

HOME FRONT

by Kristin Hannah

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 ***A Conversation with
Kristin Hannah***

The prologue really jostles the reader into dispelling any thoughts of “pretty daffodil borders”; this story is about battle, for love and everything else that truly matters. How hard was it for you to begin writing this book?

I began this book as I begin all of my novels, with a combination of absolute fear and boundless enthusiasm. Usually I know with some clarity where my stories will go and who will populate them. Although that original road map always gets revised along the way, this book, more than most, consistently messed with my head. The book I envisioned and researched simply didn’t work. When I first began to write *Home Front*, it was about two estranged sisters brought together by the deployment. It took me a long time to really grasp that Jolene’s story—and to me, she was always the heart and soul of the story, the one character who never changed—needed to be part of a bigger tapestry, that of a marriage that was tested to the limit by the wife’s deployment. I literally threw away hundreds of pages before I gave in to this new version of the story. Once I created Michael and let the marriage be center stage, I knew I was on my way. The story unfolded beautifully...until I hit the ending. It took a surprising number of drafts for me to “bring Jolene home” the way I wanted to.

The prevailing themes in *Home Front* delve into perhaps the most controversial and demanding issues you’ve explored in your writing so far. What inspired you to take this on? And how were you, in turn, inspired in the writing of it?

Quite simply, this story was inspired by the nightly news. As the war in Iraq went on, I watched the stories—night after night—our troops lost or wounded in battle, and the stories of their families left behind, waiting for them to return. As a mother,



I was heartbroken for the men and women and their families. So many of the young soldiers on the news were the same age as my own son, and that hit me really hard. As an American, I was grateful, and as a woman, I began to wonder what it must be like to go off to war and leave your children behind. I can't imagine anything that would be more terrifying and difficult. I realized that I had never read that story, and I wanted to. I wanted to explore the idea of a woman torn between love and honor. So I decided to write it.

I never thought about the potentially controversial nature of the themes in *Home Front*. I simply set out to write a story about a female mother and soldier who went to war. Although Michael is fairly antimilitary and antiwar, the book is ultimately less political and more personal. I didn't set out to take a stance on the war itself. This was really about supporting and understanding the troops and realizing the extent of the sacrifices they make.

How was a typical day spent while writing this book? On a good day? On a bad day?

Fortunately for me, I have a lot more good writing days than bad ones. I'm really glad about that because a bad writing day is an ugly thing. Usually, a bad day means that either: I can't think of what to write about (which means that something *major* is wrong and I need to go back to the beginning to diagnose and correct the problem), or I write a scene that I end up throwing away before I even finish it.

A good day writing is a beautiful thing. It's a day when the words and ideas flow from the end of my pen and collect in a gorgeous swirl of blue ink on yellow paper. Yes, that's right—I write my novels longhand on yellow legal pads. I do this because I can write anywhere—on the beach, in a deck chair, in my living room. A typical day, of course, is

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somewhere in between. With *Home Front*, I had to stop often to do extended research, and that was often frustrating. I wanted to write a scene, knew what it was, but I needed the facts to get it all correct.

You've said that you've never had such a difficult time writing a novel. Why was it so difficult, and how did you ultimately find your way to the emotional end of this story?

There were two difficulties that this book presented. First was the burden of authenticity. It was important for me to capture the spirit of the true American soldier in my portrayal of Jolene and Tami and their colleagues. Because I knew so little about the military when I began, creating these characters, and indeed the world they inhabit, was often an uphill battle. And then, as the writing continued, I fell so in love with Jolene—she has become my favorite character of all time—that I really wanted not to “ruin” her by doing anything wrong. Second, I was fairly undone by the emotional component of this novel, and honestly, even though I have often written about difficult, heartrending situations, no story has ever affected me personally so deeply. No novel of my own has ever so consistently brought me to tears. It was difficult to maintain my balance as a writer in this one.

What about Jolene made her such a favorite for you?

In a word, heroism. I can elaborate on that, but you'll have to bear with me. At first, my answer may seem to make no sense. I have always been a geek girl at heart. I grew up reading a lot of science fiction and fantasy novels, and a quick trip to my Web site will let readers know that *Harry Potter* and *The Lord*



of the Rings are two of my favorite stories of all time. Harry standing up to Lord Voldemort and Frodo climbing Mt. Doom with the increasing weight of the ring...these are two of the greatest reading memories for me. When you read about a hero's quest you feel it all: fear, horror, hope, faith. In a way, Jolene is my version of the hero, fighting nearly insurmountable odds, with only her heart to defend herself. We wives and mothers are heroic every day, but rarely do we get to be a *hero*. Jolene, as a Black Hawk pilot in combat, gave me a new kind of heroine.

