

The empty sound of his goodbye echoed in me. He left early summer of 2024. I was 8. I wept and followed the little car along the length of my driveway. My Mom ran after me, embraced, and kissed me. She comforted my aching heart and together we went inside. The chess board that we played weekly remained closed until his return. My Dad deployed and then re-deployed with just days of returning home. During many months I hardly understood what it meant by his service and “love of country” until his departure. What about love of his family too? Other kids have their Dads! Eventually, with the help of my Mom, I understood. We are the land of the brave because we accept the call to serve with grit, tenacity, love, courage and self sacrifice.

I never saw my Mom weeping. She was tough and disciplined to kept my routine in place even if a meteor fell from the skies and burned a hole in the lawn! My Dad was over there and my Mom with me attentively sacrificed for all my needs even sleeping with me to make me feel comfortable and safe. We are the home of the free because of brave men and women serving our country. They are the freedom fighters that leap to protect and secure our livelihood and our great country globally respectively. We feel the pinch at our own hearts for being short in a count. We don’t serve on ships but we keep our ship running so that my Dad can be calm and remain focus in his mission and Sailors.

My Dad returned late Winter 2025. The anxious sound as a large ship steered under bridges and was joined by tiny little boats with powerful engines guiding her closer to its dock, little by little inching her way filled our senses! Sailors lined up in their white uniforms while families gathered at the homecoming port joyfully weeping. I waited to embrace my dearest hero, my Dad.

This summer I celebrated happy tears of honor and intense heat, togetherness with a multitude of millions of people at the Mall in Washington DC on America’s birthday, 4th of July 2026. I reflected about the last two previous summers when my Dad was gone. His efforts and the greater collective of all of our freedom fighters honor our brave Founding Fathers infinite vision in protecting America. His efforts continually inspire me to hear my call to service. At the Mall, I stopped and had a chat with one man. He had a large patch, Secret Service, it said. We were a few feet from the White House so I told him of how my Dad inspires my dreams. Pointing at her majestic white pillars and looking at him, I said: “One day, I will be serving my country there, at the White House.” The secret service officer looked at my eyes and said: “ It will be my pleasure to protect you and to serve for a great man is in front of me.”