

ESSAY PAGE

Fly-ins were always the same. Sunday evening as sunset approached, my sisters and I would climb into the back of our blue Suburban, our mom in the driver's seat. It was just a regular SUV with military tags, an American flag sticker, and a small Blue Angel decal that shone on the windows as we drove away from our house on Pensacola Naval Air Station to the Blue Angel headquarters down the street.

Fellow families of the pilots gathered as arrival time approached. All the kids would play on the cooling metal bleachers, and our mothers talked, awaiting any new information. Sunglasses slowly came off as the sun went down and anxious eyes were revealed. Everyone's heads would soon be pointed to the sky and the atmosphere would become quiet. My eyes would dart around the purple sky looking for little specks approaching the runway. My ears were straining to hear the faintest sound of jet engines in the distance.

Whenever someone said "Look! Over there!" we would all turn quickly with heightened awareness. As the six Blue Jets would approach the runway, cheers would erupt from the same crowd of families awaiting dads and husbands, but a feeling of pride erupted within me because my dad wasn't just returning from another performance, he was returning from a mission.

The Blue Angels might be the "celebrities" of the Navy, but in the beginning that was not what it was all about. My dad kept to the tradition, trying to represent what the flight demonstration team was created for, instilling pride in Americans for their military and their country.

When my father would return home he didn't come bearing new gifts or anything special. He came home with nothing but a suitcase, his helmet, and kisses for each of us. I would take his suitcase, which was the size of my whole body, and maneuver my way up to his office wearing his sweaty-smelling helmet, visor down.

Upon entering my dad's office, you would notice that it was rather plain. On the shelves were the few material things my dad truly valued; along with our family pictures, there were cards and letters from many people. These would say things within them like "The Blue Angels are awesome, I want to be a pilot when I grow up," or, "Thanks for what you do. Proud to be an American." Objects like this confirmed for me that my dad really took his job to heart and did it to make a difference, not to be flashy.

My dad is no longer Commander of the Blue Angels, but even now, six years later, he is still my American hero and I am proud to be his daughter. My dad has taught me always to respect our country and defend its honor. Now whenever someone around me looks at a jet and just says in wonder, "That's so cool," I just smile a little to myself and say, "Yeah, it is."