



Each year the USNA Southeastern Pennsylvania Parents' Association honors our Firstie Parents at the April meeting. One part of the ceremony is reading a letter from each Firstie that presents an overview of their last four years and recognizes the role their parent/s had in their success.

A suggestion was made that these letters would be inspirational for both incoming appointees and their parents. Posting all the letters from the last few years in their entirety would be too much to publish and read from a web site. Instead, excerpts from some of the letters will be included. Those that have been chosen represent common thoughts or unique perspectives. The names of the Firsties are not included for reasons of privacy.

I am sorry that I can't be with you tonight, but I hope this letter will let you know how I feel about you and my time at the Naval Academy. It is hard to believe my four years "By the Bay" are almost at an end.

I've learned to prepare for the worst, count my blessings, never take a single thing for granted, and never pass up an opportunity to make someone else smile.

I sure wish I could have found time to get more sleep!

I don't think you could have done a better job preparing me to face the moral and mental challenges the Academy has thrown at me. To this day, whenever I find myself in a tight moral bind, I find myself pausing for a second to ask myself, "What would Dad do in this situation?"

I think I must have received over a thousand care packages, during plebe year alone. At one point, I remember calling you, Mom, and asking you to stop sending care packages because my roommates and I couldn't consume all the food at the rate you were sending us. We did enjoy them! Thank you!

It was wonderful to see clearly after my PRK, and missing class for the operation was a nice side benefit!

I know it was frustrating for you when I got down and talked cynically about this "wretched place". I want to thank you for all you have done to support me. You were supportive in just the right way...enough so I knew you supported me but not so overbearing/over involved that I did not learn how to take care of myself, and become ready to be an officer in the USMC. You've taught me to take responsibility. You've set me on the right track to reach my goals. Thank you for your love and support. Know that I love you.

My most memorable event as a Midshipman was Ring Dance weekend with my friends. We partied like rock stars, and Mom told me, not to "do anything she wouldn't do" with a certain female. That was probably the funniest-ever thing I've heard you say.

Knowing what I know now, what would I do differently? I would have become more active in the Brigade and my Company.

I have learned how to take on the open ocean armed only with a 40 ft sailboat and crew of nine friends.

My biggest challenge was realizing what my priorities were - and sticking to them. I can easily become distracted with other happenings like weekend ski trips or learning how to play ice hockey or creating a paintball empire. My challenge was to stay focused on my grades and realizing time is what you make of it.

One of the best memories I have is of our 1145 p.m. water balloon launching sessions. Those Firsties never saw it coming as they stumbled back from downtown.

What would I have changed? I really have no regrets. My memories are all positive. If I could change one thing, however, I would be to challenge myself even more.

The best gift I received from my family was the camera from Christmas 2004. I have taken and sent countless photos allowing me to tell my story at the good USNA.

I missed a lot of things while I have been away from home, but it is because of my family's strong support that I have been able to stay close to their hearts. I love you guys with everything I have.

Like everyone else here, I have encountered various challenges along the way, but have learned a great deal about perseverance and determination. It is easy to get caught up in the day-to-day responsibilities and deadlines, which is why I had to constantly rely on the help of God rather than on my own strength.

Mom, you brought me a fruit and yogurt parfait from the fitness center you belong to and gave it to me after the game. Isn't it always the little things we remember? I am eternally grateful for all your love and support and I praise God for blessing me with such an amazing family.

Plebe year was the most frustrating. However, spending time with my friends was priceless.

I know that when I was happy and doing well you were the most happy too. However, your support for me was constant during the tough times, as well as the good times. You've been there for me, beginning with Plebe summer when you sent dozens and dozens of great care packages and then attending nearly every football game for my entire four years at the Academy. Oh yes, I hope you know how much I love that 2002 Ford Mustang! Mom and Dad, I couldn't have accomplished all this without you. Thank you for all your love and support.

The main reason I chose the United States Naval Academy was because of my desire to serve my country. The fact that it's free was gravy! I know that made you happy!

I am really looking forward to becoming an officer. It will be an honor and a privilege to have the responsibility of leading young men and women, and to take charge of millions of dollars of equipment.

Our family is fourth generation Irish. Each generation has served this nation proudly. For as long as I can remember, my grandfather told me about his dad being awarded the Silver Star for combat in WWI. My grandfather, a decorated Vietnam two-combat-tour copter pilot,

retired as an Army Lieutenant Colonel. My father was a Naval Aircraft Technician. My younger brother will enter West Point in July. It should be no surprise, that since I was a young boy, I wanted to serve my country as well!

