

who's driving?



Katie Kyle is married to Jack, a Chinook helicopter pilot. They live at RAF Odiham, where their three children and Labrador regularly run rings round them.



LAST MONTH BROUGHT with it another corker of a day, or as my friend Jill would say “a normal day for Katie Kyle.” I’d gone to school with our toddler to collect our older two but, when it came to leave, I couldn’t find the car. As we were hunting and I was starting to wonder whether it had been stolen, I saw something in my peripheral vision. Someone had parked an MPV, just like ours, at the bottom of the hill, knocking over a bus stop and flattening a bin. Then it slowly dawned on me; it was our car. The crazy thieves must have crashed it!

As we hurried into the mêlée, a friend called to me, “You left the handbrake off.” Finally, I was up to speed. Cars encircled us- my car was blocking a T-junction- and other parents stared, looking at me as if I ought to know what to do. I had no idea, other than to stop our toddler from running in the road and soothe our dog, who was in the car when it crashed. “Call your breakdown people,” someone shouted. So I did but they wouldn’t help me. “You’ve not broken down.” Pedantic but true.

A Chinook flew overhead and I thought, “Call Jack.” He was on exercise, playing war a few counties away, but I rang anyway. ‘I can’t come, we’ve been invaded and I need to evacuate everyone.’ As I felt the tears well up, I started to pray.

The lovely school receptionist took me back to school and watched our toddler whilst I tried to remember who we were insured with. Another kind member of staff took the older children home with

her. When I eventually tracked down our insurers, they said, “You’re covered, even if it was your fault”. I had another cry. The whole thing was hideous but everyone was so kind.

Two hours later, the receptionist drove us home and we waited for the recovery man, who had generously agreed to make a detour with our crumpled car so I could strip it of wellies, school bags and pram. When he pulled up outside our quarter, the car’s face gaping with wires, I had another cry. Then Jack’s colleague drove Jack’s car back from his squadron so I had something to drive the next day. Jack had organised this from a field on Salisbury Plain, a loving effort to help, from one war zone to another.

The next day I was grateful when a friend offered to drive the children to school for me. In my embarrassment, I couldn’t quite face the other parents. I felt drained. One of Jesus’s promises rang in my ears, “Come to me all you who are tired and weary and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28). Since becoming a mum, I am tired most of the time! At moments of intense tiredness, like this one, I’ve sometimes angrily wondered what Jesus meant by these words. Where is this rest?

A few days on, as I started to feel less bruised, I realised God had provided me with rest in varying forms. Someone at church recently reminded me that God doesn’t shield us from life’s storms but he helps us weather them. In the midst of my upset, there were all those lovely people who helped me when I couldn’t

sort things out alone, providing a safe port. And at the end of the day, when I felt judged for my mistake (the accusation of one mother rang in my ears for days), I knew that God wasn’t judging me. Despite my error and my sense of shame, there was nothing I needed to do to earn his approval.

As humans, we tend to want to be in control of our lives. That can be particularly true of those of us in the military world. With so many issues decided for us, from where we’ll live to how long we’ll stay, we can cling tightly to the bits where there is some choice. Metaphorically, we want to be in the driving seat. But as I’m learning, always being the driver can be exhausting. We grow tired and careless and sometimes we mess up and crash, as I did. Reflecting back, I realise that I need to let God do more of the driving.

Ultimately, the car was a write-off. On the face of it confirmation that I’d really messed up. But one of God’s other promises is “to work all things together for good for those who love him” (Romans 8:28).

We’re moving overseas in the summer and we actually needed to sell the car. The insurance company gave us a generous pay out so it all worked out well in the end. And the funny thing is, where we’re going, I won’t be able to drive- so it looks like I’ll have to let someone else sit at the controls...

by Katie Kyle