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Dr. Darlene Gravett Releases New Book “Army Brat, Army Bride, Civilian: A Life”

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – A former English professor, graduate school dean, and associate provost at Gardner-Webb University is unveiling her memoir, “Army Brat, Army Bride, Civilian: A Life,” in which she shares the benefits and drawbacks to military living and the challenges her family later faced as civilians. Dr. Darlene Gravett has experienced just about everything the military life has to offer, including countless relocations, deployments, and transitions.

“I always knew I wanted to write a book,” shared Gravett, a self-proclaimed Army brat. “I just wasn’t sure what it would be about.”

As she contemplated the lives of military persons, and their spouses and families, the subject of her future book emerged quite clearly. “The more I thought about it, I knew I really wanted to write this down and let people know what living that kind of life is all about,” Gravett explained. “There are lots of wonderful and lots of frustrating things about being in the military and moving around.”

Born in Roanoke, Va., Gravett still struggles with the question, “Where are you from?” She said it is one of many common denominators among children who were raised in the military. “Military brats don’t know how to answer that question,” she explained. “Because while we were born in one place, most of the time we haven’t lived there very long and certainly don’t remember anything about it.”

As an Army sergeant’s daughter and later an Army lieutenant’s wife, Gravett has lived in more than 35 different homes throughout the United States, Central America, and Europe. She discusses a time when she and her husband, Second Lieutenant Ray Gravett, decided to move onto a nearby military base because the housing was better than what they were renting and it would be much closer to Ray’s work. Within three months, Ray was deployed to Vietnam and Darlene was forced to vacate the military housing. “You make what you think would be the best decision for your life, and then the Army makes another decision that you weren’t expecting,” she offered. “Initially, Ray never intended to stay in the Army. He was just going to do his two years and get out. But, he decided he liked it. So once he decided to stay in, I just adjusted to it. I guess because I was used to the life, it didn’t bother me.”

Married 11 years without children, the Gravetts believed it wasn't meant to be. When Ray returned from his second tour in Vietnam, it wasn't long before the couple learned they would be having a baby. "Once [our daughter] Leslie was born, we knew we didn't want her to have to move around the way I did growing up," Gravett said. Before Ray left the Army, Gravett completed her doctorate. "When Ray retired, we moved to the Greenville/Spartanburg area and I became an English professor at the age of 42!" she marveled. "I loved it. We were finally settled."

After working for 10 years with North Greenville College (Tigerville, S.C.), she was ready for her next challenge. Gravett agreed to take a position with Gardner-Webb in 1989 as an English professor. "Making the decision to leave the only long-term home we had known was so tough," she shared. "We had never been able to spend that kind of time with people and get to know them so well. We felt like we were leaving family."

Eventually, the Gravetts discovered that Boiling Springs, N.C. was exactly the hometown that Darlene had always desired but had never quite found. "After more than 24 years here, when people ask me where I'm from, the most accurate answer for me is 'Boiling Springs,'" she said. "Even though that's not exactly true, I feel more connected to this community than any other."

After serving for years as an English professor and dean of the graduate school, then later transitioning to serve as the University's Associate Provost for Schools (and even serving as a town commissioner), Gravett made the decision to retire. Her book project was still a dream that she desired to make a reality.

"I tried to get it done, and as an English professor, I felt as if it was never finished," she laughed. "You continue to tweak and edit and can never get it exactly right. So that's when I realized it was time to fish or cut bait. I started looking for a publisher, found LifeRich, and the book was published in December 2013."

Much like her life story, Gravett learned to navigate the challenges of the book project with the resilience and determination that has come to define her character. She understands the life lessons her experiences have offered and considers herself fortunate to have been taught by them. "I think the hardest part was putting everything together in a format that would make sense," she shared.

A book signing for "Army Brat, Army Bride, Civilian: A Life" is planned at the Dover Memorial Library on Feb. 20 from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. in the Group Study Room. For more information on that event, contact Mary Roby at 704-406-4298. Her book will be available for purchase at the event and is also available to order online at amazon.com or at Fireside Books & Gifts, located at 212 S. Lafayette Street in Shelby, N.C.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University blends a liberal arts core curriculum with more than 55 major and minor professional programs of study, a comprehensive academic experience that flows from our Christian commitment to intellectual freedom, service and leadership.