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WHAT
EVERY
Army
Wife
SHOULD
KNOW

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Chapter 2

But What Do You Do All Day?

A typical Army wife finds satisfaction and fulfillment in her home, which she hopes may be a cherished haven no matter what four walls are enclosing it. Centered there are her prime interests: her husband and her children. Their well-being and morale, their activities, are her greatest concern.

HOME IS WHERE YOU ARE, DEAR

When asked where her home was, a teen-age Army daughter answered, "Home is wherever *we* are." This echoed the remark made by her mother sixteen years earlier. As a bride traveling with a young husband concerned about her having no permanent home, she was able to say, "Home is wherever *you* are, dear." And so it is for all Army wives who know that home is not a certain house on a certain lot, but should be any place where people live together with a special concern for one another's happiness.

The external part of her home is the community in which the Army wife lives. She usually prefers living on a post or in an Army community for several possible reasons. These

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may be that, instead of being given a "trial period" before she is accepted, she is welcomed heartily on arrival at each new post; she can always find wonderful friends in an Army community, since the Army encourages people who have high personal ideals; and she finds that the Army community provides many easily available benefits for her health and welfare. But wherever she lives, an Army wife knows that she has an important job. Like wives of many professional men, government officials, and some business men, she stands beside her husband as part of a "team." This is not to share in any official part of his job, but to give solid support in the home and socially.

JOYS AND TRIBULATIONS

Most Army wives agree that their lives are exciting and interesting. The travel, the acquaintances, and the activities on a post add up to a way of living that most outgoing people enjoy. But no life is without certain challenges, and it may seem that you need special qualities to meet the demands of frequent change, your responsibilities to your home and community. The time when you are most in need of stamina may be if you are left in the States while your husband is overseas. The stamina of Army wives is often reflected in a light spirit and a sense of humor. They treat a problem as a creative challenge and laugh at small nuisances.

In social life and community activities, cooperation is better than competition. Your best contribution as an Army wife is not in giving the most extravagant parties, having the most beautiful clothes or furniture, or even being the busiest in community activities, but in being genuinely friendly to all, in being cheerfully willing to pitch in where help is needed the most (which is not necessarily where you will get the most recognition for your efforts), and in being self-effacing should misunderstandings occur.

Army husbands, while they laud the positive assets of their wives, believe that there are negative assets, too. These

include not complaining when he has to work late, not discussing official matters unless they are for general knowledge, and not getting involved in controversy. If help is needed concerning personal problems, it is better to consult the chaplain rather than neighbors. He is qualified to help and will keep the matter in confidence.

YOUR JOB

Few people will debate the fact that a wife's first duty is to her husband, children, and home. Spare time usually goes to chosen occupations at home and activities in the community. But Army communities are often so full of interesting activities, that it is a temptation to try too many, only to be forced to drop out of some of them later. If you assume a definite responsibility such as the chairmanship of a project, the youth activities leader, or an officer in a club, it is best to allot enough time to this commitment so that you can do it justice.

High Army officials pay Army wives the compliment of depending upon them to help maintain the morale of the Army communities and to contribute to their well-being. The wives bring this about through social gatherings and planned activities which further friendship and enjoyment as well as through direct donations and work for welfare. At least one Commanding General believes that the presence of ladies at formal parades and ceremonies causes soldiers to stand a little straighter and march a little better!

If you are new to Army life, you may feel a bit lost when you arrive at your first post. But you will find that the other wives want to help you get acquainted and give you a feeling of "belonging" as soon as possible. Accept their friendliness and do your part to get to know the other families in your group. Go to the social affairs whenever you can, including activities of the Noncommissioned Officers' Wives' Club or the Officers' Wives' Club. Later, if you are asked to help with the preparations for such an affair, be eager to cooperate no matter how inexperienced you may

feel. Usually an experienced member of the group organizes the task and shows you how you may help. This is an opportunity to learn and to develop friendships.

If you have small children, people realize that you cannot participate as much as otherwise in pursuits outside your home. But, although sometimes you must miss these opportunities because of lack of time, do not avoid them because of feeling inadequate. The fact is that most people are unsure of themselves when first beginning a new venture, but it is in doing it that they gain their confidence and competence for further undertakings. One wife who found herself suddenly plunged into a task for which she felt incompetent, remarked after its completion that now she would never be afraid to do anything!