And of course, the best surprise I had was my gift of an Orange and White Chevy Camaro.

I am excited about what lies ahead, but sad about what I am leaving behind because I have made some of the best friends at the Academy and I am sad to leave them.

I wanted to fly jets since I was eleven and saw Top Gun for the first time. Dad, I also remember when I was in middle school you took me on that Tiger Cruise onboard the Eisenhower. I think it was all part of your grand scheme to get me to choose Navy and the Naval Academy

Dad, do you remember sending me boxes and boxes of chocolate during plebe summer? I don't know if I ever told you that I don't even like chocolate that much.

I've had some good times. Army/Navy was always a great! Thanks for all the chili Mom! The Army/NAVY Chili parties will be forever immortalized in my lucky bag biography.

I probably should have studied more than I did, but I don't regret a single night I blew off work to go out with my company mates. I won't remember the poor results on the exams I, but I will remember my roommate climbing on top of the bar at Sean Donlon's to replace the Army Cover with his own. I'll also remember making snow angels on Worden. However, the thing that tops them all was Service Selection night at Rams Head. My entire company gathered to celebrate the culmination of our four year journey together.

My biggest challenge at the Naval Academy was finally admitting that I had to give up something I loved in order to achieve my dream of flying off aircraft carriers. I had never before admitted that I couldn't do something until I was forced to accept that I couldn't continue to play varsity sports, keep my head afloat academically, take care of someone important to me, and be competitive for Navy Pilot. I wanted a future in Naval Aviation and sometimes you have to make those sacrifices. Yes, I have grown up and matured as a person. I have come to understand that nothing is more productive than the "last minute" and that this place does something unique to everyone.

I feel many things as I look forward past Commissioning and becoming an officer. I feel confident, scared, humbled, and excited all at once.

Dad, I remember your constant reminders that I will never be able to go back and do this ever again so I should make the most of it. I know you were talking about academics and I did study a fair amount for my Double EE, but I made the most out of other aspects of my Academy career too. The bartenders at Sean Donlon's are on a first name basis with the Firsties of Feisty 15.

The most fun I've had as a midshipman was during my oceanography internship my Firstie year in San Diego when I participated in the Navy Marine Mammal Program.

I have been waiting for my commissioning for 8 years now. Having been an enlisted sailor in the fleet, I always wanted to be on the other end of the spectrum. Seeing the good and the bad in fellow officers has provided me with an outlook on what it means to be a Naval officer. Wearing khaki's is just a minor detail, it is making a difference on the lives of the "blue shirts" is what means the most to me.

You know that my biggest challenge at the Academy was academics and a D or the occasional F seemed to define my six and twelve week marking periods. It was most frustrating to have no weekends on certain occasions and having to be back early for formation. It was a struggle for me to remain academically sat, but it always worked out in the end. More importantly, I have learned a lot more than academics over the last four years. I've learned to accept others for who they are and not dwell on their many differences. I have become dramatically more responsible and have an increased willingness to ask questions and become more involved with those around me.

Mom, I remember the most exciting thing that I received was a whole birthday cake in the mail from you.

As a senior in high school, I was rather lazy, and I never would have received my appointment without your help. I forget exactly what I didn't do right during the application process, but I remember, Dad, you got pissed off and told me I was never going to get into the Academy because I wasn't trying hard enough (along with a few other choice words). Well, you know that was the best way to make me do something - to tell me I can't, so I worked harder and I got my acceptance letter before I turned 18.

Finishing plebe year felt so good because I knew I made it through the hard part.

I know you share my pride as I look forward to graduation, and my greatest accomplishment - being selected for the Marine Corps.

I'm excited about becoming an officer, but at the same time nervous that I might let those that report to me down. This is my motivation to try everyday to better myself so that will never happen, when the time comes and it really counts.

Mom and Dad, you supported me all the way through my years at the Academy. You were willing to give advice or listen to anything I had to say. You would always tell me that you were there for me and when I had a problem or if I needed help, you were just a phone call away. Of course, you always told me that I didn't call enough and then when I called I got all these questions. I really appreciate that you were there for me when I needed a break and a ride home the first two years,

At times, the last four years have been frustrating - not being able to be my own person, not to go out at night and have the worldly experiences that people my age usually do. However, I've had many great times too. In fact, they are really too many list in this short letter. But, they have one thing in common, they all involve my friends here. I've made some lifelong friends.

