



You Have the Power

To be a force for change.

BY MOLLY BLAKE, *Marine Corps spouse*

It's 2005 and Kathy Roth-Douquet and her co-author Frank Schaeffer are reviewing the first draft of the book that would eventually become "AWOL: The Unexcused Absence of America's Upper Classes from Military Service and How it Hurts Our Country." Suddenly it hits them: Their manifesto about civil military affairs is missing something.

"It needed a personal story," said Roth-Douquet, a Marine Corps spouse. "It wasn't just my ideas as a person interested in policy that were important, but the insights that you get from actually being in the military community and being connected by the bonds of family."

After that, Roth-Douquet woke up to the fact that as a spouse she, too, was in the military. It was a paradigm shift for the former Clinton White House staffer that led to much more than just a manuscript revision.

She didn't know then that she'd found an organization that would change the military family community. But she knew something more important: That a military spouse on a mission can accomplish just about anything.

"Whatever your passion, whatever your mission, nothing can stop you if you decide to make a difference."

POWER SPOUSE

Don't let her 5-foot-2-inch frame fool you. Roth-Douquet is as focused and driven as any spouse you'll meet. She holds a master's degree in public and international affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University and was awarded the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service for her work as the acting principal assistant deputy undersecretary of defense.

But this mother of two will be the first to tell you that pedigree and resume bullets are only part of the package. Far more important, she says, is buying into the idea that being married to the military is a team sport that has perks and "is most productive when you embrace it."

And embrace it she has. While researching that first book and volunteering with her husband's unit, Roth-Douquet met Laura Dempsey, an attorney, Army spouse



Marine Corps spouse **Kathy Roth-Douquet**, founder and chief executive officer of **Blue Star Families**.

and an early advocate for legislation to ease military spouse licensure requirements when spouses job-hunt. The two became close friends and ended up mentoring each other. Eventually, along with a handful of other spouses, they launched Blue Star Families in 2008.

"When you aggregate relationships, insights, skills and talents of this community," Roth-Douquet says, "it's really powerful."

MAKING THINGS HAPPEN

Since then, Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer have penned another book. And Blue Star Families has swiftly earned a reputation as an organization with impactful programs and simple, but formidable solutions to pressing issues affecting military families. With the recent launch of Blue Star Spouse Networks and Blue Star Jobs, Blue Star Families is evolving alongside the needs of a community facing 26 percent unemployment, geographic challenges and the reality of being a military spouse.

And here we are, just a few months into 2013. Talk has turned to the troop drawdown, budget cuts and an inevitable wane of public interest and support for the military. It's Roth-Douquet's hope that more spouses will follow her lead and discover unique ways to support the military community.

You can use Kathy's story as inspiration to blaze your own trail. Whatever your passion, whatever your mission, nothing can stop you if you decide to make a difference. And you can flourish as an individual while making a difference for the wider community.

However you might envision your life's work outside of the military community, Roth-Douquet says, there are ways to apply your ideas "so you can have personal growth inside this community, and also help others at the same time."

The possibilities, she says, are limitless. "We always have an opportunity to serve. That's the beautiful thing about our lives as military spouses." ★