

My Son the Marine

by Christine Hunt, February 2007

My 19-year-old is living his dream life, he says. "Free food, free rent, and you get to spend the day blowing stuff up." Don't get me wrong: he definitely knows its not all fun and games—it *is* the Marine Corps, and there are plenty of ne'er-do-wells who even make it through USMC boot camp [though only the Lord knows how!].

But my son's always been pretty good at focusing on the good and letting the rest go. "Hope for the best, expect the worst, and you'll never be disappointed," has been his adopted philosophy for the last few years. And he truly sees the Service as his "service": service to God, service to country, service due for the benefits he and our family enjoy because we were born citizens of the U.S.A.

The end of January he graduated from the School of Infantry, Weapons Platoon, a TOW gunner—"52s" they call them, a reference to the Occupational Specialty number 0352 which distinguishes them from riflemen or mortar men or another in the smorgasbord of infantry positions within the Corps.

Many adults, when they learn that my son is in the Corps, quickly adopt an expression of mingled sorrow and confusion, as though they can instantly foretell the dire consequences he faces.

In my experience, these adults have had no military experience—they've only lived vicariously through the eyes of another or have absorbed the bunk spouted by most of today's American media and can only picture that abounding horrors and horrific boredom await him in some desolate, primitive land.

That, to me, is an interesting response. I know what he faces is hard, and please hear me when I say that I appreciate their care and concern for him and for us—but I wish they could see, no, could experience the reactions I receive from those I've met who have been in the military during the 1980s and '90s and even earlier.

Those adults I know who served seem to almost brim with pride. Invariably they stand straighter and their eyes brighten. You can hear excitement when they say, "Really? Where's he stationed?"—even the retiree who helped carry my groceries to the car.

I pray that when my son is discharged, he looks back on his service time with pride, knows he performed well for a noble exercise in the preservation of freedoms known nowhere else in the world. And if his time in the service ends in his death, I and the rest of his family will know deep sorrow but not regret, true heartache but not woe. Our grief will be real, but it will not be lasting for we will see him again. And that's a not an empty hope, an "Well, if that makes them feel better"—type wishful thinking.

Picture it this way: Bill Gates is the loving uncle you've known all your life and he calls you one day to tell you that he set up a bank account in your name that would always have a \$10,000,000 balance for use at your discretion. Would you tell him "Thank you" by being hourly concerned about whether or not you were going to be able to buy tomorrow's groceries? Or would you pay off the house, buy a new car, and throw a huge dinner party in his honor?

Why can we believe the promises of a man, even a wealthy and powerful one, whose life and fortunes are tenuous at best yet not believe the solid promises of the Almighty Creator of all that is?