Here I am four years later, I'm graduating, and I've kept my sanity - two of my greatest achievements.

I know you have shared in my successes, whether athletic, academic or otherwise. I feel very grateful to have received your continued support in whatever I did, no matter how many times I messed up. Even when I was most down and out, you were always there - no matter what - exactly what a family is supposed to do.

At the Naval Academy, I have surrounded myself with friends for a lifetime.

Challenges and frustrations have been a significant part of my education.

I've learned a lot in the last four years. I have become more flexible, able to adapt to changing circumstances and become better at planning and thinking ahead and learned how to attack complex problems and solve them. I've learned how to ask for help when it is needed, how to be patient with others and when to hold others accountable. The value of time has become precious to me as I learned how to cope with an exceptionally demanding schedule. I even learned how to sleep standing up and how to abuse caffeine. The Naval Academy taught me that I could break through what I thought was my own limits.

Mom, you honestly sent me the weirdest care packages I've ever seen. I mean seriously, every time I opened one I felt as though I was accepting a delivery to an organic foods store, or a pet store specializing in exotic birds and birdseed. OK, maybe I'm being a bit harsh here. It's all in good fun, since I know each shipment was packed with love as well.

Mom, you've always been there on the other side of the phone, no matter what time of day or night, giving me encouragement when it was needed and a kick in the pants when needed as well.

Thank you for those weekend trips home. You made up my bed and room just as I left it and letting me sleep in for ridiculous amounts of time, then returning me with a load of baked goods to bring back to the Yard.

Mom, you have showered me with more love and support than any son could ever hope for, and for that, I will be thinking especially of you as we draw nearer to graduation. If I never showed you how I truly feel, let me say it now: Thank you from the very bottom of my heart, and as I take the next step into my adult life, remember it is you who believed in me all along, and you who deserve to share every bit of my joy during this special time. I love you, Mom, and will always remember how you were there for me during my time at the Naval Academy.

I have always had the most respect for those who have been a part of the military, especially my grandfathers. I view all who have been a part of the American military as heroes. So I felt the best way to join their ranks was to come to the Naval Academy.

The marshmallow guns that you sent during plebe year were the best!

There have been countless times when nothing seemed to matter as long as I was hanging out with my friends. For instance, when we all would move to the same table after lunch was over and sit there talking until class started in the afternoon.

Knowing what I know now, what would I do differently? I would stay away from girlfriends as much as possible!

One thing I didn't count on prior to I-day was how much you were a part of my everyday life. It was one of those things where you don't realize how good you have it, until you don't have it anymore. Coming to this realization has made my relationship with you a lot stronger and put a different aspect on family holidays and vacations.

Unlike many of my classmates who have wanted to graduate from the Naval Academy since before they could walk, my decision to pursue four years "by the Bay" did not begin until my junior year of high school. When asked this question of why they chose to attend the Academy, many Mids will invoke stirring images of God and Country. However, for me, that is not enough. I do hold both God and Country in high esteem, but the fact remains that I can serve them both in many other ways than seeking an appointment to the Naval Academy. In the end, what really drew me to the Academy was the challenge and the hope that overcoming

the trials and tribulations of a Midshipman would somehow mold me into the man that I hoped to become. A man that myself and those around me could be proud of. In short, I wanted to be somebody, and I knew that graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy would place me on that path.

With the exception of plebe year, these last four years have flown by.

Not everything at the Academy was smooth sailing. As a midshipman, it is absolutely important to have a clean room and a sharp uniform at all times. As a high school senior, I was voted the messiest person in the entire class. My room and the back of my car looked like a war zone. As my dad always said, both were a "health hazard." My high school uniform was not any better. My shirt was never tucked in, the top button on my shirt was never buttoned, and my tie hung loosely around my neck. It took some time to correct these problems. Eventually though, after a few years of rough uniform and room inspections, I finally figured out that just a few minutes of work every day would keep my room clean and my shoes shined.

My favorite experience these last four years has to have been Herndon. The second that midshipmen combination cover was hoisted on top of a twenty foot obelisk, a huge weight was lifted from my shoulders. I can not even begin to explain what it felt like to know that there would be no more chow calls, come-arounds, and daily rates. The only thing that that can surpass that will be when I toss that same combination cover high into the air on May 25th.