How was it for you to write a character that was so richly nuanced in her conflicted loyalties to her family and career? Do you ever feel similarly conflicted in your own life?

I absolutely loved writing about a character as conflicted as Jolene. I think that's what real life for a woman is all about—balancing the needs of our families with our own desires. Nothing is ever easy for a working mom, or for an at-home mom, for that matter. Motherhood is a minefield of worry. We tend to live with a certain amount of guilt because we want to do so much. In that way, Jolene was very much like any other working mother. She was trying to balance the demands of her job with her responsibility to her children.

***Home Front* is a startlingly honest account of the true costs of war. What were your views on the war in Iraq and the military in general before writing this book? Did your views change through the research leading up to and the writing of it?**

I don't come from a military family, nor do I know a lot of military families personally, so I would say that I was woefully uninformed about all of it. Prior to *Home Front*, I would have said that I understood

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something about their lives and their service, but I was wrong in almost everything. I only understood the thinnest layer. I learned so much in the writing of this novel and in researching it. I went to a deployment ceremony and honestly, I think every American should attend one. Watching our military men and women preparing to go off to war, and their families standing alongside to say good-bye, really brings their sacrifice into sharp focus. It is a powerful reminder that whatever one feels about any particular war, we need to always respect and honor our servicemen and -women and their families. Honestly, I felt a little ashamed that I hadn't attended one before. Although, boy, was it difficult. I was humbled by their pride and strength in the face of such an undertaking. It makes you truly consider what heroism is and reminds you to be grateful.

The vast dimensions and effects of PTSD must have made it a tricky subject to research. How did you go about learning about PTSD, and what were the greatest challenges in writing about the disorder?

As I mentioned earlier, *Home Front* was a research nightmare. I didn't anticipate that to be the case, either. I was actually fairly cavalier about this particular aspect. I mean, I'm a lawyer, so research is something I'm comfortable with, and additionally, I have tackled breast cancer, brain tumors, the Siege of Leningrad and World War II Russia, and DNA testing to exonerate convicted prisoners. I didn't think that the themes and issues in this book would require any more research than I was used to. I couldn't have been more wrong. Researching and writing *Home Front*, with its military theme, was a mammoth undertaking. I was a bit like Alice, falling down the rabbit hole, into a world where nothing was quite the way I imagined it.

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I think the depiction of PTSD is one of the most important and relevant portions of the book. I tried to really bring it home in a way that allowed readers to understand how it feels to suffer the symptoms. I also tried to inform readers, which was the point of the Keller trial. The reader learns the truth of PTSD along with Michael. Ultimately, one of the points of the novel is a reminder to all of us. As a nation, we have to care for our warriors upon their return from duty. And their families. It's just that simple.

Having gained so much insight into your subject through firsthand accounts of people who entrusted you with their stories, did you find it difficult to deal with the expectations (of yourself and others) of honesty in your portrayal of Jolene's story?

I was consistently terrified that I would do a poor job in portraying soldiers and their lives and their families. I felt a very keen responsibility to "get it right." They sacrifice so much for the safety of the rest of us, so I really hope I wrote a book that resonates both with military and nonmilitary readers. I would love it if the novel sparked a dialogue about the price of war on our troops and our obligation to them upon their return.

You've written much about the bonds between women, and mothers and daughters in particular, in your previous books. Was it a joy or a pain (or both?) to depict Michael's changing relationship with his daughters?

Michael was really a constant surprise to me in this novel. First of all, as I've said, I spent months researching and devising a version of the story in which Michael didn't even exist. I envisioned

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a book about women in a family and a daughter's relationship with her distant father. Obviously none of that made it into the final draft. Once I decided to give a marriage a try, Michael appeared fully formed. I liked him from the get-go, and I liked the complexity of both his character and his relationship with Jolene. I never saw the problems in their marriage—or in their reconciliation—as wholly one-sided.

The twist in Michael's story is that he fell in love with his wife while she was gone, and became a better man by becoming a better father. I loved this story arc, and I loved how he evolved from a distracted, disinterested parent into an invested one.

Who was the first person to read this book?

