

My Sister, the Soldier

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Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

My sister is a soldier. I remember when she came home and announced to our mother that she was going to enlist in the army. My mother replied, "You're terribly young. It's too difficult, challenging, and dangerous, you really should reconsider."

My sister Darlene said, "I'm 18, which is old enough and through the army I'll be able to make progress. Right now, all I can get is part-time work while I go to community college. I need to have a career, not a part-time job, I need a college education, and the army will pay for that when I've finished my tour of duty, so this is about my future."

My mother cried and said, "There is a war, you will be in dangerous situations."

I said, "Don't worry. They don't send women to fight on the front lines in wars, so they are not in great danger. If it was me that would be a different situation."

Darlene said, "Don't worry, I'm cautious, I won't take unnecessary risks."

Despite that assurance, my mother stayed worried. My sister went to training camp for three months, and when she returned, she said, "I'm glad I enlisted, it was a wise decision. Training was challenging, we have to get up at 5:00 every morning, the work was demanding, we drilled a lot, but we learned skills. You have to be on time, and you have to follow all the directions, but they keep you occupied, so you don't get bored. I like the other recruits in my platoon, we all supported each other in the exercises."

My mother said, "I'm proud of you, but I'm still concerned about your safety."

"Don't worry, Mom. If I do get sent to the war zone, I'll be extremely careful."

My sister did go to the war zone when her unit was sent to Iraq. I had no idea where that was, so I looked it up on the internet. Iraq is on the other side of the world.

My sister purchased a computer before she departed, and she showed us how to use it to send email. I'm glad she did because we sent notes to her on it every day, then when she could she responded, but usually not immediately. She reported the weather and the people, but she didn't describe her activities. Here's what she wrote in one note.

"It's extremely hot here, and we have to wear heavy clothes, which makes it really challenging, though, they are bullet-proof for protection. Most of the local people here are supportive and the soldiers are great companions. Don't worry, you can rely on me to be careful, I know how important it is to be cautious. See you in September."

She would end every communication that way - don't worry, see you in September. But then September came and she communicated a disappointing message, "We have to stay longer; I'm not sure how soon I'll be returning. Don't be discouraged, I'll be there."

My mother checked the email every day for the next week and didn't get a message. She was increasingly concerned, and then she got a reassuring note -- I'm fine, sorry I couldn't email for some time, we were on assignment. Don't worry. I'm being careful."

So it went on. We waited and waited, and I worried, too. The news reports on the war on TV looked dangerous, and my mother would cry when she saw those reports.

October went by; then November; then it was December. My mother bought some presents for my sister and dispatched them by mail. She said, "I really wish Darlene could return for Christmas." Every time the phone rang or someone knocked on the door, she hoped it might be Darlene coming home by surprise. But she didn't get her wish, so Christmas was uniquely sad this year, not the holiday we had appreciated in the past.

Then on New Year's eve, the doorbell rang, and we rushed to open it. My mother said later she was a little afraid every time the doorbell rang that it might be someone to announce bad news, that there was a problem with Darlene. But this was the opposite, this was the best news we could have received. It was Darlene! We'll have a really happy new year now.

What is the main idea of this passage? Explain why you think that is the main idea.