

Special Forces Dad Chooses a Very Special Child

Family Spotlight: A Military Family

When Jane met her then-future husband, Jamie, she was a 19-year old single mom with a six-month-old daughter, Emily. At the time, Jane and Jamie were both in the Army, on active duty in New York.



Jamie with beautiful daughter, Emily, a Jill's House guest.

"When we started dating," explained Jane, "Emily had already been diagnosed with severe cerebral palsy and global developmental delays. But, just as Jamie supported our country, he also signed up to be part of our family! Most people don't have a choice when it comes to being the parent of child with disabilities -- but Jamie did, and he chose us. He chose to be Emily's dad."

"From the very beginning, Jamie has stepped in as the most amazing father," continued Jane. "He has been serving our country now for 17 years. I just love the fact that in one moment he can be a super-tough special forces soldier, and the next he can be the most gentle and compassionate father in the world."

During those 17 years, Jane, Jamie and their family have moved eight times. Luckily, they learned about Jill's House last year prior to their move to Virginia, just shortly after Jamie's fourth overseas deployment to Iraq.

"During Jamie's deployments, caring for Emily, who is now sixteen, and her two little brothers, was both physically and emotionally draining," shared Jane. "But when Emily started going to Jill's House it was what we like to call the 'game changer' for our family. When Emily is home, we are constantly thinking about what she may need and try to anticipate what she wants, since she is non-verbal. During her stays at Jill's House we let those thoughts and worries go. We know she loves it there, and they love her. Even though she is non-verbal, she makes it clear that she's happy when we pull up to Jill's House because she starts making joyful little noises!"

Jane and Jamie also have two sons, William (five) and Preston (three). The boys miss their big sister while she's at Jill's House, but they get to do special things during those stays. "One thing that most people probably don't realize," explained Jane, "is that we can't always easily visit people in their homes because their homes are not always wheelchair friendly. So when Emily is at Jill's House, one of the big highlights of our weekends alone with the boys is to visit other families in their homes."

Emily especially enjoys the pool and therapy dogs while she is at Jill's House. "Emily is a teenager, and like any teenager, we know she likes to get away from us for a couple of days, too! What 16-year old wouldn't want a break from her parents and kid brothers? We were really surprised by this, as we had not anticipated her getting a break from us as being a sort of reverse respite. Jill's House gives our daughter such an amazing sense of independence. We honestly could not be more thankful for making such a huge impact on all of our lives."

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This special family enjoy their time of respite, each in his or her own way.