The first person to read this book was Megan Chance. She is always my “first line of defense.” She is an extremely talented historical fiction novelist, and we have been friends and critique partners for the duration of both of our careers—more than twenty years. She's always the first person to brainstorm with me, and to read early drafts. We have learned to share the kind of honesty that is rare in writing. She loves telling me when I've made a misstep or missed an opportunity—almost as much as she loves telling me when I've done something well.

Do you ever have conversations with your characters? Do they ever surprise you?

Well, if I had *actual* conversations with characters, I think that would be the sign of a real problem 😊. That being said, I do “listen” to them an awful lot. I can often see scenes unfolding in my mind, and in those lovely moments when my subconscious is working hard, I pay very close attention. I do a lot of my best thinking when I'm actually doing something

else, like running or skiing or swimming.

In a way, my characters always end up surprising me just a little. They become more real than I had anticipated, with backstories and concerns and foibles that I didn't see when I began. I have often said that I really learn who my characters are the same way the reader does—through dialogue. It is true that we learn who people are through words and deeds, and that's true of characters as well.

What do you hope readers take away from this novel?

At its core, *Home Front* is a novel about two ordinary people who have lost their way over twelve years of marriage and then find themselves separated. I think this is a story we can all relate to. You don't have to be a military family or even know someone serving in our military to relate to the powerful emotional themes in the book. We can all imagine how it felt for Jolene to hear her husband say, "I don't love you anymore," and we can understand how lost Michael felt after the death of his father. A marriage is a tricky thing that hangs on hooks both big and small. Every little thing can matter. Words spoken and unspoken carry a tremendous weight, and in a way it requires as much commitment and honor to hold a marriage together as to go off to war. In that way, we all understand sacrifice. It's no surprise that I'm a romantic, and to me, there's nothing more romantic than a husband and wife falling back in love with each other.

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Interview with Chief Warrant Officer 5 Teresa Burgess

I'm still not entirely sure how I got the idea to write about a female Black Hawk pilot, but one thing I know for sure is that without the help of Chief Warrant Officer 5 Teresa Burgess, I would have been in a world of hurt. The military was as foreign to me as the face of the moon. Teresa was everything I could hope for in an advisor. She was honest and open and straightforward. More than that, she turned out to be a lot of fun to hang around with, and I am proud to call her a friend. Not long ago, I was fortunate enough to sit down with Teresa and have a nice old-fashioned girl-to-girl chat. I hope you enjoy this small glimpse into her extraordinary world.

How did you become a helicopter pilot?

I visited the career center during my senior year of high school. I found some brochures on joining the Army. My father was in the Air Force, and I thought I would play a joke on him by telling him I joined the Army. After looking at the brochures a little more closely, I saw one was on going to flight school and becoming a Warrant Officer. I really had no interest in college at the time, and flying interested me. I had grown up around it. I went to the Army recruiter with my dad, completed all the necessary tests, and was accepted. I attended Basic Training at Fort Dix and then went to Fort Rucker for Warrant Officers candidate school followed by flight school.

Tell me a little bit about what it was like to be a full-time/active-duty soldier and the mother of two boys. Did your kids understand your service? Were they always proud of you?

I was active-duty Army for only a year after the birth of my first child, Matthew. It was hard juggling schedules since my husband was active-duty National



Guard. I was in a Medevac unit at the time, and we did a lot of shift work, twenty-four hours at a time. I had Andrew, my second son, while I was a “traditional” guardsman—the typical guardsman is known as traditional. That is your “one weekend a month, two weeks in the summer” soldier. Pilots have extra requirements for duty to keep proficient at their flying duties. Luckily, I could schedule those based on when I could get child care. The best part-time job for a stay-at-home mom. I became a full-time Active Guard Reserve, AGR, soldier when Andrew started school. The timing was perfect. My husband, Bryon, was still AGR, and scheduling could still be difficult, but it was much more manageable. We had a lot of support from family and great babysitters—Ruth, Amy, Nicole, Emily, and Katie.

I am not sure it was a matter of my kids understanding my husband’s and my service. It was just our way of life. As they got older, I think they began to understand what it was we did and became increasingly prouder as they understood more.

How did you tell the kids—and your husband—that you were being deployed? What was your greatest fear upon learning of the deployment?

By the time I deployed, Bryon was retired from the National Guard. He worked closely still with the National Guard, so he knew it was coming.

