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Perseverance in the midst of trials

April 01, 2010 ¦ Sarah Deskins

Julia Anderson knows suffering and has faced her fair share of challenges. She has also, however, experienced God's provision and faithfulness.

In March 2007, she lost her unborn daughter, which would have been her fifth child. While devastating and life-changing, little did Anderson know that a mere seven months later her husband of 10 years, Ryan, would take his own life while serving in the U.S. Navy aboard the USS Sterett.

For Anderson, the moment she was notified of her husband's death drastically altered her life and the life of her four children — but she never questioned God's plan. Saved at a young age, Anderson's faith was resilient as she faced the challenges of beginning life as a single parent while mourning the loss of her spouse, because she recognized the many ways the Lord had prepared her life for dramatic changes.

"I can't say enough about what God did for me — the things He brought me through. I've gotten to experience that peace that passes all understanding," said Anderson.

Prior to facing tragedy and while living in San Diego, Anderson and her family began attending a local church where the pastor invited her to a ladies Bible study. Anderson recalls learning that the topic of the Bible study was faith and her response being, "I guess I could always use a little more faith!" She had no idea how much she would soon need to rely on her faith in the Lord.

Following the loss of her unborn child, Anderson moved across the country to Virginia to be

near family. It was during the time of recovery that she began to establish the strong network that would eventually transition to support her after she lost her husband.

When she became a military widow, the U.S. Navy offered Anderson and her family extensive provisions as she transitioned into her life as a single parent. Anderson recalls the day she learned that she was entitled to education benefits.

“Coming here was no question,” she said of choosing Liberty University last year. “It was immediate. I knew I was moving to Lynchburg and attending Liberty. I thought, ‘Watch out Liberty! Here I come and I am bringing my four kids!’”

Anderson had previously attended LU in the late 1990s, but put her education on hold to get married and start a family. More than a decade later, Anderson is back at Liberty — a place she remembered fondly — and has resumed her education as a Kinesiology major.

For Anderson, returning to Liberty to complete her degree was made possible through military benefits and the Liberty University Heroes Fund Scholarship. The scholarship is offered to service members who were injured during the Gulf Wars or to the spouses of those who died during that time and is funded through private donations.

“The Heroes Fund Scholarship is sustained through the donations of those who choose to give back to service members and veterans through education in Liberty University’s Residential and Online programs,” said Emily Foutz, LU’s director of Military Affairs.

Having the opportunity to complete her degree was a blessing to Anderson in the wake of grave trials. “The knowledge that I would receive college benefits was a big sigh of relief,” she said.

Much different than her early days as an undergraduate student living on campus, Anderson now strives to balance excelling in her classes and raising her four children: Payton, 10; Bailey, 8; Gavin, 5; and Lisette, 4.
“I know that if I don’t do my homework, I am going to fail [my classes], but if I don’t take care of my kids I am going to fail as a parent,” Anderson said. “A lot of times I feel overwhelmed, but I also know that beyond a shadow of doubt, I am supposed to be at Liberty finishing my degree.”

Anderson looks forward to the future as she continues to raise a godly family, anticipates graduation and strives to impact the lives of others through sharing her story and the message of God’s faithfulness.