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## **Mobile Careers: Writing Your Way Around the World**

by Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer

“There’s no way I can have a successful career and be a military spouse at the same time.”

This statement isn’t true. Sure, it’s challenging. Your career may not be as straightforward as your peers who aren’t married to the military, but you don’t have to drop your professional aspirations. Finding a career that works for you as you move is possible. Start by identifying strengths you have and ask yourself the big question — what do you enjoy? Look for careers that tie those life aspects together, and creatively craft a mobile career.

Our Mobile Careers series will highlight portable careers for military spouses. This article focuses on writing as a career field. The footnote below lists future topics.

The biggest advantage to a writing career is that a computer and Internet connection allow you to write from anywhere, anytime. There are other advantages, and we asked some military spouses to share their stories.

Alesia Holliday, Navy spouse and author of *Emails to the Front* and the novels *American Idle* and *Super What?*, enjoys the flexibility. “I have two children. With my home office, I can write until my son gets home at three. I didn’t have that kind of flexibility as a trial lawyer where I commuted and worked long hours.”

Heidi Rafferty, an Army spouse and freelance writer, agrees. “Since 9/11 my husband has been involved with numerous deployments. I can schedule my life around his erratic schedule and make the most of my time with him when he’s home. I can take my child with me to visit family when he’s gone, taking my work along with me,” she said.

Although things are changing in the business world, your military spouse status is often viewed as a negative by an employer. In the writing world, that same status can be a plus.

Regina Galvin used that advantage to start her writing career. When she chose to switch from PR work to reporting, she started with an entry level job as a staffer on the *Life in the Times*, a special section of the *Army Times* newspaper. Her military knowledge was a plus for that position. She has also had the opportunity to be a stringer for the *New York Times* and contributing reporter for *ABC's Primetime Live*, because of her connection with the military. “I happened to be in North Carolina when the skinhead story hit — it’s a matter of being ready and taking initiative when opportunity shows up,” she says.

In some cases, military life itself can be the catalyst for a writing career. Ellie Kay is an Air Force spouse and mother of seven. Wanting to stay home with her children and erase

her family's \$40,000 debt, she drew on her business background and concentrated her finances. She became so good at it that her *Shop, Save, and Share* seminars were born.

Serendipity stepped in and the seminar came to the attention of a literary agent, which resulted in Ellie's first book *Shop, Save and Share*. That book quickly led to two other finance books. She later went on to write *Heroes at Home* for military families and many other books.

Air Force spouse, Carolyn Quick Tillery, was a practicing lawyer when they moved to Montgomery, Alabama, for her husband to attend the Air War College (AWC). She decided not to sit for the bar and instead volunteered to chair the AWC Spouses' Cookbook committee, the kind of project she'd worked on previously because of her interest in cooking.

The two cookbook experiences led her into "narrative cookbook writing." She combines diary excerpts, vignettes, narratives, photos, and recipes to pay homage to different periods in history. Her first book, *The African-American Heritage Cookbook, Recipes and Remembrances from the Tuskegee Institute*, was followed by *At Freedom's Table: 200 Years of Receipts and Remembrances from Military Wives*, focused on the military. She's published two others with two more in process.

Air Force spouse Carol Vandesteeg began freelancing in 1995, mainly for military publications. At one point she began writing an article about deployment for *Off Duty* magazine. It took on a life of its own and became the book *When Duty Calls*, now in its third printing with over 20,000 copies sold.

If you want to pursue writing as a career, read what advice other military spouse writers have for you.

- **Be creative and don't limit yourself.**

Many writers take whatever jobs they can, from court reporting to community event coverage to military correspondent opportunities. Stretch yourself and add to your portfolio and skill set.

### **Market your versatility**

Navy spouse Karen Jowers was an editorial assistant at the *Norfolk Ledger Star* before marrying into the military. 27 years and many moves later, she has always found a writing job. As she says, "There are newspapers everywhere." Gaining new experiences in journalism with each move makes you more marketable to your next employer. Her knowledge as a military family member has been helpful in her career as well. But she stresses that on the job as a reporter, you are a journalist first.

### **Parlay expertise into writing opportunities**

Army spouse Jennifer See worked in marketing for a variety of companies including Sound Credit Union in Tacoma, Washington. She pursued freelance writing on the side

and finally chose to freelance fulltime after her second child was born. She uses her business knowledge in her writing, focusing on clients who need financial copy.

### **Target trade publications**

The large consumer magazines can be difficult to break into. Rafferty suggests targeting trade publications instead. Many writers suggest targeting the special supplements of the *Times* newspapers. And, if you are interested in the consumer women's magazines, read *Feminine Wiles: Creative Techniques for Writing Women's Feature Stories that Sell*, by Donna Elizabeth Boetig. She successfully broke into the consumer magazine market while her husband was in the Coast Guard.

### **Watch how other writers market**

Holliday suggests you study other writer's websites. Just type "freelance writer" into Google. Why not start with [www.alesiaholliday.com](http://www.alesiaholliday.com); [www.elliekay.com](http://www.elliekay.com), [www.whendutycalls.net](http://www.whendutycalls.net); and [www.randrwriting.com](http://www.randrwriting.com) (Rafferty)?

### **•Network with writers**

Join writers associations. Holliday credits the Romance Writers' Association with connecting her to agents and publishers, something available at many writers' conferences. Attending conferences shortens your learning curve and allows you to tap into a community of colleagues to connect with as you move.

### **Write, write, write**

Even if you don't have a degree in journalism, you can become a writer. Create opportunities to write. Volunteer your services to force yourself to develop your skills. Galvin's first reporting was volunteer articles for a post newspaper. Kathie, one of the authors of this article, started by volunteering for unit and wives club newsletters.

### **Parlay writing expertise into other opportunities**

Clare Morris, an Army wife, has used her writing skills in the West Point public affairs office, as a freelancer selling articles, copywriting for corporate clients, as Press Secretary and Media Relations Director for a congressman in DC and later commuting from Florida, and as a technical writer/editor for a company in Germany.

Many authors add speaking to their business mix after being asked to speak because of their books. Boetig teaches writing in Hopkins University's graduate writing program, and coordinates the Writing Center at University of Maryland, Baltimore.

There are other big pluses to writing. It connects you immediately with a new community, as you interview others and connect with writing groups. And, as Boetig says and other writers concur, "It's invigorating, always thinking, 'What am I going to write about next?'"

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Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer lead workshops and are the authors of *Help! I'm a Military Spouse – I Want a Life Too!*

For more information, go to: [militaryspousehelp.com](http://militaryspousehelp.com)