It was a matter of confirming it when it did become official. He was very supportive. I think my greatest fear was just leaving Bryon to take care of everything. Not that I didn’t think he could do it. I just felt bad leaving him to do everything. The kids were at a stage of life where they played a lot of sports. There was a lot of chauffeuring to do. We were very fortunate to have support from many of the families the kids

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played ball with.

You reacted very strongly to a sentence in *Home Front*. Jolene says that she wants to go to war, but she doesn't want to leave her family. What was it about this remark that touched you so deeply? Can you explain how that conflict feels to a woman who is both a soldier and a mother?

You want to go be with your "guys"—the people you have trained with for years. You also want to test yourself and your training. The unit I deployed with has since deployed again. I changed jobs and did not go with them. I felt terribly left out.

When you deploy you are a soldier first—your mission is first. That's the way it has to be when you are in charge of an aircrew and are being counted on to complete a mission. You don't want to let anyone down, least of all the ground soldiers who we are there to support.

Leaving your family is another thing altogether. It is something you just do not want to do. You're the Mom, something that just doesn't go away. You still want to feel like a part of the family.

How was parenting different when you were in Iraq? How was it the same?

Bryon made most decisions while I was gone. It was hard. I still wanted a say, but I wasn't there. Bryon and I had been married twenty-three years when I deployed, so we knew each other's parenting styles pretty well. He did a great job. I am very thankful for his support.

Do you think being at war is different somehow for women? If so, how?

I don't think so. Women, just like men, join for many different reasons, but when it comes down to it, they



just want to do their job and be part of a team. They want a chance to do their duty just like everyone else.

Can you speak at all about the idea of women in combat?

When I joined, women were not allowed to fly in combat. That changed in 1993. I have no issue with women doing a job as long as they are qualified and can perform the job. I don't think women should be put in a job just because they are women in order to equal things out.

What was your homecoming like? How easy was it to get back onto the track of your ordinary life?

It was very nice. I came home after a ceremony at the Post. My family had made a nice sign that was hanging in the kitchen. There were lots of flowers. The pitcher of margaritas was pretty good, too. I had commented to Bryon during one of our phone calls after a particularly long, hot day in the cockpit that the other pilot and I had been talking about how nice margaritas would have been that day. Bryon remembered that and had them waiting.

My parents had come in from out of town and some neighbors had made dinner for us. It was very nice.

In what ways did your tour in Iraq change you? Your marriage? Your family?

At first I think it is hard on every marriage. There are a lot of adjustments to make. Bryon or one of the kids would mention an event or people they had met while I was gone, and I would have no idea what they were talking about.

How did your husband handle being the parent at home? Were routines changed when you returned?

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Bryon did great. Some routines I am sure changed when I left in order to suit his routines better. It helped that Matthew got his driver's license while I was gone. He probably ran more errands and played chauffeur to his brother more than most sixteen-year-olds.

Your husband was in the military also, and a pilot. Do you think that helped make your deployment go more smoothly?

Yes and no. It made it easier to talk to him about what was going on; he understood the lingo and the mission. Then again, he understood the mission and what could happen.

Tell me what it feels like to fly a Black Hawk in peacetime... and in wartime.

In peacetime you are training, practicing, and honing your skills. In war you get to apply those skills. If you hone your flying skills and knowledge in peacetime, it becomes second nature in war. Of course, flying in the Pacific Northwest is great. It is beautiful and we have many different environments to train in: mountains, desert, beaches, and cities. The flowering plum trees are beautiful from the air.

How do you feel when people call you a hero?

Uncomfortable. I am not a hero. The guys on the ground are. I am there to make their job easier.



Greek Culinary Traditions and Recipes

To the Zarkades family matriarch, Mila, food is love. And this is a story about love, and all of the ways we show it. Discovering, tasting, and experiencing Greek food is truly a joy for me to share with my readers.

SPANAKORIZO *Serves 6–8*

This Greek spinach and rice pilaf is bright and full of promise, yet hearty enough for cool evenings. It's often likened to a Greek risotto, creamy and starchy but without the constant stirring required by its Italian counterpart. It's sentimental Greek comfort food, and healthy to boot!

½ cup olive oil
½ onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ cup freshly chopped dill weed
1 cup cooked rice
10-ounce package frozen
chopped spinach, thawed
1 lemon, juiced
2 TB tomato paste
Salt

Heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil in the bottom of a large pot.

Add onion and garlic, and sauté for about 5 minutes.

Add dill weed and cooked rice.

Add package chopped spinach. Be sure to thaw it first.

