

## A Whole New World

By Bennett Leigh

Kimberley Taylor-Beer said there was no way she was going to marry someone in the military—or have a long-distance relationship.

Famous last words.

After Kimberley returned from spending two years in Namibia, Africa with the Peace Corps, all she wanted was to stay in the Seattle area near her friends and family. Then she met Fred Taylor, an Air Force Academy graduate and the nephew of Howard Jeter, the U.S. Ambassador to Namibia whom Kimberley had met while in Africa.

Even though Fred, who lived in California, and Kimberley talked “for hours and hours” on the phone before meeting in person, Kimberley was dead-set on not getting involved with someone in the military.

“Growing up in Boulder, Colorado, I’d had zero exposure to the military,” she explains, “and I had this common misperception that people in the military are pro-war. There was a lot of ignorance on my part in those days.”

Six months after the two met, Fred was selected for the Air Force Intern Program in Washington, D.C., and Kimberley went to graduate school in Seattle for public policy. They talked more and saw



Kimberley Taylor-Beer (center), with her husband, Fred, daughter Sydney, and some of their extended family during a change-of-command ceremony last April. Photo courtesy Kimberley Taylor-Beer.

each other when they could. After graduation, they needed to live in the same town to decide if they would get married.

Fred’s next assignment was in Cheyenne, Wyo. “That was my first real exposure to the military,” says Kimberley. “Not to mention the culture shock of coming from a large metropolitan area to the least populated state in the country.”

But Kimberley soon found a niche for herself, working for the state legislature doing program audits. “I was very fortunate to find a job where I could actually use my degree,” she says. “And I really loved the people—they’re so down-to-earth.”

Kimberley soon realized her earlier perceptions on the military had been incorrect. “I now have the deepest respect and appreciation for the military and military families,” she says. “It was a real eye-opener—if you and your close friends are the ones who are going

to war and possibly dying, you’re certainly not going to be cavalier about going to war.”

“There’s such a unique bond in the military, and it is more ‘me’ than I ever realized,” she says. Her mother is from Japan, a very formal culture. Kimberley’s father was a college professor, and his work took the family to Japan for several years throughout her life, to travels around the world, and to Pennsylvania for high school. “I grew up in a very traditional home, more formal than most,” she adds. “The military reminds me of that formality, that tradition—only in a different way.”

Even after traveling the world with her family and the Peace Corps, Kimberley says that the military has opened up her world even more. “I’ve met people from all walks of life; from all over the country and the world through the military.”

Kimberley also recognized the sacrifices made by service members

and their families. “The level of independence, self-reliance and self-sacrifice required of military families is unreal,” she says. “It doesn’t matter where you want to live or what you want to do—you go where the military needs you.”

Kimberley recalls the adjustments she made when she first joined the ranks. “Those first few years were extremely hard,” she says. “Of course, I was dealing with being newly married and getting used to the very different cultures of Wyoming and the military. Once you’ve been in for a while, you develop a support network each place you move—I’ve made some very dear friends in the eight-and-a-half years I’ve been involved. I am very sympathetic to the challenges faced by other military families—especially those who are very young and those whose jobs call for frequent deployments.”

Helping military families has evolved into a passion for this Colorado Springs-based wife and mother. “I became involved with Blue Star Families last fall,” she explains. “I met so many accomplished women who wanted to make a difference for military families—it really struck me!”

“Here were these women, passionate about helping other military families; using their different skills—including lawyers, homemakers, PhD’s, and government policy makers—to help spread the word” on what military families want and need from the public and the lawmakers who set the policies.

Kimberley’s passion for Blue Star Families brought her together with Michelle Obama during the campaign last year, when she and her four-year-old daughter, Sydney, met with the now-First Lady. Mrs. Obama has taken up the torch for military families, with her first official visit to Fort Bragg and interviews in which she consistently focuses on helping military families

and letting the general public know the challenges they face—a stance Kimberley embraces.

“I think she really ‘gets’ it with military families,” she says. “I appreciate the personal sacrifices she herself has made—I know it’s on a different level than military spouses, but she understands that, depending on whom you marry, it can

completely change the course of your life. She’s very genuine, warm and down to earth. You can really tell she has studied the issues and understands them. I’m thrilled we have someone who is using their platform to talk about military families and what we can do for them.” ●

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