walk in the Angeles National Forest. Nate spotted large acorn caps that—to him—looked just like Santa’s hat. The family collected a few and turned them into Christmas ornaments for the special people in their lives. Like us!



Cousin Domino and her West Coast duo

I know more about my relatives: They’re crafty collectors—and givers! I’ll have part of a West Coast oak tree hanging on my East Coast Christmas tree, thanks to a loving branch of my own family tree.

Violets for Catherine

JILL HATFIELD, KENOVA, WEST VIRGINIA

While I was still battling breast cancer, a friend gave me a collection of vintage handkerchiefs. “May every tear you cry be wiped away by an angel,” she said. Once in remission, I made some of those hankies into angels. When I heard about the Newtown tragedy, I thought the victims’ families might find them comforting too.

Although I didn’t know anyone involved

personally, I tried to match the initials on each hankie with teachers or students who had the same initials. For the family of Catherine Hubbard, I used a hankie with a sprinkling of pretty violets to match the six-year-old’s love of nature.



Jill’s vintage violets

I delivered the 26 angels to the municipal building in Newtown. Weeks later Catherine’s mother sent me a note. “The flowers remind me of Catherine’s beauty and spirit,” Jenny Hubbard wrote. The card was signed, “From the family of Catherine Violet.”