

I remember the first time I used email . . . and a guy named David Brown does, too.

David and I had been married several years and were living in Oklahoma. I don't remember exactly where he'd gone—maybe Korea—but I know he was on a ship doing his annual two weeks of active duty with the Navy reserves. The reserve unit's liaison called to tell me David could get email and gave me the address I should use. Since this was back in the Dark Ages of cyberspace, David couldn't just use his own account but had to go through somebody else on the ship. After a good deal of fumbling around, I finally figured out how to break into David's email account, and I wrote and sent him a message. "I did it!" I typed triumphantly. "I'm now email literate!"

The next day, I sent him another letter.

The day after that, another.

On the fourth day, it occurred to me David was probably writing back and I should track down his replies. That took more a lot more fumbling, but finally I uncovered his inbox. Sure enough, I had mail from David Brown: to my three letters he'd written six replies, some of which didn't make sense. I puzzled over them. Had life on the ship scrambled his brain?

Not until I got to the last letter—which, being at the bottom of the lineup, had actually been written first—did I realize what had happened. "Not so email literate after all," the first line read. "You've got the wrong David Brown."

This wouldn't happen now, but back then if both writer and recipient had AOL accounts, you didn't have to type in the @AOL.com. To make sure the guy on the ship would know whom my letters were for, I'd typed DavidBrown in the CC space. My

husband got my letters—and so did a stranger in Texas who wrote that he wished his wife would mow the lawn, too, and that he hoped to meet me someday.

No way, buddy.

Since then, David (the Oklahoma one) and I have written hundreds of emails to each other when the Navy took us apart, most of them when he was called back to active duty after 9/11. That November he was assigned to a ship based in Japan, and when his year was up, he was home only a few weeks before he went to Kuwait and then into Iraq just behind the Marine invasion. During those six months as I wrote to David and read his replies each day, I thought often about husbands and wives who'd gone through earlier wars with long, blank weeks or even months between communications. Like those women, my real dependence was on God . . . but it was awfully nice to have email.

As of April 19, David and I will have no more Navy separations. He's officially retiring after nine years of active duty and twenty-one with the reserves. The timing seems beautifully appropriate, letting go of one career to move into another as we begin work with the PRT. The military has given David plenty of adventures, friendships, and opportunities to be stretched in courage and faith—but it did seem those once-a-month reserve weekends popped up at the most inconvenient times. It will be good not to have to work around them.

As for me, sometimes I believed the stretching opportunities were fast approaching the snapping point, but I know God used them deeply in my life, too. Along with the spiritual side, those times of separation pushed me into doing things I might not have otherwise, like tax forms, email, and cranking a stubborn lawnmower into action.

Speaking of which . . . I wonder if the David Brown in Texas ever got his wife to  
mow the lawn.