

help has wings



“HAVE YOU TAKEN THEM yet?’ This was a question asked by my husband on a daily basis during our trip to the UK last month. It was the sort of trip other military families living overseas might recognise, a week in which we had stuffed six months’ worth of activities and then wondered why we were snoring into our dinner every night!

We managed to make it encompass most of the south of England, a family wedding, seeing my grandma in her nursing home, a spot of work to deal with a last-minute meeting, kitting out our daughter for boarding school and visiting our poorly dog.

I knew before we boarded the flight to Heathrow that I would find it overwhelming. The week before, I had worked in the shadow of the mountain that lay ahead of me. I fretted over the packing, trying to imagine in the 45-degree heat of the Middle East, what clothes we needed for a British summer that my weather app said would comprise floods and a heatwave. Something that should have taken a few hours took far longer. And I kept crying.

A therapist recently told me that living with uncertainty and change, even good change, is stressful. A seemingly obvious statement, yet it made me see my life through her non-military eyes. Isn’t that how we tend to live as military families, in a semi-permanent state of uncertainty and change? With the future sometimes as uncertain as the weather, with us experiencing a deluge of unknowns, sometimes enjoying sunnier times, but rarely operating with more than a short-term forecast?

Personally speaking, we have spent the last year not knowing if I would be packing those suitcases for a UK holiday or to move back permanently. It has been a mental state of limbo and conundrums. Should we apply for schools? How with

no address? Should we buy a house so we have an address? If so, WHERE?!

Easter brought with it some answers at the promotion board, but it actually opened up more uncertainty and change than it solved. It prompted our eldest to explore the option of boarding school and it hung a huge question mark over the next few years. As I packed, I decided all the crying wasn’t healthy. I arranged to see my GP and, as I left for my appointment, I disturbed a collection of insects resting in our front garden. Late as ever, I cycled off without investigating.

My GP shares my faith. A 15-minute appointment lasted an hour as she silently gave up her lunch break to talk to me. She prescribed anti-depressants, the same ones I came off five years ago when my husband stopped deploying to Afghanistan. As I was handed them, a peace settled on me. I could touch help, I could pack it in my suitcase, it could come with me. It seemed to be enough. I decided not to take them, just to keep them close by.

I slept badly in the UK and I found aspects of the trip unsettling. ‘Have you taken them yet?’ my husband asked again. I kept making excuses: ‘I don’t want side effects whilst we are away’, ‘I should take them at night, not in the morning, in case they make me sleepy’. A friend texted to ask if the tablets were helping. I explained I wasn’t taking them. She texted back: ‘Would you get a cast if you’d broken your leg?’

Initially, I couldn’t explain my resistance but I finally worked it out. It felt like I was going backwards. I had come off these tablets before. As someone who has taken anti-depressants several times, who passionately believes there should be no shame around mental health issues, who encourages openness about our inner struggles, I wasn’t living out

these beliefs.

I felt like I should be able to manage without medication. I had subconsciously resolved to manage by my faith alone, to leave the pills in my packing. But it wasn’t really a case of by faith alone, more by Katie alone. And it did feel lonely. I realised, for me, in this particular set of circumstances, my resistance was rooted in pride. I wanted to manage in my own strength. I wanted to be able to say I didn’t need the help and conquered my troubles without it.

Two nights before we flew back to the Middle East, I started my medication and a verse came to me: ‘When I am weak, then I am strong’ (2 Corinthians 12:8-10). As I admitted I couldn’t cope on my own, I turned to a God who had already offered me help; help I could have had a week earlier, right at the point of need. As I accepted that I had come to the end of my own strength, He let me lean into His.

On my return from the GPs on the afternoon of my appointment, I disturbed those same insects again. I looked closer. They were butterflies. Lots and lots of butterflies. I had never seen a butterfly here in the Middle East until that afternoon. They stayed for that whole week whilst I packed. A symbol of new life, life borne out of something apparently lifeless, new life displayed in fragility, beauty, freedom.

The butterflies weren’t there when we returned from our trip but the God I believe in placed them around our house - He never left.

• **Katie Kyle is married to Jack, an RAF Chinook helicopter pilot. They are currently posted abroad with their three children.**

You can read more from Katie on her blog: www.eagletswings.co.uk