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ughest

M

the fact that, thanks to Matt's gift of preplanning, I received two great Valentine's cards in the mail.

because he knew the delay in delivery might make them late.

by desks in the office and a city full of balloons and cutesy sayings and couples going out to romantic ones like these, I think of a phenomenal woman -- my aunt Pam -- and how she had the opportunity to see the world but didn't.

ed a tour in Iraq at the same time Matt did in 2004. It would be an understatement to say she was the mother of the little boy faced. I say "little boy" because, despite the fact that he's well over 6 feet tall these days, he was the sweet-faced towhead I used to chase around the yard with a plastic He-Man sword. But he grew up to have the perfect opportunity for a meltdown.

as tough as it is to think of Matt fighting in Iraq, my stomach tightens and I feel nauseated when I think about it. I think I'd be able to handle it, and as strong as I think spouses are, there is something about the thought that is short of amazing.

the town crazy person in her little Vermont village?

ly mailed packages to Josh, Matt and any other soldier or Marine she knew was serving overseas. And she began adopting service members she didn't know through organizations she found on the Internet. She made Valentine's Day cards to wounded soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. She made sure that his buddies were strung out on it.

ears into tangible, comforting good deeds that do our troops such a valuable service that it's difficult to believe and it made the time go by in such a way that Josh was home before we knew it.

oops. To this day, she's acting on behalf of men and women she's never met, showing her appreciation and love over time.

ved numerous requests from readers for an outlet where they can show their support for our troops. My website allows troops to register a message asking for the insignificant things we take for granted but that make life more like home. As much as I'd love to give Charlie 84th's address out, operational security won't allow it. I know that a number of Charlie 84th soldiers are registered there and would love to receive letters, and I want to report what they're doing.

entine's Day. I have a date. And a front-row seat to the latest "Thomas the Tank Engine" release on DVD. I have a job the Builder" blanket. Life is good.

ached at mbaeza@adn.com.

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