



SOLDIERS' CHILDREN

The Voices of Children in Military Families Living
with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

A DOCUMENTARY TOOL KIT BY LAURA SKY

“I can always forgive him for all those things that he can’t do, because I know that he’ll eventually get okay.... I know it’s not his fault at all—he’s just trying to control it as best as he can.... I’ve learned a bit of that from him, and I know that’s the thing that’ll be going on for a little while.”

—SAM, AGE 10



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To research this documentary we talked with many military children and their families across the country. They showed us that it's not only military personnel who experience the pain of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Their children and spouses spoke of their own traumas in living with the consequences of PTSD. The children share, paradoxically, both a wall of silence and a wealth of experience. They have also developed coping skills and strengths that deserve to be recognized and shared with others in the same situation. The process of healing from PTSD involves the whole family.

CHAPTER 1: THE LECONTE FAMILY – MY DAD IS NOT CRAZY OR BAD

Teenage sisters, Jessica, 18 and Patricia, 15 and their father, veteran Louis Leconte are struggling with his PTSD. They live in emotional isolation, dealing with their father's mood swings, anxieties and volatility. *"A couple of my friends know, but they just don't get it. I don't want them to think that my Dad ... is crazy or bad."*

"He really watches over us. Sometimes we don't like it but sometimes it's a good thing. And he cares a lot about us. He'd do anything for us."

CHAPTER 2: THE KINGSTON FAMILIES – SAM, HOLLIE AND LUC – IT'S NOT HIS FAULT

Sam, 10 and his stepfather, Luc, have a close bond. Since retiring from the military, Luc has struggled with PTSD. He is full of regret and guilt about his inability to contain his flashbacks and outbursts. Hollie, Sam's mother, feels like she is the buffer between Luc's PTSD and the family's need for equilibrium.

Sam understands that his own innocent behaviour can trigger terrible memories for Luc. He has learned that, as a child, he is not to blame.

Sam tries to understand Luc's flashbacks: *"I remind him that he isn't in the military at that moment, but he's home in Kingston with me."*

CHAPTER 3: THE LAMROCK FAMILY – IT'S POSSIBLE THAT I CAN HEAL, THAT MY DAD CAN HEAL

Kayla, 22, and Brittany, 18, are sisters in a blended military family living in Meaford, Ontario. Their father, Steve, was in the infantry for 24 years. He served in the Gulf War, Bosnia, Croatia and two deployments to Afghanistan.

Brittany: *"... you don't know who your parent is when they're struggling with PTSD because all of a sudden— (they are an) entirely different person.... You change the way you act to try and make them not as angry.... So, you kind of lose who you are."*

Grandparents Audrey and Chuck also experienced the loss of their son as they knew him before he served overseas. The support of the extended family is a source of healing.

CHAPTER 4: MILITARY MOTHERS – WE WEAR THE INVISIBLE UNIFORM

At the Valcartier Canadian Forces Base, we spoke with two military mothers.

Mesdames Elizabeth Dallaire and Caroline Lemieux are 3 decades apart in age yet they share similar experiences as military spouses and mothers. They manage the consequences of military PTSD in their family lives.

Referring to their military husbands, Caroline Lemieux says: *"They build themselves a thick shell. They want to be strong in our eyes. They want to come back and say, 'I'm the man of the situation, the man of the family. I can't cry. I can't let it show that I'm not well.'"*

Madame Dallaire: *"We say in French, we are 'la femme accordéon.' ... You realize that you have more potential to do all kinds of things than you thought you did. We wear the invisible uniform."*

CHAPTER 5: VALCARTIER TEENAGERS – THE FILMMAKING GROUP

At the Valcartier Family Centre, near Québec City, we brought together a group of young people whose parents have all served in the military. The teenagers

created a short docudrama about their experiences as military children.

Anabelle, 17: *"We definitely have to talk about it because if no one talks about what they feel... we will always think we're alone. But that's not true. There are thousands of other people living the same thing as we are, so why not just talk about it and help each other with that situation?"*

PTSD is not simply an injury of the mind. It is not simply about family or individual pathology. This is not only a military issue – but a concern for our entire Canadian village. These stresses will stay with children long into their adult lives. And so will their strengths. The young people we have talked with show remarkable wisdom. All these abilities make them wise and capable teachers for their peers and the adults who care about them.

Photo by Alexa-Frances Shaw

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