



OPERATION LOVE REUNITED: PHOTOS OF MILITARY FAMILIES

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Operation Love Reunited is a breathtaking way that photographers use their talent to give back to military families. The goal is simple: helping military families cope through pictures by photographing their homecoming. Learn about this amazing program through one photographer's experience, and lens.

"Giving back to those who want nothing more than to come home."

These are the words plastered across Operation: Love Reunited's website.

OpLove was started in August 2006 by Colorado photographer Tonee Lawrence. Since then, they've served thousands of military families across the globe. OpLove helps the long months of deployment go by a little faster by capturing unforgettable moments of these brave men and women. This non-profit organization is made possible by the professional photographers who donate their time and talent asking for absolutely nothing in return. We spoke with an

OpLove photographer to learn more about the appropriately named Operation: Love Reunited.

The photographers behind the lens

Nicole Spangler is the owner of [Nicole Spangler Photography](#). Her work has been described as modern and ethereal. She specializes in weddings, high school seniors and family photography. She's also one of many OpLove photographers. About why she chooses to volunteer with OpLove, Nicole says, "I knew I wanted to give back to my community by using my photography. I started doing some research and found Operation Love. I loved the idea of capturing military homecomings for the families who have served our country. Every time I photograph one, my life is changed for the better."





How it works

When a potential client — a family member who has learned that their deployed loved one is coming home — contacts a photographer via the website, OpLove's wheels start turning. Nicole explains, "A potential client contacts me through Operation Love's website to see if I'm available. Typically the significant other who is stateside knows what month their loved one is coming home. As the return month gets closer, the date changes a few times. I usually know the final return date about two days before they arrive. I make sure to get to the homecoming location — usually the airport, a hangar or a large school facility — about an hour before the soldiers come home. I like to photograph the family of the deployed soldiers as well as the surroundings. Once the soldiers arrive, I photograph the family coming together, the tears of joy and the family reunion."

OpLove offers three kinds of professional photography sessions. Pre and Mid-

Deployment sessions, Homecoming sessions and Fallen Loved Ones sessions. Each one's goal is to offer a boost or a lift in the form of breathtaking photos. The Homecoming sessions, for example, gift military families 15 free digital image downloads.



A moment in time

It's impossible to capture the heart of this program, but being the lens behind it has been repeatedly described as life changing. Nicole shares, "My first homecoming was probably the most memorable. It took place at a military base hangar. We were surrounded by Blackhawks and Chinook helicopters. They're huge! When the soldiers arrived, the hangar doors were opened and this gorgeous natural light poured in around us. It was so emotional seeing my clients reunite after one year."



Operation: Love Reunited

People often tell military families, "I don't know how to thank you." OpLove offers a way to do just that. Nicole adds, "All of my military homecomings have left an imprint on my life. I have so many wonderful memories from each session, I could go on and on. Each family has made a sacrifice for my freedom and I'm honored to capture these moments for them. It's my small way of thanking them."

▶ OpLove runs on donations and volunteer time. You can learn more about the program at their [website](#) and support and [donate](#) to the program directly online.