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Commentary by Tech. Sgt. Gloria Wilson
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2/2/2009 - **EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE, Alaska** -- I never thought the words of a 5-year-old would affect me so profoundly.

My husband Robert and I both serve in the military and with that comes a commitment to our country--a duty we are proud to fulfill--but Rob and I are also parents. While serving in the military brings challenges and concerns to any family, being dual-military can increase them.

I picked up my vivacious son Tyler from daycare recently and as usual we talked during the drive home. I've had a number of laughs in the past from some of these conversations as my only child has an interesting 5-year-old view of things.

In the past we've discussed things like why the moon is big, but looks small, whether or not I liked the picture he drew of a machine bringing his girlfriend (yeah, right!) from Colorado to Alaska for him, and how he likes me better when I have enough sleep.

This time the conversation did not make me laugh as it was infinitely more serious.

"Momma, I don't want to die," said Tyler.

As soon as I heard him say that I explained to him that he was only five and shouldn't have to worry about that for a long, long time. He then, with the bluntness of a child, calmly told me that I was going to die first because I was older than him. Now of course no one really wants to hear that, but I couldn't fault him with his logic plus if he was bringing up death I wanted to lay any unfounded fears to rest.

So I said "Well, honey that may be true but hopefully that's also not something we have to worry about for a long time."

His next words struck me like a speeding train with no brakes. First, because what he asked next was sadly a possibility and second, because wow... my son was having deep thoughts for someone who wasn't even in Kindergarten yet.

"Momma, I know it's not gonna happen, but... what if you and daddy die and I'm still a kid?," said my precocious child from his booster seat. "Who's gonna take care of me?"

Well by this point I actually had to clear my throat because I got a bit choked up.

Although I was trying to allay any fears, I knew to do so I needed to answer these questions. I explained to him that Nana, my mom, or Grandma and Papa, my husband's parents, would take care of him if that ever happened, but of course Tyler being my son, still wasn't done with his questions.

"But how will they know momma?... How will they know that I have no parents and I'm all by myself if you and daddy are dead?"

Ok, so by this time that imaginary speeding train that hit me found its brakes and was backing up onto my heart.

I thought about it for a moment and then I told him the Air Force would tell them.

He seemed content with that answer and long after he moved on to play like most people expect from a 5-year-old, that conversation stayed with me. It made me think about how things would go if it did happen. Who would tell my son if my husband or I died? Who would pick him up from school?

Yes, as dual active-duty military we have a family care plan that addresses some of these issues, but what if it isn't a necessity and doesn't fall within the family care plan criteria. What if one of us could just use help? Who, what, when ... what if... what if... what if?

I filed it in my memory bank of things to look into and the next time that conversation placed itself front and center of my consciousness was when I heard about a new Eielson endeavor--Care Teams.

I found out the Army has a program in place that lends structure and guidance to something people within our AF family do, but not necessarily with training and maybe not all the time. In a time of grief it's easy to miss something, no matter how good someone's intentions may be.

Care Teams are comprised of people who help with non-official matters when a member of our AF family goes through a crisis. Currently the AF has people who ensure you understand the legal side and who help you with benefits as well as a range of other items. However those teams don't necessarily pick your child up from school, help make dinner or organize the help people want to give you. Care Teams fill an area where there is currently a hole.

I now have a better picture of what may happen if my husband and/or I pass away while Tyler is still a kid.

I saw the guide they have. It lists things like school schedules, who should be contacted for a variety of reasons and even what medications those still living are on. During a time of mourning small details can be easily forgotten, but with this new program--if the help is wanted--it'll be there for you.

Now even though talking to my son about such a serious topic wasn't my favorite thing to do, it made me think about things that may be hard to contemplate during a difficult time. My ears perked up when I heard about Care Teams and now I'm listening both as someone who may one day need a Care Team, and as someone who wants to be on a team.

The time to think about this is now. I was fortunate enough to have a son who brought up the hard questions. I encourage you to learn from Tyler's bluntness because the reality is... even a 5-year-old is thinking about it.

Editor's note: For more information on Care Teams to include becoming a Care Team member please contact the Airman Family and Readiness at 377-2178 or go to the Eielson Website and click on Care Teams.

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