As your husband advances in grade, your contribution is more and more important. Younger wives look to you as an example and sometimes for assistance.

If you are a senior enlisted man's wife you may be willing to take leadership in the NCO and Zebra Wives' Club as well as activities for chapel, youth, and welfare. You might want to organize a social group of the wives of the men who are in your husband's organization. Not being boxed in by tradition, you'll find broader opportunities for applying basic Army customs to your own environment and prescription for living.

MORALE BOOSTER

Perhaps you have a friend whose charm and talent you often hear praised. Why not let her know about it? A saleswoman makes an extra effort to help you with a problem of selection. Give her a special word of appreciation. A friend (or child of a friend) receives an award, promotion, or other honor. Congratulate him right away, even if it means telephoning or writing a note. At home the housework seems to be piling up to your ears, so the family pitches in and gets things closer to normal again. Tell them what a lucky person you are to have them as a family.

Usually the most difficult time to show that you care is when death has occurred in the family of a friend. Although you don't know whether your presence would help or accentuate your friend's grief, don't use this thought to lull yourself into doing nothing. You may be missing the opportunity to lend encouragement or give practical help. Send a note of condolence immediately. If you are a close friend, of course you will be there with a helping hand. The point is that a person who has been bereaved needs friendship more than ever, so don't hold back.

Of course your chief morale-maintaining job is in your home, and husbands, like the rest of us, sometimes need a lift to depressed spirits.

COORDINATOR EXTRAORDINARY ("My Mom Can Do Anything")

Few wives are more in need of adaptability than wives of men in the Armed Forces. While your life has all the multiplicity of that of any modern American wife, you may have still more challenges, such as having to know how to plan an international party or a five-course dinner, learning to represent the country with people of foreign nations, or having a particular sensitivity to children's needs when moving or when raising them in an under-developed country. At one time you may have to direct a servant-staffed household, and at another time be all the "servants" yourself. You must know the rules of etiquette and sometimes may need to learn those of a foreign country also. You might have to study a foreign language, public speaking, and how to handle teen-agers without father's help (when he's on that separated tour).

Since there is always so much to do, you may want to make the most of your time by evaluating it and planning for the best use of it. Yet you must be flexible enough to change the whole plan on a moment's notice. The best reason for organizing your time well is so that you have

some of it left for yourself in order to do the things that you enjoy and that lift your spirit.

Equipment needed for helping make the most of your time consists of a pencil and paper. Keep separate checklists of things that must be done to complete any project (such as having a party), items to be bought on your next trip to town, grocery items jotted down when you notice that the stock is getting low, and any other type of list that you may need as a reminder. One wife jots down all the things she wants to tell her husband when he comes home to lunch. The busier you are, the more you need these checklists. They help you avoid making two trips to the store when one would do, they suggest to you ways of saving time by doing several errands in one trip, and of course they prevent the problems that result from forgetting important duties. Best of all, they give you a sense of order and confidence that can be acquired by placing your responsibilities in perspective.

SOCIAL SECRETARY

An indispensable item in an Army household is the engagement calendar on which you record appointments, meetings, or social affairs. This should be near the telephone so that telephone engagements can be recorded at the time they are received.

For real efficiency, keep filed notes or a looseleaf notebook with recordings of social, household, and family information that is important to you. This may include a seemingly endless number of things, such as a 3x5 card file or large address book with information concerning your acquaintances—their addresses, birthdays, the names and birthdates of their children, and the like; a file or notebook of party ideas—themes, decorating, menus, and games; a file of your childrens' school records; files of clippings concerning interior decorating, house plans for that future "dream house," or any other information relating to your hobbies and interests.

GUARDIAN OF FAMILY HEALTH AND WELFARE

Military men frequently work long hours and forget that their efficiency decreases unless they get enough sleep, regular exercise, and the proper food. You can help in the attaining of all three for your husband, the last probably requiring a little subtlety. Learn all you can about nutrition (and calories, if overweight is a problem) and try to establish eating habits in your family that give maximum health.

