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SOMEONE YOU SHOULD KNOW

Student earns honor writing from her heart

by DAVID F. SHERMAN

Relocating every two years as part of a military family gave Sacred Heart Academy senior Jessica Lauer a subtle edge in a national essay contest.



Jessica Lauer

Jessica won honorable mention in the 11th-and-12th-grade category of the contest sponsored by the Armed Services YMCA. Children of servicemen and women from all branches of the military were asked to submit essays about why their military parent is their hero.

"My father, retired Major Arthur Lauer, a Desert Storm veteran and a brave Army aviator, is certainly a hero in my life. However, I would like to write this essay in commemoration of my mother, Regina, his dauntless Army wife," Jessica wrote. "Yes, my father was miles away in BDUs [battle dress uniforms] and combat boots, but my mother also had the equally complicated job of staying behind.

"Besides learning that she should never write with ink in her address book and that multiple sets of curtains are a must, since you never knew how many windows the new house has, my mom learned how to love a soldier who loved his country. I believe that being a military wife for 20 years is such an achievement, and she is one of the bravest, enduring and loyal of women."

Jessica's mother was taken by surprise when her daughter asked her to read her essay.

"I didn't know she was writing about me," Regina said. "I thought it was very sweet and was grateful that students had the opportunity to pay tribute to their military parents."

"And, of course, I cried."

The East Amherst teen found out about the essay contest while searching online for scholarships and related material. She thought the military theme was well-suited to her background and knew from the start how she would approach it.

"I'm not a fast writer; not even fast on a computer," she admitted. "But I pretty much wrote it in one sitting. My mom was the focus of another essay I wrote for college admissions, so I knew what I wanted to do."

Jessica will work this summer at the Chapel Woods community pool as a lifeguard and at the Transit Valley County Club. In the fall, she will attend the Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio.

Having just completed an internship at the All Creatures Animal Hospital in East Amherst, she is interested in a possible career as a veterinarian.

"I'm testing the waters on a career. I'm not completely sure," she said. "It will probably be in the fields of science or biology."

Jessica has an older brother, Conrad, an ROTC student at Niagara University, and a younger brother, Matthew, who attends St. Mary's Elementary School.

Her father is a graduate of Kenmore East High School and Canisius College. Her mother graduated from Amherst Central High School and Buffalo State College. Two weeks after they were married, Arthur was deployed to active duty. That was the genesis of the young woman's essay.

"My mother lived her whole life on Manning Road, never once stepped a foot out of New York State, until she married my father," Jessica wrote. "She was whisked away immediately after their wedding and traveled with him everywhere he was stationed. Boldly, she moved our family around the world 15 times; some moves she accomplished even without dad."

Home became Georgia, Alabama, Texas, Germany, Kentucky and New Jersey before the family returned to suburban Buffalo.

One of Jessica's most memorable experiences was the day her father came into her kindergarten class in Kentucky, showing off his flight gear and allowing one of her young classmates to don his aviator helmet. A newspaper clipping of the event remains one of her most prized childhood possessions.

That show-and-tell environment was a far cry from the airspace over Bosnia and the Middle East, where her father flew U.S. Army Apache helicopters with calm precision.

"I don't remember when my dad was in Operation Desert Storm because I was so little," she said. "I had just turned 2. I didn't really remember him when he came home. That was hard for him. I was more connected to my mom. It took a little while for me to warm up to him."

Based on her 380-word essay, Jessica now knows him very well.

If you have a suggestion for someone to feature in this column, send it to David F. Sherman, managing editor, Bee Group Newspapers, P.O. Box 150, Buffalo, NY 14231-0150, or e-mail: dsherman@beeneews.com

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