

## Her daughter deployed, Grandma plays Mom again

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**Editor's note:** We are approaching two 10-year anniversaries. Sept. 11 we all remember. But Oct. 7 we seem to have forgotten. It marks 10 years of war: first in Afghanistan, then in Iraq – longer than any time in U.S. history. More than 6,200 dead. More than 45,000 wounded. Over four Sundays, the Orange County Register will tell the story of the more than 2 million troops who've fought in these wars. As we commemorate the anniversaries of Sept. 11 and Oct. 7, let us, as a nation, seek to understand the sacrifices made as a result of them.

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Debbie Nichols got the call a few weeks before Christmas. Her daughter was deploying to Afghanistan with the Air Force. Her two granddaughters were coming to Yorba Linda to live with her.

Grandma was going to be a full-time parent again.

"We're going to get through this together," Nichols, now 57, told her granddaughters Ivie, now 14, and Bailey, now 10. The two girls later wrote a book with Nichols about the experience, and called it "Deployed Kids."

This is their story, in their own words, drawn from interviews with all of them. It begins in late 2007, when Master Sgt. Erin Caldwell got orders to go to a place that her youngest daughter mispronounced as A-fa-ghanistan.

**Ivie:** She's like, "I love you," and gave us both the longest hug she's ever given us. It seemed normal, like she was saying goodbye to us, but at the same time I knew I wasn't going to see her for a long time after that. I didn't know how to feel; I was just there.

**Debbie:** Bailey was in the bathtub the first night. And she looked up at me and said, "Grandma, am I supposed to call you Mommy now?" It took my breath away. I said, "You get to call me Grandma. Your mom is just going away."

She smiled. She had the biggest relief look on her face.

**Bailey:** We had this little pillow that said "I love you," and we kissed it every night.

**Ivie:** Before she left, they say the person who was leaving kissed it before, so it was just like kissing your parent goodnight every night.

And then another thing we had that she left with us, it was a necklace, it was a heart and it had our names engraved on it. And it had a picture of her on it.

**Debbie:** And then Bailey had an incident with her locket. (She was) crying that night, that afternoon. She "killed Mommy," and I go, "What are you talking about?" And she was crying hysterically, "I killed Mommy! I killed Mommy!" I said, "What? What?" And she held out her necklace and somehow their mother's face got rubbed off of the locket, and so she was hysterical. When my husband came home that night, he had to remake the little photo. It was tiny.

**Ivie:** We made this giant poster that said, "Welcome home, Mommy, you are our hero!" We painted it, drew pictures on it, we put it on the garage. It had been windy, and so it kept falling down. Grandma kept going out there.

We were watching a movie and we just remember her not coming inside. We were like, what the heck? We're like, maybe she needs help because we thought the whole thing fell down.

And I just remember running outside, and they're hugging. I'm like, Mommy! I just remember yelling that and running.

**Ivie:** I think after a while we ended up growing closer to my mom. We've always been close. But it's one of those, I talk to her a lot more just because I know there's always a possibility that she could leave again, for a longer time period. You always want to be with her.

*Their mother expects to deploy again soon, possibly by the end of the year. Ivie and Bailey will stay this time with their stepfather.*