

Gardening Lessons

by Janine Boldrin

A few weeks ago, a sign appeared in my garden. It read: Yard of the Month. We also found a congratulatory note stuck in the door of our post housing. Honestly, I was perplexed by the entire situation.

My garden consisted of a marigold my son had grown in preschool as a present for Mothers' Day, a jalapeño pepper plant that my husband used for omelets, some spring plants that had survived the weather and the neighborhood kids, plus some new mums for the change of season. And, in the corner of the garden, was a giant sunflower that grew from the only seed that escaped the notice of the squirrels.

But my garden was nothing like the well-coordinated gardens that I saw in front of some of the other houses around post. I admired the more well-thought out yards. I imagined that the owners just naturally knew how to make them look beautiful and how to maintain the plants so they would remain lush. Compared to them, my yard looked eclectic and a bit haphazard.

I never imagined that anyone else would find my garden beautiful or worthy of notice.

This is not unlike how I felt about military life: a bit haphazard and little less natural at Army living than other spouses.

Our military family's story is pretty typical: my husband and I have been married for 10 years, we have three children, we've moved five times with the Army and my husband was deployed twice. But, for as much as our story sounds typical, I have always struggled to fit into the role I



Photo by Kingston Photography

thought I was supposed to fill as an Army wife.

And that meant I would never win Yard of the Month.

I am the Army wife who forgets what all of the acronyms mean and must ask my husband to repeat his new unit's numbers many times before I get them right. I still have to think for a bit before I can determine a soldier's rank and I never seem to be able to figure everything out on post before we move again.

Deep down, I have always wished I could be better at military life so winning Yard of the Month surprised me. Wasn't someone who was good at this Army wife thing supposed to win stuff like this?

I wasn't the only person who was surprised. My neighbors took great pleasure in ribbing me about the honor. Several friends cracked jokes since they knew about my general military life foibles. Other friends made it a point to tell me how good the garden looked; I think they could tell I was uncomfortable about the whole situation.

After I won, I felt the responsibility that came along with the sign. I realized would have to keep my flowers groomed and pick weeds. And then there was my big, beautiful sunflower. The bees had spent a lot of time working on the bright yellow flower and time had taken its toll. For as much as I tried, I could not make my garden into what I thought it was supposed to be.

Then I had to chop off the top of the sunflower because it was dying. My children gathered around me and watched as I removed the sunflower seeds. They talked about the peppers and the marigold. They admired the pumpkins and hay and talked to our new buddy, the scarecrow. And I realized that they saw my garden much differently than me.

They saw the love that went into that garden and saw the potential that it held. Yes, it was different from the prettier yards, but a second look would show how much my eclectic garden had to offer.

At the end of the month, the sign in my garden will go away. But the memories of the marigold, the pepper plant and my beautiful sunflower will remain. No, I'm not an expert gardener. Just like I will never be a perfect or even close to perfect military spouse. But I am doing my best and I have a lot of potential; along with a lot of smiles from my family who adore the garden and the military life we grow together. ●

Janine Boldrin is a military spouse living in West Point, New York, with her husband and children.

Do you have a Family Story to share? If so, email your story (between 650 and 750 words, please) to JenniferW@AmeriForce.net. If we publish it, you'll receive \$50, just like Janine! Please include your name, address and telephone number with your submission. We reserve the right to edit all submissions. All submissions become property of AmeriForce Publishing and may be republished and used for any purpose.