

# life through the wire

with Katie Kyle

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 and Kaylie works part-time as a solicitor.



WHEN JACK told me he was due to do a week of national standby, I thought little of it. (National standby requires a Chinook and a crew to be on short notice standby at all times for national contingencies.) The rules at the time meant Jack couldn't leave the station for the week but our quarter is only a few hundred yards away. To the extent I did think about it, I pictured less washing and more time in charge of the remote, whilst having Jack nearby. Naive.

I'm not sure I watched any television that week. Instead I fielded telephone requests from my incarcerated husband for clean pants, more snacks and visits from the children. The bank holiday weekend was spent with Jack watching us through the fence playing at the park (sad) or with all of us in the Mess (nightmare), our children terrorising

During our times apart, Jack worries about national security, I worry about keeping a two year old Houdini safe; Jack experiences loneliness, I crave 'me' time, unable even to go to the bathroom without an entourage of children/dog; Jack's freedoms are restricted, I can go anywhere. We're coping with the same separation on different sides of a fence, in very different worlds. National standby demonstrated this perfectly because we were actually separated by a fence. The relationship fence usually goes up days, sometimes weeks, before a deployment, as Jack focuses on something I can't even picture and I start planning a children's birthday party alone. Emotionally, we start to peel away from one another. Then there's a pre-deployment argument to ensure the fence between us is good and solid. The

fence as usual. But I belatedly remembered the fence and (I think) it helped to

sort things out.

I realise that neither one of us wants the fence there. Our subconscious cleverly works out that it will be easier to say good-bye if we are cross with one another and already disconnected. It's a coping mechanism. In fact, it demonstrates the depth of our love for one another. In films, we sometimes see star-crossed lovers separated from one another, gazing on the same moon. As Christians, we have something better to gaze on than the moon. We can look to a God who is able to see over both sides of the fence - a father who can help us bridge the divide. The challenge is to know how to let God connect us.

Here are some suggestions: **Better thinking:** In my worst moments, I regard Jack as a deserter when he leaves and as an invader when he returns. Obviously he's neither- he has a calling to serve, which necessitates time away. Reminding myself of this can help. **Forgiveness:** If time apart causes friction, it's good to remember that the separation is no one's fault. **Taking an Interest:** Shamefully, there've been times when I've not known where Jack's gone because I haven't bothered to ask. The fence might be less divisive if I tried to peek over it. **Looking Up:** Reading the same Bible notes whilst we're apart links us spiritually. If we look heavenward, the fence might disappear. **Being Sensitive:** Jack's always sensitive to the fact that things at home may have changed during his absence. My challenge is not to make him feel like a guest when he returns. **Neutral Territory:** A friend whose husband recently came home said it was good to spend his R&R away from home. Turf war is less likely on neutral ground- a holiday might help everyone readjust.



the other inmates. And yet, for all the stresses, I learnt something valuable that week. After our final visit to the mess, we left through the gate in the fence and I turned to wave but Jack was already heading back inside. Through the wire mesh, I watched him as he retreated from us. It occurred to me later that the fence I was looking through was also a construct in our relationship that goes up every time Jack is deployed or on exercise.

same dynamic is at play even if we're just apart during the weeks. The fence goes up, the weekend isn't long enough to deconstruct it, and so there is strife! We will have been married eleven years tomorrow (we will be apart) and yet I've only just seen the fence. I don't know if others experience it? I would love to say that having had these lofty thoughts, I handled the current separation better. I didn't. It was the summer holidays, I was tired and distracted from six weeks of childcare and we constructed the