

Greenwich Time

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Everyone has a way to support the troops

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Months back, I found myself standing in front of display of men's underwear trying to figure out which type to buy for a Man-Who-Is-Not-My-Husband. In fact, a Man-Whom-I've-Never-Even-Met. My mission was complicated because, a) I had no idea what size to get, and b) male underwear technology has moved on since I last went shopping for it. (Can anyone explain "boxer-briefs"?)

Why was I purchasing unmentionables for a Man-Whom-I've-Never-Met-Who-Is-Not-My-Husband-In-Fact-Is-Someone-Else's? Believe it or not I was doing my patriotic duty.

Prior to "Mission Underwear," I'd heard about an organization called AdoptaPlatoon, which links supportive citizens with deployed military personnel. For security reasons, organizations like AdoptaPlatoon screen applicants and make telephone contact before giving out any information about soldiers.

Readers of this column are aware I disagreed with the way this government took us into Iraq, but contrary to the belief of many (like the man who told me "all Democrats are communists and hate America"), this doesn't preclude real support and concern for the soldiers who are serving there. I wanted to show that support in a tangible way, so the kids and I applied to adopt a soldier.

In the application letter I was upfront about my feelings about the war, but expressed my family's genuine desire to help in whatever way we could.

I didn't hear anything for three weeks, and in Ashcroft-induced paranoia figured that they didn't want wackos like me infecting the troops with subversive ideas. This couldn't have been farther from the truth.

It turns out that AdoptaPlatoon is a grass-roots soldier-support effort, run entirely by volunteer "moms." It provides morale-lifting mail and care packages to more than 10,000 service members in overseas deployments. My application was part of a backlog these dedicated moms had to work their way through.

Eventually I received an e-mail with the name and APO address for "our" soldier, whose name I cannot divulge but will call "Jay," along with a long list of suggestions of what to send in care packages. This included toiletries, powdered drink mixes, snack foods and personal items like \$ underwear. That is how I ended up in the department store, blushing so hard Jay could probably feel the heat in Baghdad.

The kids and I wrote letters introducing ourselves, and sent photos of each of us -- including the dog. I sent some of my non-political columns, recent Time magazines and a Dave Barry book.

For five weeks we sent either a box or a padded envelope of goodies, along with a long letter saying *what* we'd been up to. It was odd to write to a stranger about whom our total knowledge consisted of a

name and an APO number.

One week, Joshua was stuck about what to write. I told him to tell Jay about a fun boat trip we'd taken. "Jay's stuck in Iraq!" Joshua replied, horrified I would suggest such a thing. "He doesn't want to hear about us having fun!"

I wasn't sure what Jay would like or not like because we hadn't heard from him. I was worried that something had happened to this person whom I'd never met, but nonetheless felt a bond with him. Must be something about buying boxers. We were pleased we got an e-mail from him not long after. He'd been away from base and came back to four packages and lots of letters.

Our Jay is a 20-year-old from West Virginia who plays guitar and likes heavy metal. He and his wife have a 3-year-old daughter and are expecting a baby in September. Jay asked me if I'd seen "Fahrenheit 9/11" yet, and said he loved to hear about the fun we were having; it "puts a big ol' smile on my face."

The parcels we send are helping because, being pregnant, his wife isn't able to get about easily. "I can't thank you enough for the support you're giving me," he wrote. "If there is any way I can pay you back or show my gratitude, just let me know."

It's so humbling. He's there, away from his family, risking his life. All we've done is write letters and buy underwear.

AdoptaPlatoon needs support for a large unit of Marines who are deploying to Iraq. Information on how to apply can be found on the Web site (<http://www.adoptaplatoon.org>). Another way to show support is at <http://www.Booksforsoldiers.com>, where service people request reading material for folks stateside to send. Supporting the troops isn't a partisan activity. It's for all of us. Please help however you can.

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