Add the lemon juice and salt to taste.

Slowly add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil and stir.

Add tomato paste (about a tablespoon at a time) and stir.

Keep stirring until it looks and tastes delicious!

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FINIKIA

Yields about 5-dozen cookies

This cookie is made of almonds, coated in a honey syrup, and sprinkled with crushed almonds. They're particularly delicious if combined with a mug of steaming tea, a big comfy chair, and a good book.

Cookies

½ cup butter, softened
½ cup superfine sugar
Grated zest of one orange
½ cup corn oil
2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
1 ½ cups semolina
4 TSP baking powder
1 TSP ground cinnamon
1 TSP ground cloves
½ cup orange juice

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C) and grease cookie sheets.

In a large bowl, cream together the butter, superfine sugar, and orange zest.

Gradually mix in the oil and beat until light and fluffy.

Combine the flour, semolina, baking powder, cinnamon, and cloves; beat into the fluffy mixture alternately with the orange juice.

As the mixture thickens, turn out onto a floured board and knead into a firm dough.

Pinch off tablespoonfuls of dough and form them into balls or ovals. Place cookies 2 inches apart onto the prepared cookie sheets.

Bake for 25 minutes, or until golden. Cool on baking sheets until room temperature.



Syrup

1 cup water

1 cup white sugar

½ cup honey

1 cinnamon stick

2 TSP lemon juice

½ cup finely chopped walnuts

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, combine the water, white sugar, honey, cinnamon stick, and lemon juice.

Bring to a boil and boil for 10 minutes.

Remove the cinnamon stick. While the mixture is boiling hot, dip the cookies in one at a time, making sure to cover them completely.

Place them on a wire rack to dry and sprinkle with walnuts. Place paper under the rack to catch the drips.

Keep finished cookies in a sealed container at room temperature.

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Do You Know?

The first cookbook was written by the Greek food gourmet, Archestratos, in 330 B.C., which suggests that cooking has always been of importance and significance in Greek society.

Modern chefs owe the tradition of their tall, white chef's hat to the Greeks. In the Middle Ages, monastic brothers who prepared food in the Greek Orthodox monasteries wore tall, white hats to distinguish them in their work from the regular monks, who wore large black hats.

To a large degree, vegetarian cuisine can be traced to recipes that originated in Greece.

Many ingredients used in modern Greek cooking were unknown in the country until the Middle Ages. These include the potato, tomato, spinach, bananas, and others, which came to Greece after the discovery of the Americas.

KEFTEDES

Yields about 25 meatballs

This fried meatball—with its unique flavor provided by the herbs—is a versatile dish that can be served in many ways: on a platter of *mezedes*—small plates of food served in Greece with ouzo that are often compared to tapas—with pasta, or as a main meal with salad, *tzatziki*, and chips. *Keftedes* are especially good when served with a little bit of *mizithra*, a traditional Greek cheese, grated on top. That’s the Greek way!

Meatballs

2 pounds ground meat (combination of veal, pork, and beef)

4 pieces torn up white bread, or a half cup of bread crumbs, or a half a cup of crushed saltines

2 eggs

1 onion, minced

4 cloves garlic, minced

½ cup fresh mint, finely chopped

½ cup fresh parsley, finely chopped

1 TSP oregano

½ TSP allspice

Salt and pepper

¼ cup olive oil

Mix all ingredients together and form the meatballs.

Heat olive oil on medium heat in a skillet.

Briefly fry the meatballs, about 20–30 seconds on each side.

Set meatballs aside.



Sauce

½ onion, minced
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 TSP salt
2 cinnamon sticks
6 cloves
16-ounce can plain tomato sauce
4 TB tomato paste
1 TSP apple cider vinegar
1 cup water

In the same pan you used to fry the meatballs, sauté the onion and garlic.

Add salt, cinnamon sticks, and cloves.

Add tomato sauce and tomato paste.

Bring all of the ingredients to a low boil for about 5 minutes or until it's all blended.

Add the apple cider vinegar and water. Sauce will be thin. This is normal!

Return the meatballs to the pan. Cover. Cook on medium heat, stirring occasionally, for 45 minutes.

Uncover and cook for 15 more minutes. Serve with the pasta of your choice.

