

CREATOR OF ARMY WIVES TALKS TO HMC



Single mom and creator of Lifetime's top rated original series Army Wives, Katherine Fugate gave us an insight to her journey, her spirit, and the best advice she got for being a mom.

By: Patricia Walters-Fischer RN

Katherine Fugate is a woman who knows hard work.

While making her way in Tinsel town, this single mother worked as a Chinese Food delivery person, sold CD's on the sidewalk, and when money became very tight, she lived on eating only one 99 cent burrito.

The creator of the Lifetime Original Series Army Wives tells HMC that the journey to get here was only one of many adventures in her life and it wasn't the struggle with money, but herself and her creative spirit that could have discouraged her.

She starts our interview with about the show with, "We've all worked hard to honor the lives of these (military wives) women, so I'm so happy to be here."

Then we get right to it.

(1) Why do you think this show hit such a nerve right now?

It's my belief we've touched a nerve because we deliberately hit a nerve.

We tell our war-peppered stories from the most humanistic point of view possible: from the heart.

Some may call that the female perspective of war, but to me, it simply means we're bypassing the traditional imagery of war on the battlefield, by concentrating on the personal relationships of our military families that are left behind.

What happens behind closed doors – with the wives, the children and the soldier, who are all sacrificing for our country in their own way, by being absent or adjusting to life as a soldier and a husband and father – hasn't really been illuminated so directly before.

And I also use the term "wives" as gender-free, because as we've found out, many men become Army wives when their wife or partner goes to war.

(2) Do you think we as Americans are becoming more aware that being in the military is a hard job no matter if you're stateside or deployed?

Yes. I believe we're discovering that being at home, after returning from war, has its own set of obstacles and challenges to overcome.

We're more and more aware of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). We're more aware of what it means for a soldier to leave his family for 2 years at a time, then come back and meet his son, who is now a toddler, for the first time and how that affects him. Affects them both, really.

The soldier misses so much of his children's lives and of his life with his partner, soul mate. It's a great sacrifice on so many fronts and whether at home or in country – our love for our military families only grows with this fuller portrayal of all they give to us.

(3) Tell me how you know so much about military life?

I did not grow up in a military family directly, although my uncle, Richard Berls, served for six years and was an Infantry Officer in Vietnam. He has told me many stories about his time in the Army.

My aunt, his wife, Kathy, vividly remembers the "white glove tea parties" of the Army at that time. I have fond memories of my uncle teaching me, when I was a kid, how to use chopsticks and saying, "we did okay, but periodically, we had our

butts handed to us.”

He’s said a lot more, from time to time, but the general theme seems to be one of pride and growing up very fast. He came in to speak to his writing staff, who were all very moved by what he said.

In one episode, where Trevor LeBlanc (Drew Fuller) sees his first casualty, we used images and words from a story my uncle told us.

(4) I like that you have women in the military with civilian husbands, that is certainly a switch in any other show about military life. How well (besides ratings) have people responded to this?

Thank you for recognizing that!

It’s one of our greatest achievements on the show - that we portray such a contemporary version of the Army. It is a new Army and it’s one of constant change.

We have such fantastic support from the DOD and specifically Lt. Colonel Todd Breassealle, who can save my life any-time!

It’s also a testament to African-Americans, because Lt. Colonel Joan Burton and her husband, Roland Burton, are such highly respected, educated and intelligent characters, as are the actors who portray them.

Wendy Davis (Joan) was nominated for a NAACP award and for a PRISM award.

(5) On the message board, posted May 26th, 2008, I read this:

I’m an Army Officer’s Wife, and I do like the show. However, I don’t like the portrayal of many of the wives as sleazy, just waiting for deployment to sleep around. Please interview more real Officer’s wives for material. Many of us have real, big careers of our own; some homeschool their children to help with consistency; others are really involved with their husbands’ careers. We do not ALL wear our husbands’ rank. I personally don’t have time for it. It’s a great and challenging life supporting our soldiers. Please don’t cheapen us with unwarranted drama! Thank you!

I understand there is a certain amount of sensationalism that goes with shows. I had a hard time watching ER because as a former ER nurse, I’d say “nope, that doesn’t happen that way”, but for the restriction of time, there are going to be things that aren’t going to connect with those in the field. How do you reach out (or do you) to viewers like this?

