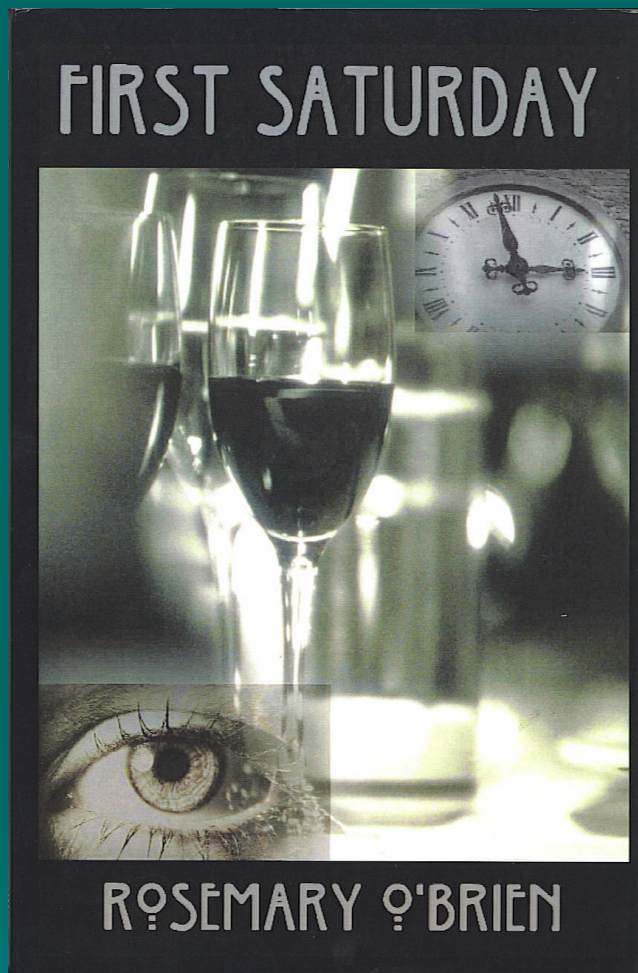


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# Novel



Audrey and her three closest friends from West Haven, Connecticut have always gotten together on the first Saturday of the month. They have shared life's highs and lows, but nothing has challenged them like the upcoming year will. Christine must confront a crisis with her teenage son, Morgan must make decisions about her career goals, Emma's dreams of motherhood seem over, and at 35, recently-divorced Audrey has just found that she has cancer. What follows is an account of an enduring friendship in a world where sometimes things happen when you least expect them and the only way to triumph over misfortune is with the help of good friends.

Published October, 2002 - Quiet Storm Publishing

# Magazine Articles



## Connections

Staff Sgt. Tavares Mays checks a telephone switch at Sather Air Base, Iraq. U.S. Air Force photo/Master Sgt. Will Ackerman

### Advanced Technology Brings Troops and Families Together

By Rosemary O'Brien

**“WHEN** you get to hear the voices of the people you love, it really makes an impact on your morale,” says Lt. James Anderson, U.S. Navy, who was recently stationed in Iraq near the Syrian border. “I would go nuts when I didn’t get a chance to call Jo Ann for three or four days. Then I would call her, she could unload and vent about all that was

going on with the family or Granny, and I would feel better.”

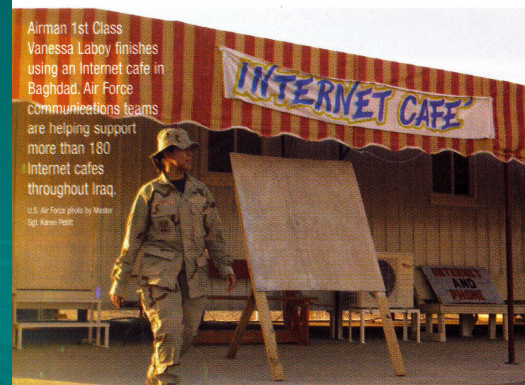
Lt. Anderson’s grandmother, who was in her nineties and lived with his family, had been ill and was dying while he was serving in Iraq.

“I spoke to her about four days before she passed,” recalls Lt. Anderson. “I told her not to wait for me, that I would be all right, and she died soon after our last phone call.”

That small comfort wouldn’t have been available to Lt. Anderson had he been fighting in WWII, the Korean Conflict, or the Vietnam War, when troops waited at least six weeks, and sometimes months, for letters from home to reach them in the field.

