

**Life as a Military Brat can be wonderful**

I am a military brat. Being born into the family of an Air Force chaplain meant inheriting the obligation to move every two or three years. California, Germany, Idaho, South Dakota, Oklahoma, Japan — the military is always the reason I morph my life to fit into a new setting, but it always seems as easy and natural as squinting when the sun gets too bright. I used to ponder the outcome of my chameleonic behavior, but I now realize that it is my nomadic existence and unconventional experiences that sculpted my personality.

It is not often that a 17-year old girl can say she has seen a heated toilet seat lift up upon entering a bathroom stall because of its impeccable sensory capabilities, heard Mickey Mouse speak in Cantonese, Japanese, French, and English, or realize that a blue starfish from the Great Barrier Reef looks more astonishing in person than on the Discovery Channel. These things might not be common, but I'm lucky enough to have experienced them because of growing up in an environment that personifies a transient lifestyle.

Certain aspects included in such a life may not seem desirable. Each new school means the cliched yet still odious predicament of being the "new kid." Every time I walk into each unfamiliar classroom, a thick, sticky, nervous feeling slides down my throat and settles into my chest, while I glance at kids who shared graham crackers and apple juice in kindergarten. I have e-mail contacts for people on three different continents. However, this is not a major accomplishment of mine, but a reminder of all the times I have said goodbye. Recently, my grandparents died unexpectedly in a car accident. Within hours of their death, we were making arrangements for a thirty hour flight from our home in Japan so that we could make the funeral in North Dakota. I will be graduating in June, and I have to face the uncertainty of my own father attending the ceremony because he is currently deployed to Iraq, and may not return home in time to see me receive my diploma.

At times these things have been like lifting a 500-pound weight; excruciatingly painful, yet enabling me to become stronger. It is because of, not in spite of, these hurdles that my life is astounding. Each place I am forced to trek to causes me to gain a bit of interest about the world and I wish to explore somewhere else. Each situation that forces me outside of my comfort zone teaches me to be more resilient, more flexible, and much more accepting. Now, I am infatuated with foreign cultures and thrive on new experiences. But most of all, I try not to judge change before I fully understand it. I'm thankful for these attributes because they are what make it easier for me to transition and cope with life--to do things like finding my way around a college campus, or simply being appreciative of an electronic toilet seat.