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Many roles

In more than a dozen years in the Coast Guard, and six years in the U.S. Army before that, the Bensons have moved multiple times.

They met when Stacey was attending Winthrop University in her native South Carolina, earning a degree in marketing communications, and Larry Benson was being trained for special forces duty in the U.S. Army. They married in 2002 and have a son, Zachery, now 12.

After six years of deployments — including missions where Larry Benson could not tell his family where in the world he was going — the sergeant first-class was serving with the Army Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. When it came time for a decision on re-enlistment, he instead made a lateral transfer to the Coast Guard. The change forced a drop in rank, but meant he could be closer to his growing son.

The Bensons moved to Astoria in July. Prior USCG assignments have been in the southern Outer Banks of North Carolina, on the Great Lakes at Buffalo, New York, and in Rhode Island.

Over the years as a service wife, Stacey Benson has been a wedding coordinator, a wholesale travel package seller, a fundraiser, a project manager, a cake baker, a photography prop maker, a photographer, a graphic designer and a secretary.

When she was named the 2015 Armed Forces Insurance Coast Guard Spouse of the Year by Military Spouse magazine, she used the platform to help spread the word to employers that military spouses are good hires because of their versatility and resilience.

Capturing service members' stories

Her graphic design and



PHOTO COURTESY
WINEGEART PHOTOGRAPHY

Stacey Benson is a new Astoria resident whose thoughts about life as a military spouse are featured in a just-published book.

'IT HAS BEEN TOUGH, BUT WE HAVE MADE IT WORK, AND IT HAS MADE US STRONGER AS A FAMILY.'

photography skills continue to be in evidence in her work for the past two years in marketing for The Semper Fi Fund, which provides financial assistance and support to wounded, critically ill and injured members of all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families.

The organization takes its name from the Latin motto of the U.S. Marine Corps, "always faithful." Its supporters work to ensure injured veterans from all branches of the country's armed forces have the resources they need during their recovery and transition back to their communities.

Benson cultivated her photography skills through college. While she is proud her images for the group have been displayed in advertising campaigns in New York's Times Square, she enjoys sharing her photos more intimately.

"When I am able to travel for the Semper Fi Fund to different events around the United States, I get to use my passion to help tell our service members' stories through the lens of my camera," she said.

"I not only help create compelling images for our marketing department, but I am able to gift those images to the Semper Fi Fund families. More times than not, families never have an opportunity to hire a professional photographer, so when I travel to events, I make sure to carve out time for those families interested in stepping in front of my camera.

"As a thank you, I am able to gift those families beautiful images from their shoots that will last a lifetime. It's an amazing feeling when I get a personal message telling me that their images are amazing and they have them hanging within their homes."

'We have made it work'

Stacey Benson grew up on the family farm, "riding tractors, shooting guns, fishing and 4-wheeling"; she credits her family with instilling her work ethic, her independence and her desire to help others. She is mindful of the enforced separations and the waiting-and-worrying dynamic of service spouses.

"It has been tough, but we have made it work, and it has made us stronger as a family," Benson wrote in her chapter of the book. "Due to military life, we have been lucky enough to live in some amazing places, establish some lasting friendships, and have had some remarkable experiences.

"Knowing back in 2000 what I know now, would I have selected a different path for my life? I would not want to change a single second, because this life has shaped me into the person I am today." CW