

THE INK

# *Between Us*

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## Introduction

Some stories start way before we recognize our purpose in them. Mine started in a military household, where distance was a very familiar part of my life and love happened across time zones. I grew up watching my parents work through long distance with letters, books, and the small things that kept them connected even when they were miles apart. I understood their dedication to each other as a kid, but now, looking at the beginning of my own story with someone preparing to join the Army, do I fully appreciate the strength that it took.

This paper focuses on the deployment letters that were written by military spouses and the weight that those letters carry. Their words show what it means to love someone while being forced to separate. These letters also helped me understand my own past and get ready for the life I am about to start.

This is my letter to these women. Recognizing their honesty, resilience, and the ways their stories constantly guide people like me. Their words remind us that even in the hardest of times, connection can be held together by something as simple and as meaningful as the *ink* on a piece of paper.

*To the women who wrote to their husbands during deployment,*

When I read your letters, I took my time because it felt like you were trusting me with something very personal. Every sentence showed how much love and strength you carried during that time. Every line felt like a little piece into your lives and the feelings you don't always show other people. I could feel your hope, your loyalty, and how your love stayed strong even when you were separated by so many miles.

Maybe it's because I lived inside this life too. My father served in the Air Force for 24 years, and I learned early what distance does to a family and it's not just the miles, but the waiting, the missing, the learning how to breathe during someone's absence. I watched my parents focus on the kind of love that doesn't just go away when the physical touch disappears. They would read the same book while they were apart. My dad in dangerous territory, my mom at home by the lamp after putting me to sleep. They would read their books and then when they were finally able to talk to each other they would talk about the book and share their opinions on it.

I never fully understood that until now. Reading the same words allowed them to feel like they were both connected, even if they were thousands of miles apart. It kept their love alive when they would run out of things to say. Now, after reading your letters, I see that they were doing the same thing you did, using words to create a connection that the military would try to stretch thin.

As my boyfriend gets ready to join the Army, I realize I am stepping into the same story you once lived. I am walking toward a future where airports will turn into memories, where goodbyes will be the hardest pill to swallow, and where I'll have to find strength in myself that I haven't yet met. Your letters remind me that I am not alone in that future and that women before me have loved so bravely and honestly, and that their words can guide us people who will have to love during that far distance.

Your letters gave imagery that was beautiful even though it was so simple. One of you wrote about moving your husband's boots to the corner of the room, knowing they would sit untouched until he came home again. Another wrote about lying beside him before deployment, listening to his breathing and trying to memorize the safety of the moment. Another said they were imagining the way he would look walking through the door after months away.

You may not know this, but those images do more than just paint a picture but, they keep that love alive. They remind the men overseas of the homes they get to return to. They remind you of the pieces of them that linger in the smallest little corners of your life.

Growing up, I saw those same small gestures in my family too. My mom saved shirts that still smelled like my dad. She would play our favorite daddy and daughter songs in the car. And the book, *always the book*, resting on the nightstand, like a reminder that they were still sharing a life together, even from far away. Your letters

are acts of love and dedication. They are the quiet ways we keep loving someone who isn't physically there.

There is a quote from Winnie the Pooh that has always stuck with me: "How lucky *I am* to have something that makes saying goodbye *so hard*."

You showed me this quote is something that is much deeper. You showed me that missing someone so deeply is just another way of showing how much you love them, and that the hurt only exists because the relationship is so real.

It is okay to love someone so passionately that the distance scares you.

It is okay to cry in the shower or the car or the grocery store aisle when the world feels too heavy.

It is okay to feel strong in one moment and extremely weak the next.

Love during deployment is not perfect, it is a crazy rollercoaster with so many ups and downs.

If we could sit together, I would tell you that your words do so much more than just travel the distance between you. They keep your husbands strong. They feel grounded when everything else around them is chaotic and uncertain. Your letters become a home made from the ink on the paper. A quiet place they can keep in their pocket.

And for myself, staring at this huge mountain to climb over, preparing to love someone from far away, I will take your stories with me. You have shown me that love does not die under pressure. Instead, it becomes stronger and wiser. You have shown me that distance is not breaking the connection, but it is strengthening the string that ties two people together.

One day soon, *I will write my own letters.*

I will read the same book, just like my parents did.

I will love him from a distance.

And when I do, I will remember you. Your strength, your courage, your vulnerability.

So, to those amazing and strong women who wrote to their husbands during deployment,

Do not force yourself to be brave every second.

Do not hide your pain.

Do not confuse vulnerability with weakness.

The strength I saw in your letters was not from pretending everything was fine, it was from telling the truth in a vulnerable and beautiful way.

Remember that love is not measured in miles.

It is measured in the way you continue to fight for each other even when the world creates distance.

And when the day comes that the door opens

and they step back into the home where you kept their memory safe and sound,

you will breathe again in a way that feels brand new.

And you will be able to say, with every woman who has ever loved like this,

How lucky I am.

How lucky I still am.

But until we're together again, we'll stay connected through *the ink between us*.

With Love,

Ally

# The *Ink* Between Us



Growing up in a military family, I learned early that love has to stretch across distance. With a father who served twenty-four years in the Air Force, I watched my parents stay connected through letters, books, and the little things that made the weight of separation a little bit easier.

Now, as I get ready to work through my own long-distance relationship with a partner entering the Army, I look back at the memories in my childhood. This book reflects on the strength found in military spouses' deployment letters and the honesty, fear, and hope put into every word.

I explore through these letters what it means to love through the uncertainty of the military and to trust in the relationship that distance can't break. It is a story of resilience, dedication, and the ink that keeps people close, even when miles stand in the way.

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