First, I’d thank her for her service to our country. I firmly believe the wives serve, too. I’d also remind her that not all of the characters are sleazy or have affairs – in fact, on the show it is a minority. But that it does exist, as it does in ALL worlds, in all walks of life, is also true.

However, our show clearly draws the respect the Army wives have for their roles.

Look at Claudia Joy Holden’s (Kim Delaney) speech at the end of “Independence Day,” in season 1, when she speaks out on what it means to be an Army Wife: “Their victories are our victories. Their defeats are our defeats. I am proud of the role we play in maintaining peace in our country and in the world. I am proud to stand by a man whose integrity shines like a diamond in the dust. I am proud to call myself an Army wife.”

(6) As a single mother, you have done a variety of jobs to pay the bills, what journey did you take to reach this point of your life?

My journey hasn’t been an easy one, but I am grateful for all of it, as it has brought me to the place I am now.

For every misstep, every fall – I’ve learned it’s most important how you get up. What you do with the information – who you become. How you perceive your flaws.

We are all imperfect beings, living in a world where we strive for perfection. That’s a goal we will never reach.

I am most inspired by people who embrace their uniqueness, their scars, their imperfections as well as their beauty and keep going. Keep moving on, trying to make the world a better place.

At my lowest points, I’ve delivered Chinese food, waited tables, lived off of unemployment for months at a time, sold CDs on the corner – all the things where a 99 cent burrito is all I could afford to eat for the day.

But I think my truest low points haven’t been about money – they’ve been about doubting myself, who I am in this world and what I have to give.

My darkest hours have been about losing my own light - letting someone else’s opinion of me matter more than my own.

There is a quote by Emerson, I am most fond of: “To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest achievement.” That’s the greater struggle for me – if I don’t get that right, I won’t be able to teach my daughter to believe how beautiful she is, terribly unique she is and worthy she is – and that she is more than enough, exactly as she is.

(7) What was the best/worst advice you’ve received about being a mother?

The best: Not to beat myself up over all that I don't know. And I've already learned that is true. Just as I've learned that I will never love anything or anyone more than I do my daughter.

The worst: That I'll be up and walking around a week after my C-section and it was no big deal. It took me six weeks to feel human and for me, it was a very big deal. After all, someone opened up my belly and yanked a living being out of it.

(8) What did the books not cover that you discovered after you had your children?

That it's okay to be tired. To look at your child and think, "No more crying. It's not accepted here anymore." It's okay to want someone else to take over for awhile, so that you can take a breath and recharge.

It's okay to be human.

That, and to accept that you won't magically get a flat belly in two weeks – or even a year, after giving birth. That loving that extra 10lbs is part of thanking your body for giving you that child in the first place.

(9) Do your experiences as a single mom carry over into any of your characters on the show?

Ironically, all the mothers on the show – whether married or not – become single mothers as soon as their husband goes to war. Many of these wives become single mothers for 2 years at a time. I think it must be even harder for them, actually, than it is for me as a true single mother.

They are married, they have someone to hold them at night, to nurture them, to witness their lives – only that person isn't there. That is a different kind of longing.

It's another example of the sacrifice all military wives give – willingly allowing their partner to leave them to fight for our country – and I so admire that.

And, yes, of course, our characters get the moments of never having enough arms to fetch stale fish sticks from behind the couch at the same time dressing a wriggling live octopus who suspiciously looks like your child and suddenly will only eat deviled egg sandwiches for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

And oh, thinks you are a poo-poo head.

(10) What does it mean to be a Hot Mom?

A Hot Mom is anyone who owns themselves fully. Their sexuality, their femininity, their beauty, their body – just as they are. And brings that confidence and sass to how they raise their sons and daughters.

If we all empowered our kids into believing they are perfect JUST as they are – then by god, we can save the world.

And a Hot Mom is also someone who tells other mothers they are Hot Moms.

So Hot Moms unite!

Remember Season Two started, Sunday, June 8th at 10 pm EST on Lifetime, but for those who wish to catch up on Season One, recaps can be viewed at Lifetime.