You and your husband should have some time for a diversion that is completely different from everyday work. A hobby that satisfies the mind is especially good, such as dramatics, woodworking, or learning a foreign language. Time to be alone is also important for most people—to reflect, and to study.

If you have small children, and are "housebound" much of the time, you owe it to yourself and your family to find opportunities to break the routine and get out into wider horizons occasionally. This makes you a more interesting person and gives you a fresh perspective to take back to your family. Army posts usually have good nurseries at low cost (they are often subsidized by the Thrift Shop or other groups), or you might be able to arrange an exchange plan of baby-sitting with a friend.

In addition to separate diversions, you and your husband need recreation together. Many commanders believe that men are more efficient on their jobs if they get away from it each year on leave. This should be true for you too. Although mothers must usually take their work with them on a vacation (children, laundry problems, and the like), there is at least a change in the routine and an alleviating of pressure that is conducive to relaxation. Changes in the routine on a smaller scale are profitable too, from a week-end camping at the lake to an afternoon of kite flying with the children.

YOUR RESOURCES

Like many busy wives of today, you may sometimes find

your normal enthusiasm and confidence giving way to depression and fatigue. This happens to most people occasionally, and the best course to take is to establish defenses against it. When such a feeling occurs, it is usually a signal to slow down and restore the body as well as the spirit. One mother of small children says, "When I feel myself growing panicky at the untidy condition of the house or the thought of all that I have to do, I sit down and rest instead of plunging into my work. Later I begin to do only the most important jobs, one at a time, without being concerned whether the others get done or not. Somehow everything is accomplished when it should be. And I may also find that some of the things I thought I had to do are not necessary after all."

Two factors seem to be important. One is to let yourself go, at least momentarily, and admit that you are unable to run your life efficiently right now. The other is to take hold of the resource that puts things into the proper perspective. This resource—which is your religious faith—gradually renews physical energy and spiritual insight. To some, this faith comes easily; for others, it must be found through reflection, study, and prayer. And this can only be done by taking time for it.

This is the establishing of your defenses; difficult as it may seem, find time each day to spend in this search—through spiritual reading and prayer—for the source of guidance and stamina. The time will not be difficult to find after all, and it is not wasted for it is made up many times in a new understanding and ability to take care of what is needed.

TALENT FOR LIVING

The decor of your home should have an individuality and charm that is all your own. As a family who moves often, of course it is wise to bear in mind certain factors when selecting furnishings. One of these is weight, because of the limit on the number of pounds that you can ship at

government expense when you move. Other factors are durability, to hold up in all those moves, and versatility, so that some of your pieces may adapt themselves to different uses in various homes. An example of the last is a desk or chest that may be used just as well in a bedroom, hall, or living room. Sectional furniture is the most versatile of all. Your first consideration, however, when furnishing your home, is to buy, within the limits of your budget, what is in good taste and attractive to you.

The part of a wife in the advancement of her husband's career has been exaggerated in some cases, and has caused a few wives to become almost immobilized for fear of doing or saying "the wrong thing." Saying or doing the wrong thing is a common human trait. Just remember that your husband's promotions are mainly his accomplishment, and your influence on them is concerned with keeping up his morale. This is not to say that a wife shouldn't make a good general impression on her associates.

It is possible for a wife to make a poor impression and influence her husband's career negatively if she displays an attitude of continual dissatisfaction, if she promotes harmful gossip, becomes involved in open hostility with others, refuses to cooperate in any community enterprise, or in other ways behaves in ways contrary to good relationships among people. Few commanding officers desire to have a troublemaker in the community in which they are striving for good will and high morale.

An officer may be assigned to certain duties in which a wife's ability *must* be taken into account. These are duties involving diplomatic relationships such as that with a Military Mission, MAAG, or as military attaché. Here a wife has a definite responsibility (see chapter 7). The wife of an aide de camp or of any other officer whose job involves good public relations must be considered with regard to her characteristics of tact, good nature, and willingness to cooperate.

