



USING ART TO DEAL WITH LIFE

My sweet Navy brat found comfort in her own creativity during Dad's deployments.

by Nicole Trull, Navy spouse

I've learned many lessons in my 13 years as a Navy wife and a mother. But none have made a bigger impact than the one taught to me by my 10-year-old daughter, Dominique.

I'm sure I'm not alone when I tell you that regardless of my contribution to her existence, my girl is "daddy's little princess." So I worried over how she'd handle the news the first time her father deployed. It didn't go over too well with me, a 30-something-year-old adult. How would my then 3- and 4-year-old kids react?

Dominique, the older of the two, was stronger than I thought. She may not have known why he was leaving or how long six months would last, but she knew how to express her feelings. At night she'd cry herself to sleep. By morning, she was full of emotion and ideas. At 4, her writing was limited. Her creativity was not. She picked up a crayon and began to draw.

With each deployment, her vocabulary and imagination grew. I recall a drawing of my husband and I at his 70s-themed going-away party. She left no detail out, from his brown polyester suit and afro wig to my red jumpsuit and matching hair bow. Capturing everything about this happy but sad time in our family helped heal her little soul.

Six years have passed and her father, a Navy chief and Search and Rescue Hospital corpsman, has de-

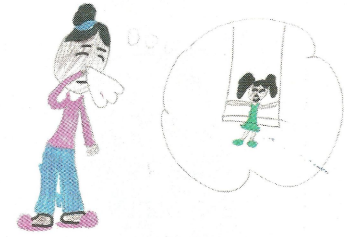
ployed four more times: three Individual Augmentee deployments in Kuwait and Iraq, and two sea deployments aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln. Each time, she took solace not only in drawing and writing letters to her dad, but in writing stories, songs and poems. In the dentist's office, at the breakfast table, anywhere the mood struck.

One day last fall, she wrote down a crazy dream she'd had that read like something by Dr. Seuss. I thought she borrowed the ideas from a book, but it was an original. And she wanted to publish it, sharing her poetry with the world — or at least with family and friends and her daddy — by Christmas.

She paid for self-publishing with the money she was saving to buy Christmas gifts and with a little help from me. She took the lead in selecting which poems to include and designing the front cover. Her hard work came to fruition in a 14-page book titled, "Dominique's Book of Poems."

This process not only helped soothe her soul, but it soothed mine as well. She reintroduced me to a passion that I thought I had to put on hold to raise her and her brother while their dad was away. Back-to-back deployments have really taken a toll on us all. But Dominique has taught me to draw from my strengths to get through the tough times and that there is healing in helping others. ♥

EXCERPTS FROM DOMINIQUE'S BOOK OF POEMS



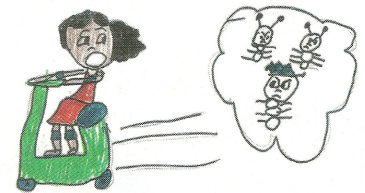
My Cold

I'm sick. I have a cold. I sneeze and there's a cold breeze. There's a bunch of fleas that make me sneeze and I hate that cold breeze. My voice sounds funny and my nose and out comes snot. It looks gross and I think roses don't help. I lay in bed, then my mother said, your soup is ready. I took a sip and it was hot, hot, hot. It was so hot that it burned the top of my lip. One day later, my cold went away and today I can go play.



Ice Cream

I scream. You Scream. We all love ice cream. I dream of screaming if you keep on believing. I saw lasers beaming. But after that, I'm done with ice cream.



Ants

I hate ants. They crawl in my pants and make me do a funny dance. It's like the ants control my body and it's their favorite hobby. I wonder where they go when the queen lets them go, and they know just where to be. They harm me every second I sit on the ground, and when they bite me it really, really hurts. What do I do to make a truce sign. Or how about making some juice. Now you see why I hate ants and cry because they crawl in my pants.