"*I'll be Home for Christmas*"

By Chaplain Allen Vaughan

Many of you know the classic Christmas song, "*I'll Be Home for Christmas*." It's a familiar song around this time of the year, and it has been re-recorded numerous times since it was first popularized by Bing Crosby in 1943. The songs lyrics begin as follows:

"*I'll be home for Christmas. You can plan on me. Please have snow and mistletoe, and presents on the tree. Christmas Eve will find me, where the lovelight gleams. I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams.*"

Originally released during World War II, this song became an emotional favorite for military personnel serving and fighting on foreign soil, far from their homes and families. And, throughout every conflict in which our nation has been engaged, "*I'll be Home for Christmas*" has become one of the most requested songs of all time during the holiday season.

Perhaps the emotional "hook" that catches us when we hear the song, especially those who have served overseas, is the desire to be with the ones we love on special occasions such as holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries. And yet, we also know the disappointment that inherently goes along with military life.

I don't think anyone enters into the military believing that it is going to be easy. But, I do think one of the most stressful aspects of this lifestyle, both for the service member and their families, is managing our expectations and dealing with disappointment when our expectations are not met.

We are promised one thing, like: "Our deployment dates are on schedule, and we should all be home by Christmas." But the disappointing reality usually ends up being something completely different, like: "The deployment has been extended, so Christmas dinner will be served on the mess deck this year."

Another experience that nearly every military family shares in common is "coming home." This may be a mom or dad, a husband or wife, coming home after a long deployment or a short underway period. "Coming home" may also include spending time with family while on leave. While, for others, "coming home" may mean returning to the United States after several years spent overseas.

The experience of "coming home" carries with it a mixture of emotions, which may include: joyful anticipation, mild anxiety, fearfulness or even ambiguity. These emotions are related to the stress mentioned a few paragraphs earlier, regarding managing our expectations and dealing with disappointment when our expectations are not met.

The Christmas song expresses this kind of expectation: the expectation of a perfect Christmas reunion with snow and mistletoe and presents under the tree. But it also conveys both hope and sadness; hope that we will have the "perfect" reunion we've pictured in our minds, and sadness at the very real possibility our perfect reunion will not live up to our expectations. "*If only in my dreams*," so says the songwriter.

As long as we serve our nation in the armed forces, there will always be disappointment. There will always be a missed birthday, a missed anniversary, or a missed family gathering around the holidays. This is the reality of the life we have chosen. The key is to create joyful moments and beautiful memories, as often as we can, with the people we love.

Whether you are coming home from a long deployment or coming home after a long day at work, take every opportunity you are given to build stronger relationships, better communication and a peaceful atmosphere of love and support in your home. If you need a little help in this area, you can always contact a chaplain or counselor.

I pray that you will have a blessed and peaceful Christmas and that, when you "come home," all of your expectations will be met or exceeded.

Pet of the Week

The Pet of the Week this week is Loblalie. We call her Lola, which is fine by her. She is a real diva and wants everybody to know it. Lola is playful, full of personality and would be a great fit for almost any home.To find out more about Lola or any animal at Pets Are Worth Saving (P.A.W.S.), contact them at 243-9996, by e-mail to usskittytalk.yokosuka@gmail.com or visit the P.A.W.S. website at www.pawsyokosukajapan.com.

Photo courtesy of P.A.W.S.

NaNoWriMo unleashed in The Sullivans Elementary School

By Steve Parker, The Sullivans Elementary School Public Affairs

As National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) was coming to a close at The Sullivans Elementary School, 25 students in Jane Pollard's fourth-grade class wrote feverishly in an attempt to take on the novel-in-a-month challenge.

Pollard's students are part of the Young Writer's Program and are attempting to complete a novel in one month by writing down their ideas, just their ideas. No grammar, no punctuation, no editing. The children are encouraged to save all that for later and have only one goal for the month, completion.

Students from Jane Pollard's fourth-grade class feverishly type out their thoughts and ideas during National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo).

Photo by Jane Pollard

After the end of the month, the children use the product as a rough draft and a vehicle for further lessons on editing, spelling and grammar.

"It's far more meaningful and ultimately a more effective teaching tool," said Chris Angotti, the Young Writer's Program director.

If you were to visit Pollard's class, you would notice an almost unearthly quiet that fills the small corner room of the fourth-grade hall. A few children will pause and look up, as if to acknowledge the visitor's intrusion into their personal domain. Most do not. The children are seated in their chairs and one can scarce believe it, writing enthusiastically? Their pencils barely scratch the surface of their zebra books, moving quickly back and forth in more or less horizontal lines. The resolute attention the children are pouring out onto the paper is immediately evident.

"The students write more fluently and use much more detail in their everyday writing," said Pollard, a 12-year veteran teacher. "They become more aware of story structure and characterization. Each of my students has written about 6,000 words in one month's time."

"I really liked the class, it was fun," said fourth-grade student Sydney Mazat. "It made writing easy because you had it all planned out."