I am extremely excited and a little anxious about becoming an officer and leading enlisted men and women in the Navy. I have thoroughly enjoyed every chance that I have had at leadership these past few years, and I cannot wait to get my division. At the same time, though, every action and decision I make as a leader becomes a lot more real when I step outside the Academy's gate.

A day or two after the Brigade reformed every August I always found a note up in my bag from Mom, congratulating me on making the next step in my journey, and offering me advice on how to make it through the upcoming year.

I remember that when I was about to come to the Academy, my primary concerns in life were sports and girls. Now, four years older and wiser, I've come to the realization that my primary concerns are sports and women. It appears I've become a man.

The best time I had over the four years was beating Air Force that first time plebe year at FEDEX field.

In high school I thought you were pretty weird, and it took coming here to change that perspective. My goodness, you parents suddenly got so smart! Maybe it is clichéd to observe that I grew closer to my parents only after I moved out, but it certainly was the case for me. When I was younger I always found it really difficult to please you, but I haven't felt that way for some time now. Whether that represents a change in me or in you isn't as clear-cut.

Mom, the biggest thing that I have learned from you is compassion and genuineness. You taught me that you cannot be someone that you are not, and that it is important to accept others as they are and not as you want them to be.

I don't know if you remember, but in 8th grade you wrote a letter to me before I graduated. In that letter, you told me that you were proud of me and everything. After that, you wrote something that I won't ever forget. You said that when I was born you were not sure if you

were going to be a good father or not. Let me assure you, that both you and mom have done everything possible for me. If you had not said anything in that letter in 8th grade I would have assumed you were ready to be a dad since the day you were born, that's how good of a father you have been.

Please know that although I have not made the popular or easy decision regarding my future career, I am doing what will make me most happy in a setting where I can have the greatest impact on the lives of others. I know that you both will always be there supporting me, and that is the greatest thing that you can give me. As I lead Marines I only hope that I can be for them what you have been for me... and once I have kids of my own (all 9, all boys) I hope that I will be able to raise them just as you raised me.

Coming home was always what I needed to recharge my batteries. Dad, you said you could always tell when I was coming home because the refrigerator would be stocked with Buffalo wings and my other favorite foods!

Without you, I probably would never have been able to survive this place. I think the most frustrating thing for you was dealing with me when I hated this place because when you hate it, you really hate it!

The most interesting thing that I received from you over the last four years goes all the way back to plebe summer. I remember quite well getting a care package full of underwear because the laundry center had lost all of mine. Needless to say, no one inspected my care packages after that evening. Only at the Naval Academy would someone get a care package like that.

My greatest achievement over the last four years was getting the serve selection that I wanted.

I feel I've matured more than any of the people I graduated with from high school. No other place could have contributed to my development as a leader and manager in such a tremendous way, and I know that I have prepared myself for what is to come.

In these four years, there have been challenges. There have been weeks where at the beginning I wondered how I would make it through. There have been days where I stood at attention and got my ass chewed for mistakes, and days where I've failed tests. There have been days when I didn't want to do something, and days I didn't get any sleep, days where I woke up and felt like I couldn't physically get out of bed. I've had black eyes and bruises and sprained ankles and elbows, burnt eyes and pulled teeth. But when you add up all those days, it shows the character it takes to still be here, and that I've come out a better person for it all. My greatest achievement I guess, would be who I am today - a summation of all those things - of all the experiences that have led up to this point, both good and bad, both at USNA and not. Because it is what I have achieved now that will allow me to continue to achieve in the future, both as a Marine officer, as a civilian somewhere after and as a mother. (someday, not anytime soon, don't worry!).

I loved my CSNTS Sailing cruise to Newport, I loved hiking the mountains in Japan, and I loved playing in the woods at leatherneck (except for the ticks).

So naturally, one must ask, would you change anything? There are a very few things that come to mind. First, I would have brought hair gel with me to plebe summer. People break out pictures of "my do" sometimes, and all I can do is laugh. Second, I would have tried boxing during plebe summer instead of D&B. A little extra coordination and quickness wouldn't have hurt.

Of course, at sometime, you'll have more little grandchildren to care for, but who knows when that'll happen. It is something important to me, and I want to pass on to my children the values that you both have passed on to me.

What was the most fun over the last four years? Definitely traveling - Charlotte, Charleston, Boston, Norfolk, Jacksonville, King's Bay, Quantico, San Francisco, Orlando, St. Louis, San Diego, Houston, Hawaii, Rome, London. They weren't kidding when they said, "Join the Navy - See the World."

