

Positive lessons learned from my parent's deployment

A positive lesson I learned during my father's four deployments was responsibility. When I was four years old, my mom assigned me pet duty. We had a Golden Lab, a tabby cat and a gold fish. Pet duty consisted of feeding and brushing them daily. They all survived under my care except for the goldfish. My mother reassured me that taking care of them was very tricky and I was not to blame myself.

As I got older, my duties changed and consisted of taking care of my own room, laundry and bathroom. My mom never paid me for my chores in money, instead I received rewards. If I did not complete chores, privileges were revoked. When I entered seventh grade, I was in charge of all outdoor chores and lawn maintenance. These skills paid off and helped me get my first job with a farmer in my community.

There are two sides to responsibility, the physical side and the emotional side. My mother went through some scary times emotionally when my father was deployed, but I was always there with a smile and a big hug. I knew she needed to hear that my dad was going to be okay and would come home safe. I remember when my little sister was born while my dad was in Iraq. She was almost six months old before he ever got to hold her. I learned how to be emotionally responsible for my mom by making her little cards and telling her how much I loved her.

I never understood the impact of what our family had gone through during four deployments until the day my dad retired from the Navy. My father stood in front of a podium in the presence of his Captain, his sailors, our family members and friends as he began a speech about what his naval career had meant to him. Suddenly, he became quiet and tears began to roll down his cheeks. I had never seen my father cry. He had always been the strong Senior Chief of the Navy. He told everyone how proud and thankful he was to have a son like me that was responsible and could fill his shoes on the home front while he was away protecting its borders. Dad said I was the glue that kept our family together.

I did not realize that anyone was ever paying attention and certainly did not expect or want any recognition or praise. My parents have always told me that being the oldest child meant having to be the one to set great examples for my brother and sister because they would follow in my footsteps. My father told me that I had set one of the finest examples of responsibility for my siblings.