

The Journey "Home" for Military Children

Donna Musil

"Oh, that kid is just an ornery brat." One can guess that most of our readers have heard and perhaps said this or a reasonable facsimile more times than memory serves.

"BRAT" is an official military acronym. The full text is "British Regimental Attached Traveler."

While this acronym has become a sort of time-honored reference to military children, countless people have no idea what really goes along with the name — unless of course they have been one. BRATS move an average of nine to twelve times. They go from military base to base, living on post or off, in the United States and around the world — growing up in the paradox of belonging everywhere and nowhere.

One estimate is that over 15 million people in the United States grew up with at least one career military parent. Another 4.5 million grew up overseas in families outside the Armed Services.

Right now, about 1.5 million children have at least one active duty military parent. Here is an entire global subculture. Passports say "United States of America." But experientially, they are citizens of world.

The journey to adulthood "is a highoctane mixture of incredible excitement and enormous pain." Another way to describe the entire group, military as well as non-military is "TCK," either "Third Culture Kids" or "Trans-culture Kids." They have their birth culture plus one or more other cultures in which they lived.

BRATS: Our Journey Home is a phenomenal documentary about growing up as a child with military parents. Donna





Lazy days at Fort Bragg, NC

Musil, the writer-director, gives us the very first non-fiction film that deals with this type of childhood and its later effects on adulthood. Kris Kristofferson, himself an Air Force BRAT and former Army helicopter pilot, is the narrator. The video includes powerful interviews along with archival footage, home movies, and private photographs from post-war Japan, Germany, and Vietnam.

Donna worked on the film for seven years. She has a deeply vested interest. Her father was an Army Judge Advocate General. Since 1960, she has resided in five foreign nations and eight American states. In all of this, she spent the ninth grade at Taegu American High School in South Korea. Years later in 1997, Donna attended an impromptu reunion with friends from Taegu. That event was a profound turning point in her life and career. Donna, trained as a journalist and attorney, set upon five

years of independent research on life as a military child. She founded "Brats Without Borders," a 501(c)(3) non-profit in 1999.

Of the film, Donna says:

Making this cultural connection gave me a sense of belonging I had never experienced. This was empowering to a "little girl" who had moved twelve times on three continents, attended three high schools, and lost her father, an Army officer, by the time she was sixteen years old.

Today, I have a film about a group of people whose only "hometowns" are each other. We have more in common with the military children and "global nomads" of other countries than with our fellow citizens. And that is my vision — that this film might be a spark in a global fire of self-awareness and belonging — that from the ashes of war might rise a nation of children committed to peace.

"Operation Military Brat" is an educational outreach program from "Brats Without Borders" that is currently sponsoring free screening of the film. Go to www.operationmilitarybrat.org and click the "screenings" button on the upper left side of the page for dates and locations.

