

AA Gifts & Baskets can help you find the perfect gift for someone who is returning home from serving overseas in the military. With patriotic themes, welcome home baskets, and more, it's a great way to say "Thanks" to them for their personal sacrifice for our freedom.

Encourage or Discourage?

We always try to encourage our children. What kind of parent would we seem if we took a different approach and discouraged them? As strange as it may seem I have found myself lately in a dilemma of not knowing which is the right thing to do.



My son joined the Army Reserves, Infantry Division with the Princess Louise Fusiliers in October of 2004. The following summer while he was in C.F.B. Gaagetown doing his Soldier's Qualification and Infantry Training Courses I received a call from him telling me that he had put his name down to volunteer to go to Afghanistan. My first reaction was panic, was he absolutely crazy? Did he realize what he was doing? I calmed down and thinking more rationally realized that he had only joined reserves nine months previously, had only the most basic of courses under his belt and was only 19 years old, they surely would not choose him to go. Over the next months, I did not worry about this too much, however that was soon about to change.

On a Thursday evening of April this spring my son went to his regular Reserve evening I was at home relaxing and watching television, a call from the Armories where he works came in, "Mom, my D.A.G. papers are green, I'm going to Afghanistan!", you could practically hear this kid jumping around in his combat boots. I cannot describe what I felt at that moment as I could hear the excitement in his voice and I knew that this was something that he had wanted and I was happy for him but at the same time my heart dropped. I really did not know what to do with this information, my brain was thrilled for him, very proud that he was doing a job that the Military thought he was qualified enough to do, very proud that he wanted to help the people of Afghanistan, very impressed at this brave child I had raised in the past nineteen years, but, at the same time I am his mother and my heart said differently. This is my child, how can I possibly be excited or thrilled that he was going into harm's way, how could I possibly encourage him when I was scared too death for him?



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May 1st was creeping forward, that was the day he was to be at the Battle School in Aldershot, Nova Scotia to begin his Task Force Training for Afghanistan, the previous weeks were a blur of getting

all his kit list together, shopping for what he would need, making his bill payment arrangements, getting vaccinations up to date, etc. The next seven months he would be training, training hard and it would leave no down time for him for him to do any of these things. About a week and a half before he was due to go we were sitting one evening and he turned to me and told me that he did not think that he could do it. Talking with him I learned that his concerns were not about going or being in Afghanistan but were the first phase of the course which was the physical fitness end, he didn't think he was good enough as they would be setting the standards high. I told him that he would do just fine, this is what he wanted and that he had the drive and determination to get through it. If he quit before he started he would always wonder if he could do it, to go and try his best, not to set the goal as Afghanistan but to set the goal as to getting past each phase of the training. A word of encouragement, that's what I'm supposed to do is it not?

The next months were busy for him but difficult for me, he was training in everything from weapons, specialized battlefield first aid, Afghani language, and so much more. It seemed a lot to deal with in such a limited time period. Coming home some weekends he was telling me what the training involved and it was beginning to become more and more real to me as to what he would be facing. I still kept encouraging him even if he had a really hard week and seemed to be really discouraged himself. During this time the news reports from Afghanistan made it clear that the situation was steadily getting worse, I was now watching Repatriation ceremonies bringing our Soldiers home to Canada in flag draped caskets. I began doubting my encouragement, maybe this was something that I shouldn't be doing, and after all what if something were to happen to him while he was deployed, would I ever be able to deal with the fact that I gave him that encouragement? That maybe if I hadn't he would be safe? During this time that I seemed to be struggling with this there was an article in our local newspaper that a mother of one of the reservists also on Task Force with my son had written and she was so discouraging towards her son and what he was doing and I thought "How can you say those things to him, that seems so cruel". I then realized that as mothers of these young brave men and women about to face something that we cannot possibly comprehend we all have our own ways of dealing with it, there was no right or wrong way.

Towards the end of the summer my son had gotten home on leave from a phase of his training in Wainright, Alberta and I had asked him if he had heard about the latest deaths of our Soldiers, and was he still sure that he still wanted to go. He looked at me and said "Mom, it's not even about 9/11 anymore". He didn't have to say anything else, I understood that it was now about our soldiers losing their lives and the doubts I was having were gone.

Am I still terrified for his safety? Yes.

Do I still wish that our Soldiers were not over there in harm's way? Yes.

Do I think that our troops should be pulled out as the Canadian polls show? No.

Ask our soldiers what they want, I've learned the answer to that and I think they should have our support and encouragement 110%.

It will still be the hardest thing that I ever have to do as a mother, seeing him get on that plane about to fly into some kind of hell that I am certain that he isn't even sure of yet, but I will now be able to do it with an understanding of why and a pride in my heart that I cannot express in words. Encourage or discourage? There is only one answer to that.

As the days grow shorter and shorter and my nights alone with my thoughts grow ever-so-painstakingly long, my son prepares to leave. I am constantly reminded of the words spoken in the movie *Saving Private Ryan* in fiction and in life...

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Gen. George C. Marshall wrote: My dear Mrs Ryan: It's with the most profound sense of joy that I write to inform you your son, Private James Ryan, is well and, at this very moment, on his way home from European battlefields. Reports from the front indicate James did his duty in combat with great courage and steadfast dedication, even after he was informed of the tragic loss your family has suffered in this great campaign to rid the world of tyranny and oppression. I take great pleasure in joining the Secretary of War, the men and women of the U.S. Army, and the citizens of a grateful nation in wishing you good health and many years of happiness with James at your side.

Nothing, not even the safe return of a beloved son, can compensate you, or the thousands of other American families, who have suffered great loss in this tragic war. I might share with you some words which have sustained me through long, dark nights of peril, loss, and heartache. And I quote:

"Dear Madam: I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant-General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so

overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save.

I pray that our heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

Abraham Lincoln. "

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

George C. Marshall, General, Chief of Staff

A proud mom of a Princess Louise Fusilier