Thanks to advances in technology—and the know-how of service members stationed overseas—troops can communicate with loved ones on a regular basis. Indeed, service members “in the sandbox” may have access to everything from cell phones and digital cameras to satellite telephones and wireless Internet access. Moral, Welfare and Recreation departments, known as MWR to military members and their families, often provide satellite phones and computers for the troops to use, while families stateside can go to a Family Support Center if they don’t have computers at home. Here, they can send email and occasionally gain access to a Web cam for real-time communication with their deployed family member.

Understandably, time limits are imposed on troops using the services—typically 20 minutes for a phone call and 30





**HUGE** list of open houses & log raisings

# LOG HOME DESIGN IDEAS the great OUTDOORS

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find a log home in the middle of Manhattan, for instance," quips Bird. He believes they are best suited to the log home locale of lore — wooded areas, or waterfront property with a great view of a lake or the ocean — instead of in the suburbs or the city. Resort areas, like Colorado, Jackson Hole, Wyoming, or Sun Valley, Idaho, are known for their spectacular designs according to Murray Arnott, owner of Murray Arnott Design in Guelph, Ontario.

"The log homes built in the Eastern United States tend to be more manufactured, more traditional in design," Arnott observes.

Wherever you decide to build, keep in mind the following steps.

### **Make a wish list**

Before approaching a designer or log home supplier, sit down and determine your needs. How many bedrooms do you want? How many bathrooms? How should the rooms flow from one to the other?

"The floor plan needs to fit your lifestyle," Fink says. "Is this an older couple that doesn't want to deal with stairs, or a young couple with children? Maybe the couple with children would rather have the master suite on one side of the house and a

## Are you ready for your own log home?

If so, there are a number of things to consider and decisions to make before you can create your dream house.

Log homes are built all over the United States and Canada, according to Carol Fink of Alpine Log Homes in Victor, Montana. "We've built them in 45 of the 50

states so far," she says, "even in the warm climates."

But some areas lend themselves better to log home construction than others, according to Michael Bird, owner of Adirondack Design Associates in Saranac Lake, New York. "You wouldn't



# MILITARY SPOUSE

family • self • country

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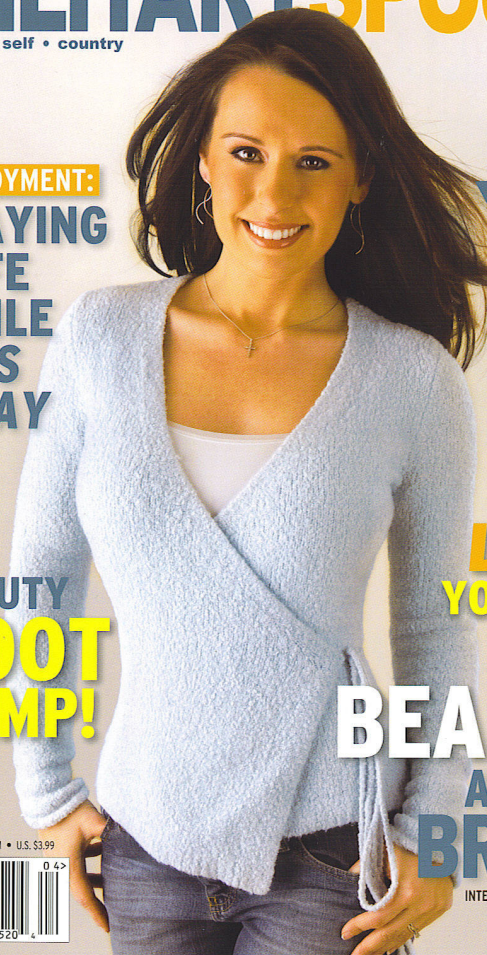
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## NEED TO KNOW



### "GO BAG" CHECKLIST

The following items should be kept ready in your family's "Go Bag" throughout the year:

- Bottled water. One gallon per person per day is recommended.
- Non-perishable foods such as granola or energy bars.
- Flashlight and extra batteries along with a battery-operated radio in case the power goes out.
- Necessary medications for your family members. It is helpful to jot down dosages and reason medication is prescribed.
- First-aid kit.
- Moist towelettes for quick clean-ups.
- Dust mask or a cotton t-shirt to help filter air which has been contaminated by fumes or other debris.
- Map and contact information, including the meeting place agreed upon by your family.
- Any special items such as childcare supplies.
- Copies of important documents in a waterproof container such as a zip bag. Documents should include items such as ID cards, passports, health records, marriage license, birth certificates, VA Loan paperwork, etc.
- Extra set of keys to your house and car.