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 *Ideas for Book Groups*

In the past year, I've been able to "talk" to book groups via speakerphone during their meetings. What a blast! For so long, I wrote books and never really met anyone who had read them. It is such a joy to talk to women from all over the country. We talk about anything and everything—my books, other books, best friends, kids, sisters. You name it, we'll discuss it. So if you belong to a book group and you've chosen *Home Front* as your pick, please come on over to the Web site and set up a conversation with me. I can't promise to fulfill all the requests, but I will certainly do my best. And don't forget to join me on my blog and/or Facebook. I love talking to readers. The more the merrier!

Thanks!





Recommended Reading

Here are a few of the books that helped me understand the lives of American soldiers—both at war and at home—and their families. I thank all of these authors for sharing their personal stories with readers.

The Other Side of War

Jessica Caputo

Courage After Fire

Keith Armstrong, L.C.S.W., Suzanne Best, Ph.D.,
and Paula Domenici, Ph.D.

Once a Warrior, Always a Warrior

Charles W. Hoge, M.D.

While They're at War

Kristin Henderson

Band of Sisters

Kirsten Holmstedt

The Lonely Soldier

Helen Benedict

Nowhere to Turn

Daniel Hutchison

You Know When the Men Are Gone

Siobhan Fallon

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Reading Group Questions

1. In the prologue of *Home Front*, we see Jolene's early life and the incident that leads up to her parents' deaths. How does this scene lay the groundwork for her personality and her choices in the remainder of the book?
2. When Michael says, "I don't love you anymore," he wonders fleetingly if he'd said the words so that Jolene would fall apart or cry or say that she was in love with him. What does this internal question reveal about Michael? About Jolene?
3. When Jolene learns of her deployment, she is conflicted. She thinks that she wants to go (to war), but that she doesn't want to leave (her family). Can you understand the dichotomy she is experiencing? Discuss a mother's deployment and what it means from all angles—honor, love, commitment, abandonment. Can you understand a soldier/mother's duty? Do you think it's harder for a mother to leave than a father? Is there a double standard?
4. Jolene and Michael's twelve-year marriage is on the rocks when the novel begins. Did you blame both of them equally for the problems in their relationship? Did your assignment of blame change over the course of the novel?
5. Jolene worries that Betsy will see her deployment as abandonment. Do you agree with this? Think of yourself at Betsy and Seth's age: how would your twelve-year-old self have reacted to your mother going off to war?
6. When Michael sees Jolene for the first time in Germany, he is so overwhelmed by the magnitude of her injuries that he can't be strong for her. He reveals both pity and revulsion. Discuss his reaction. How do you think you would handle a similar situation?



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7. At home, Jolene can't cope with her new life. She can't reconcile the woman she used to be with the woman she has become. She wonders how it could be harder to return from war than to fight in it. What does she mean by this? A soldier gets a lot of training and preparation before going to war. Should there be more preparation for returning home?
8. Early in Jolene's homecoming, Mila says: "We all knew how hard it would be to have you gone, but no one told us how hard it would be when you came back." What do you think about this comment? Do we romanticize homecomings and thereby somehow set ourselves up for disappointment? What could her family have done to make Jolene's return an easier transition?
9. At the beginning of her physical therapy, Jolene asks Conny how she is supposed to forget about her injury if it keeps hurting. What does this question reveal about Jolene's personality and her attitude toward her injury? How does this attitude hinder her recovery? How does it help her?
10. Dr. Cornflower describes Jolene as a woman who has spent a lifetime in the Army getting what she wants from a system that doesn't want to give it to her. What does he mean by this? Do you agree? How is a woman's career in the military different from any other career? How is it similar?
11. During the Keller trial, Michael turns in the middle of his opening address to look at Jolene. Why did he choose this very public forum as the time to address the Iraq War with his wife?

12. Although the dire effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are as timeless as war itself, the counseling and support services provided to military men and women returning from war are often insufficient, and the public is often ill-informed about the vast consequences of the disorder. What did you already know about the disorder, and what insights did you gain from reading *Home Front*?
13. Discuss the various relationships formed between parent and child, from Michael's relationship with his daughters and his grief for his father to Jolene's relationship with Mila. Which struck the most resounding chord for you? Why?
14. On page 175, Jolene thinks about the word "heroes" and all that it means in the shadow of loss. For her, heroes were her fallen comrades. What is the definition of a hero to you? Who is one of your own heroes? How do our heroes reflect our values?
15. This book explores a lot of dramatic situations and powerful emotions. Has reading it changed you in any way? What was the most important thing you learned in reading this book? Who would you like to recommend the book to and why?