

MEMORIES FROM THE HEART

By Betty Schaefer McCormick

Another year will soon be upon us as I type this message. Two thousand eight will have many memories- some sad, some happy, financial stress, weddings, funerals, graduations, births, new jobs, all in all --another typical year.

I always have good memories no matter how tough the year has been. One year in particular will always be special in my heart. It is the year my husband and I were stationed at Ft. Riley, KS. He received his Captain's Bars and I became a very active officer's wife, volunteering at the USO, Officers' Wives Club, helping with various functions. Being an Officer's Wife can be a fulltime job, and I let it be that. I will always cherish the memories that I have from those fifteen months. I learned all about calling cards, serving cocktails, entertaining at a high level, military balls, and always being ready to support your husband in his career. Growing up in a small town like Gary, SD, this was a real eye opener, and I dearly enjoyed it.

That Christmas was very special to me. Jim was Company Commander and I enjoyed all the activities that went with this appointment. I baked cookies and made candy for his men. We purchased a Christmas tree and ornaments for them so they could have Christmas in their activity room. We did not take our vacation until mid January, so we could be there with them to help them celebrate.

Christmas Dinner was very special. Jim and I received a special invitation to eat in the mess hall. Jim had an outstanding crew in his mess hall. So many officers and wives and families came from the other Companies came to eat in his mess hall. The General and his wife joined us for that special dinner. We had a wonderful meal starting with the Shrimp Cocktail and finishing with the various desserts. Beautiful Christmas music played and the conversation was wonderful. We also spent our Thanksgiving Meal with the soldiers. I was so hoping our son, Daniel, was able to enjoy such a meal when he was recently deployed to Kuwait, but he tells me "no". His meal was served in the field and the holiday meal was gone so he got the usual packaged ration. I am glad I learned about this later and not before.

Also I cherish the memories of being with the soldiers as they returned from Viet Nam to Irwin Army Hospital. The Officers' Wives would help the soldiers with writing to their families, visiting with them and doing whatever we could to make their stay a bit more pleasant. Some of the injuries were very difficult for me. These soldiers were my age, 23 or younger, and I was not prepared. I never broke down but stayed strong, but they have always been in my thoughts and prayers. I hope they were all able to go back into society and lead wonderful lives. They certainly deserved it.

Jim and I were fortunate to have on base housing. A beautiful red brick, Colonial two story home. It was about a block from the Officers' Club and Golf Course. Our neighbors were all young Captains and Majors and we women formed a wonderful bond as our husbands were very busy with their careers. We women would watch the Army Band practice on the field as it was right in our backyard. It is truly amazing how I grew from a young girl in a small town in Gary, SD, to a mature woman in a matter of fifteen months. Our Battalion Commander's Wife was from the Deep South. The Colonel and his wife took us younger wives under their wing and showed us the correct way to conduct ourselves in the military. It was a wonderful experience. They were outstanding and I owe a great amount to them.

Our first child was born at Ft. Riley; my stay was seven days and cost seven dollars. A dollar a day for the food I ate. There were many of us delivering babies at the time, which is true during

war time; usually the birth rate goes up. There were about ten to twelve of us mothers in the ward. Some of the young Mothers did not have their husbands on base. They were in Viet Nam, but the Mothers were allowed to use the hospital facilities. We were a strong supportive group. Shortly after Bryan was born, two dozen red roses were delivered to my bedside. The other Mothers and Nurses were so impressed, "wow," they said "your husband must really love you. " I was shocked also. Jim is pretty quiet and reserved, small personal gifts, not big showy bouquets of flowers. However, I did receive red roses from him when he was stationed in Korea on my twenty first birthday. I opened the card, and to my amazement, the roses were from the enlisted men in Jim's Company. It is the largest bouquet of red roses I have ever received. Jim's tour ended the fall of 1970. We came back to South Dakota so he could pursue his graduate studies at South Dakota State University. I was once again a mother and housewife. We lived on a farm by White and in 1972 moved to Sioux Falls. Jim became an employee of the United States Postal Service.

I once again became a busy wife with government functions. I have met some outstanding people in Jim's career. His positions have taken us to various cities and wonderful co-workers and employees. I have hosted some very large parties, attended some very large parties and now I am busy with my own career. The Colonel's wife's advice from Ft. Riley has helped me in many situations.

Jim is retired as Postmaster. We enjoy our large family, traveling and have too many hobbies to mention. We have had some wonderful opportunities and a wonderful life. We are most grateful. So as I look back at some of my fondest memories, those fifteen months are some of the best. You now realize why the American Soldier is so special to me. I truly love and respect all our American men and women as they serve our country and I sincerely hope they had a Blessed Christmas and I wish them the safest and warmest New Year.