



HOPE IN THE TRENCHES

THE KATE W. MCDONALD MEMORIAL
MILITARY SCHOLARSHIP

Stephanie Fries' Story

Kate McDonald was a quick and deep friend and mentor in my life. Our paths crossed while our husbands were both assigned to a tour overseas, which required frequent deployments. Kate greeted my husband and me with a bottle of champagne and spaghetti dinner on one of our first nights in town. She continued to serve others as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion at Mass, a volunteer on the Parish Council, a hostess for spouse gatherings and happy hours, a home base for neighborhood children to gather and play, and a participant in cross-cultural gatherings and adventures.

In the solitude of her heart and deep in her bones, Kate was a devout spouse and mother amidst the challenges of her husband's career and passions; she was a shining light of inspiration to defend family life amidst an often dark and threatening environment.

As I reflect on Kate, from the onset of our friendship up to her death, I would define her heart in 3 simple mantras.

- Stay in Your Lane.
- Peace Beyond Understanding
- Family First, Mission Second

Stay in Your Lane.

Kate said this often, and she even had these four words printed and framed next to her front door. She understood the significance of boundaries in all settings. For example, how to define appropriate boundaries with extended family in order to protect the early years of married life. And most significantly, how to create boundaries against any external demand that may interfere with her family's values. No social or professional expectation was more important than the cherished time together as a family.

Peace Beyond Understanding

At Kate's funeral Mass, the second reading came from Philippians 4:4–9, in which Saint Paul tells us, "Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

In times of suffering—whether through military circumstances, terminal cancer diagnosis, or uncertainty of her family's new home, school, or career—Kate loved others well. Through small acts of kindness, consistent text messages, surprise gifts in the mail, radiant joy despite physical discomfort, and more, Kate loved through a peace that surpassed any earthly understanding.

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Finally, I have touched on this mantra above, yet it deserves its own distinction. The mission of the military is often non-negotiable when you or a spouse is serving among the ranks on behalf of our nation. Families are expected to simply surrender any needs, expectations, or desires in a parallel act of service. Kate loved our country and spent her entire life in silent service as a military child, spouse, and mother. However, through her years of experience, she knew the significance of her complementary role to the military servicemen in her life: as her husband defended our country, Kate defended her family. She knew her God-given vocation to honor and love God, to honor and serve her husband, and to protect, love, and raise her children with a deep and authentic faith. No matter how the military called upon Kate and her family, she maintained her personal mission to serve God and her family in any and all circumstances.

Kate was a Catholic wife, mother, friend, and Navy spouse who lived through challenging circumstances but never abandoned her vocation. Therefore, a profound way to honor her legacy is by naming Kate's Walking with Purpose Scholarship Fund "Hope in the Trenches." For through the eyes of a Catholic, our Mission—Our Vocation—is defined by God through Scripture, vows, and circumstance. Our ability to receive and fulfill that mission is our call to holiness.

Kate accepted her Mission on this side of heaven and fought in its defense for the entirety of her life. In doing so, she upheld the dignity of her womanhood, protected the values of her family, and influenced the hearts of hundreds of women through friendship and mentorship. She was a living model of a woman who walks with purpose.