

Understanding military students

Among other things I hoped to achieve with this narrative is celebrating the resiliency and matter-of-fact bravery of military kids who are constantly uprooting and following their parents in service to our country, (and in the case of Berlin in 1960 to dangerous “outposts of freedom”). I hope the novel will also spawn a better understanding and empathy among “regular” kids when they meet military students, completely new to the school and the area.

Today, it’s estimated that our two million military kids *move six to nine times* during grades K-12. The overwhelming majority—more than 80 % attend public schools, trying to fit their way into more stationary civilian populations and their already well-established social circles, teams, and activities.

Growing up near the Pentagon, I knew and came to admire a good number of military kids. My 6th-7th grade BFF became an Air Force intelligence officer herself as an adult. I remember well, though, the tears—from me, her, and a sweet boy who’d fallen head-over-heels for her, as she got into that overloaded station wagon and drove away to her father’s next assignment, far away in Colorado.

Researching WALLS, I had the enormous, good fortune of interviewing several alumni “Berlin Brats,” as they call themselves, whose fathers were stationed in the divided city when the Wall went up. They were incredibly generous with their memories and time. Because of them, I was able to capture the gutsiness of American kids posted in the epicenter of the Cold War, living just a few blocks away from the communist sector held by the Soviet Russians, where a teenage prank or mistake could potentially spark an international incident or undo a parent’s military career—as well as what life was like for military families in general.

I’ve really appreciated the outpouring of military readers in their blog reviews, such as this one from <https://phoebesrandoms.wordpress.com/blog/8/2/21>:

Thank you all family members of military personnel. I know for one that the tasks we ask of you are not easy. Thank you for supporting us through war, peace, health, and sickness. Thank you for your prayers, cards, and messages of hope. We see you. We hear you. We appreciate you more than words can say. From one veteran to all of you: I thank you.

***L.M. Elliott** writes a beautiful salute to military family members in Walls. I know the synopsis emphasizes the relationship between Drew and Matthias, but Walls is about so much more. Elliott describes what it is like for military brats when their parents get reassigned every couple of years. The hardships can be unbearable at times. Imagine not being able to take your dog who is your best friend. Or having to extend your graduation because the new school doesn’t accept your points. Or having to recreate your whole life from sports, to friends, to routines. Elliott does a fantastic job connecting with these real issues that military families deal with today.*

For those of you who teach military kids, I know you feel acutely the responsibility of helping those special students feel integrated and welcomed both socially and academically, often dealing with their coming from curriculum that does not mesh with yours. They also deal with unique pressures and anxieties born of having active service parents.

In thanks for all you do, I pass along two resources:

A panel discussion among your peers:

<https://militarykidsconnect.health.mil/Caring-for-Our-Youth/Educators>

Military Child Education Coalition, offering resources to help educators help military kids:
<https://www.militarychild.org/about/who-we-serve>

<https://www.militarychild.org/cprleducators>

Dr. Jill Biden's Joining Forces Initiative to support military families: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/joiningforces/>