In our modern world, wives are urged to "grow" with their

husbands and, since a military man spends most of his career gaining more knowledge and developing greater leadership abilities, it is a challenge for his wife to keep pace with him. Yet, as you embrace your life in the Army with enthusiasm, you may find that the circumstances of meeting interesting people, extending hospitality to many, living in a variety of ways in many different places, and participating in the community activities available everywhere, will automatically constitute at least part of this growth. Further growth comes from taking an active interest in books, art, music, politics, and world affairs.

FOR COMMANDERS' WIVES ONLY

The responsibilities of a commanding officer's wife are self-imposed and vary according to her individuality and to the situation. She acts as unofficial leader of the wives of members of her husband's command, and whatever she does to increase the well-being and friendly atmosphere of the individuals and groups with whom she is associated is a significant contribution.

If your husband commands a unit such as a company or if he is chief of a small staff section, you may plan ways in which the families can get together informally and inexpensively (potluck suppers are good) in order to become better acquainted. Since the group is small you should encourage the close relationship that includes celebrating together on joyous occasions (a baby is on the way) or helping each other out in difficulty. If your husband's command is part of a larger unit, you may help your husband's commanding officer's wife by informing her of any problems or special occurrences, and by participating in the activities of the larger unit.

Because an Army community is a transient community, and because many people who arrive there are in a strange place with no acquaintances, the wives of senior officers usually take it upon themselves to see that newcomers are received in a friendly way, that the members of the com-

munity may associate in an atmosphere of fellowship, and that anyone who needs assistance will receive it.

If you are a commanding officer's wife, these three things are the essence of your concern within the group of officers' families of your husband's command. The more families that are included within your husband's unit, the more executive ability you need in order to carry this out, as you must call upon others in the group to assist you.

If you are new to the group yourself, you may become familiar with it by consulting several wives of the next senior officers in the unit. It helps to become acquainted with all the other wives as soon as possible in order to include them in plans for the group according to their desires and interests. To welcome newcomers, the responsibility may be divided among the existing subdivisions of the group. For example, within a battalion, the wives of officers in each company may welcome each newly-arrived wife in their group. This is done by calling on her informally, offering to give information and assistance or both, and accompanying her to her first ladies' social affairs. Sometimes one welcoming committee assumes this function for the whole group. In addition, you and your husband may wish to meet each newcomer through their formal social call at your home. If there are many newcomers, it may be preferable for them to call in groups. The latter may be more informal and it gives the newcomers an opportunity to meet one another as well as to meet you. A yearly "Open House" or "At Home" is considered the equivalent of calls made and returned although it is not a good way to become acquainted with individuals.

Usually the wives in a group meet for a coffee, brunch, or luncheon once or twice a month. There the senior officer's wife usually presides, introducing newcomers, saying goodbye to those departing, and informally conducting any business that may be necessary. It is best to assign the responsibility for the preparations for these social functions in a way that all members have a share in it at different times.

You may also provide for other activities such as a bridge group or special trips and projects, but these should be entirely according to the desires and needs of the group. While you are not usually responsible for the evening parties of the officers and their wives, your attendance should convey a hostess-like warmth.

Of course you will take pleasure in sharing in the joy of happy events that occur to members of the group, but there could be unhappy occurrences that call for your assistance, advice, or both. It is a good idea to know where one should go to get official help in an Army community (see chapter 6).

The objective of your leadership as a senior officer's wife, which is to promote good relationships and morale, thrives best if your approach is in friendship rather than authority. You must, of course, seek support in your efforts from the other members of the group, but your position only allows you to request this, not to demand it. Advice and instruction is best given only when it is asked for, and then with tact and understanding. If certain courses of guidance seem to be needed, this is best done by example. Your position calls for a sense of graciousness, and to be gracious is to be marked by kindness and courtesy. This, of course, would be true in any wives organization as well as in the social groups of units.

Since individual units at an Army station sometimes are given an obligation as a group to the Red Cross, the Thrift Shop, hospital, chapel, or other activity, the senior officer's wife must request volunteers for these projects. She is expected to attend all official functions that include ladies and to support the organizations that contribute to the betterment of the community.

The wife of the post commander is glad to encourage participation by wives of enlisted men as well as officers' wives in activities which benefit the post, such as those of the Red Cross and youth work.