### RESOURCES:

- Ready America - [ready.gov](http://ready.gov)
- Military OneSource - [militaryonesource.com](http://militaryonesource.com)
- FEMA - [fema.gov](http://fema.gov)



## Get Your "Go Bag" Going

Are you prepared for an emergency? Find out!

by Rosemary O'Brien

>> In our post-9/11 world, emergency preparedness is important for everyone. According to a recent survey by the National Center for Disaster Preparedness, 80 percent of Americans are concerned about new terror attacks in the United States. The problem is that only one-third of these same Americans are prepared for an emergency or unexpected evacuation. Are you prepared? Would you be able to safely evacuate your family in the event of a natural disaster or other emergency?

"This is not only an issue of terrorism," says Lt. Cmdr. Alan Alfonso, Assistant Disaster Preparedness Officer at the Naval Undersea Medical Institute. "An emergency situation could be caused by adverse weather or a manmade situation such as a gas leak in the neighborhood." Alfonso advises every family to have a kit prepared in the event of an evacuation for any reason.

So what should you pack? A "Go Bag" should include essential items necessary for survival. You can buy prepared kits, but Alfonso recommends tailoring your kit to fit your family. He also advises you check your kit seasonally at the very least to make sure food items and medications are current with regard to their expiration dates.

These are only the basic supplies necessary for survival. Each state has a department in charge of that state's emergency preparedness plans. Though they do not all go by the same name, some of the departments can be found by searching for department names such as Emergency Management, Department of Public Health or Emergency Preparedness Department.

"Once you build your kit, it takes minimal effort to restock and re-check it, much like seasonal maintenance on a snow blower or your pool," according to Alfonso. "If you think of it as family preparedness in the event of any emergency, you have the correct level of awareness."

Awareness is good and preparation is vital. If you prepare your family's emergency preparedness kit, or "Go Bag," you can make certain your family has all it needs to survive whatever surprise comes your way. **MSM**



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## Organized Business

by Rosemary O'Brien



"I've always been an organized person," insists Ranae Hughes, "so I decided to turn it into a business."

As a professional nanny, Hughes often found herself organizing her families' closets or children's bedrooms. Word got out about her skills, so, in the early 1990's, she joined National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO) and incorporated Organize This, her home-based professional organizing service.

"What I find is that a lot of people have time restraints. Everyone has some organizational skills, but many don't feel they

have the time. They look at the overall picture and it is daunting to them, so the room, the closet, whatever they need to organize, stays the way it is."

That's where a professional organizer comes in. An organizer helps you efficiently set up your house, room, or closet, then shows you how to maintain that order. Hughes sometimes gives a notebook to her clients at the end of a job, organized according to what she has done for them. This, she says, helps them maintain the space she has put in order.

Organize This clients reside all over the country, from Texas, California, and Chicago, to Hughes' home state of Idaho. Her specialization is home offices and just about anything for the house - from space planning to inventoring for insurance purposes.

"My first piece of advice" to someone considering this field of work as a career, "is to know what you're really good at," counsels Hughes. "Don't say you can organize a home office if you are [more] competent in accounting or business skills. Someone once asked me to organize a workshop, but I don't have any idea how a shop should be set up" so I declined the contract.

Hughes considers professional organizing a very viable home business.

Though there are many facets of organizing, some people prefer to specialize. Some organizers just consult - performing space planning then let you do the work. Others specialize in the offices or closets, setting up home businesses, even organizing photos, insurance, and doing inventoring.

"I am an overall kind of gal," Hughes chuckles. "I can do pretty much whatever a client needs for the home or the home office, or sometimes, outside the home." Recently she put her skills to work organizing the Dickens Festival in Garden Valley, Idaho.

Hughes says she knows one organizer, a chef in Boise, who specializes in setting up kitchens. Another loves photographs, and organizes clients' photos chronologically for them. "The nice thing about organizing is that it is a relatively new field as far as having the word 'professional' in front of it, but it has been done forever."

Professional organizers charge anywhere from \$20-\$150 per hour, depending upon the area of the country in which they live. "I take demographics into consideration," admits Hughes, "but I have a straight hourly rate." Most organizers charge an hourly rate for smaller jobs such as a room or an area. "I change my rate if the job is going to be larger such as organizing or inventoring an entire house. A large part of the job [as an organizer] is time, effort and the stress factor."

According to Hughes, a professional organizer needs to be organized in her own life, able to do physical work such as lifting, and has to tailor solutions to individual family needs.

"The main thing is to never be judgmental about disorganization or treat it as a moral issue, because it is not," says Hughes, who claims her job is part organizer and part therapist. "With professional families nowadays, there are any number of reasons why things are the way they are in people's homes. I compare it to any other private professional. You are going to see and get to know these people in ways many people do not see by getting into their personal and private things. You need to be able to make them feel comfortable so that they can trust you and the fact that you will help them organize their lives in all sorts of ways."