I must have done enough of the right things because I'm graduating and received my first service selection choice, Navy Pilot. That alone is a great achievement.

I know that you too have had frustrating times over the last four years... like during Plebe Summer. However, do you remember seeing me in uniform for the first time during Plebe Parent Weekend? You were so happy!

I wanted to come to the Academy to serve the country and lead others in doing the same, and I owe my sense of duty and patriotism to my strong upbringing.

I truly feel that the man I have become over these four years is the man I will be for the rest of my life, and I only hope to live up to the example set by both of you guys.

The friends that I have made in my company have been the best part of the entire experience. We are all like a family with thirty siblings at this point. I never expected that I would form these kinds of friendships, or be so well-accepted within a group I respect so much. My best memories are the experiences with my friends, whether driving cross-country to cheer on Navy Football, crawling from bar to bar in downtown Annapolis, or just sitting around talking in each other's rooms instead of doing homework.

If my experiences have taught me anything thus far, it is that I can face any obstacle and achieve success because I have you as my parents.

Climbing Herndon and being at the top with my two best friends would be my most memorable event as a Midshipman. The pride and sense of accomplishment reflected by my parents is something that I will never forget. It made me feel good and very special, I love watching you smile like that.

Without the support of my family, I honestly do not know if I would have made it through the Academy. There were many times when I wanted to quit and transfer to another school. I was worried that I was not getting the full college experience; I even went as far as applying to other schools. But with your guidance, I chose to stick with the Academy and I could not be any happier.

Some of the things that made the difference were every time Dad dropped me off you would say that you were very proud of me and every time Mom said goodbye over the phone or through email, you would scream GO NAVY!

Mom and Dad, you tried so hard to make me see the great opportunities that were open to me. I know that you went out of your way to make me happy and for this, I am truly thankful. You are simply the greatest, and without you, I never would have even made it to the Academy, let alone get through it. You provided a perfect guideline, and in the future, I hope that I can be half the parents you have been for me.

I had many ups and downs over these four years, sometimes struggling with a particular academic course or varsity athletics, and I know it was frustrating for my entire family but especially you Mom and Dad. One thing I could always count on was your never ending support.

I could actually sense happiness and pride in your voices when I called to tell you I got Navy Pilot, it was awesome.

Mom sending me random cards or newspaper comics was always appreciated and as was Dad's accepting attitude towards talking over Instant Messenger in the morning. We had our own routine that we both enjoyed, and who knew, my Dad would become a computer guy!

These last four years have been life-changing. I assume that going away to college is a maturing process, no matter the school, but I dare say that my experience at the Academy has been something extraordinary.

The best time at the Academy for me would have to be my experience as a Plebe Summer Cadre Member. It was an experience of a lifetime.

You were there to keep me focused, and I can't begin to imagine what miracles my grandmother's prayers have wrought. I wish that I could express my gratitude in more concrete terms, but suffice it to say that I love you with all of my heart.

You always call to see how I am doing, and you are always willing to listen to me complain. When I go home, you greet me with open arms and build your schedule around my plans. Your interest and involvement in my life shows me how much you care and I will never be able to thank you enough. I wouldn't have made it this far without you. God has blessed me with the best parents in the world.

One of my greatest was keeping a positive attitude during the rough times and those many long nights deciding if this was the right place for me. Looking back, I wouldn't have spent all that time worrying about leaving during plebe year.

Mom and Dad, I want to say thank you. I know you have had more than a few frustrating times when I was thinking of quitting and it was hard for you to relate to my situation. You made many trips to the yard for a healthy dose of encouragement. I know you were happy to watch me come to grips with this place and finally find my own way to stay sane and stay here.

I always knew I had a place to go to and someone to call. You two have really understood about the time commitments I have here and haven't expected a call more than once a week or so. It is nice that you knew it was not because I didn't want to call. I love the way you always have a mini celebration every time I get home. I'll always look forward to coming home to you.

It goes without saying that entering the Academy was a humbling experience, however, gaining self-confidence in myself while acquiring leadership skills were certainly part of the "growing pains" of Midshipman life.

In closing, I hasten to add how very grateful I am to both of you who have been of monumental support for these past four years. Through your prayers, encouraging emails and letters as well as your understanding of my time constraints and general lack of return communication and your patience dealing with the stress of broken bones, lots of homework....I thank you Mom and Dad.