Rosemary O'Brien is a freelance article writer and author of the novel, *First Saturday*. She can be reached at [obrien.rosemary@worldnet.att.net](mailto:obrien.rosemary@worldnet.att.net).

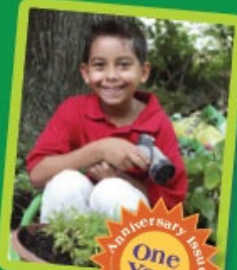


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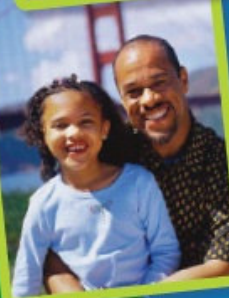
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## Nicholas' Blue Pizza

by ROSEMARY O'BRIEN, from CONNECTICUT

From the time my son was about a year and a half, he has been cooking. He does not stand by the stove with a spatula and a frying pan, but he does make salad, mix cake mixes, and make homemade pizza. I got this idea from watching my brother's daughter who is four years older than Nicholas. She was barely two when she would stand at the sink, on a kitchen chair, tearing lettuce for a salad.

A few years ago I found myself with a blue blob called "Dinner," and a smiling, cherubic face who created it. "There is no blue food," you say? Au contraire. You have never experienced The Blue Pizza. The main ingredient is creativity, not pizza dough. The technique is a loving touch, not rolling or tossing to make it rounder. And the cozy restaurant is my kitchen table. Let me explain.

When Nicholas was born, my brother advised me to get him involved in cooking as early as possible. His theory was that if a child helped to cook, he would be more interested in eating what he cooked. Besides, cooking is a life skill at which all of my brothers and I are very accomplished, if I do say so myself. Why wouldn't I want to pass down this love of creating to my child? Well, I followed my brother's advice and Nicholas, who is now eight, is a cooking fiend.

In January of 2002, he was about three months past his second birthday and we had just come off the baking season. Christmas cookies had filled our house, and been passed out to friends, family and neighbors. Because of this frenzy of baking, Nicholas was enamored with sprinkles. Colored sugar sprinkles in red and green were his favorites. He had sprinkled zillions of them all over—not only sugar cookies, but on butter cookies, chocolate fudge, even a batch of chocolate chip cookies. It wasn't necessarily traditional, but if it made him happy, who cared?

On this particular night, we were making homemade pizza. After the sauce and the mozzarella were safely spread out on the pizza dough, he wanted to add some sprinkles. When I tried to explain to my persistent child that sugar tasted terrible on cheese and tomato sauce, he became even more persistent and very upset.

Using the ingenuity of a mother with a very demanding child, I quickly ran through the options available to me—or actually, the options I could make up on the spot while the situation escalated. I finally pulled out the grated parmesan cheese and the box of food coloring left over from Christmas. Unfortunately, there was only one bottle left in the box... and it was blue. After my momentary revulsion at the thought of eating something with artificial blue coloring, I thought, "What the heck?," and dove in. The bowl came out. The cheese went into it and the blue food coloring was added on top of the cheese. As I mixed, my son became quieter, watching the transformation before him. When I finished, the cheese resembled dry Play-doh pulverized with a hammer.

As I watched Nicholas sprinkle the blue cheese all over his pizza, I wondered how I would ever eat this thing. In the end, he ate three large pieces of his interesting creation, all the while admiring the pretty blue color. My husband and I had to close our eyes while eating, but the taste was the same and our son was happy—now we make pizza our way.

Since then, I have been blessed with a second creative child. Perhaps he has learned from his brother, but he, too, is enamored with sprinkles. So far, he has not created any super creative food items involving bright colors other than cookies, but I look forward to the day when the pasta crunches with colored sprinkles or even chocolate chips. I may not eat it this time, but I can pretend with the best of them.

My brother was right. If you teach your child to cook, even the simplest of dishes, he will eat with gusto. Enjoy the creations, within reason, and one day you may come home to a full-cooked dinner made by one of your teenagers. Let's just hope it isn't anything blue with chocolate chips.

**Rosemary O'Brien** is a freelance writer and the author of one novel—so far! Living in Connecticut with her husband and two beautiful sons, she enjoys creating foods of a different color with her children, playing with various craft items, and writing her next novel. As the author of *Writing Military Mom* (<http://writingmilmom.blogspot.com>) and proud military spouse, she is also active in the military spouse community.



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