

West Point Women's History Month Luncheon
26 March 2010
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Thank you/Welcome

Thank you all for taking time from your schedules to attend this celebration. Presumably you are all here by choice. But if you're attending under duress, I hope someone else picks up the tab.

Thank you Colonel Diane Ryan, Majors Casey Moes and Megan McSwain and Michele Nadeu-Schaff for your gracious invitation. I am honored to be here.

Each trip back evokes a myriad of memories and emotions. There are some things that never change. Driving around the Bear Mountain/9W circle last night, I was overcome with that sinking and slightly nauseous feeling I used to get as a cadet returning from leave.

Thanks to Facebook a few of my '87 classmates insured that others in the class around the world saw the advertising for this event. For the record, I really did provide a picture taken within the last decade.

I am a believer in getting out of the comfort zone -- as I am today. As a ski instructor in Park City, I am much more accustomed to ski boots than heels, favor gortex over linen, and much prefer Patagonia to Prada. Perhaps it's the altitude ... or maybe some would say "attitude".

Writing Women Back in History—This Year's Theme

“Recognizing the achievements of women in all facets of life – science, community, government, literature, art, sports, medicine and the military – has an enormous impact on the development of self-respect and new opportunities for girls and young women.”

The past shapes and forms us. And at times it entertains us. It provides a source of power and fuel for our dreams. By understanding the glories and inequities of American history it helps us learn who we are.

Role models renew our sense of optimism and increase confidence in our own ability to succeed. They set examples for us, and our daughters and sons. We draw strength and inspiration from those who came before – and those remarkable women working among us today. They are part of our story.

This is especially true here on the banks of the Hudson River. West Point is a place where bridges to the future are built from a foundation where the past is always present.

When I was a cadet in the mid 80s, there were six women on West Point's Faculty and Staff: Drs. Sue Tandy and Bonnie Bennett (DPE), CPTs Barbara McMillan, LouAnn Nanni (TAC DEP), and CPTs Gayle Watkins and Connie Genung (Academic Dept—BS&L and History). These women embodied in our all too human world, the traits and qualities Pallas Athena represents in the Greek's mythological world. They are leaders who beget leaders and so, too, belong to the fold of "the bright-eyed", goddesses in their own rights of wisdom, warfare and crafts. The trajectories of West Point Women graduates began with the strong, insightful and inspiring contributions and coaching these early goddesses of West Point shared in their aims to ensure the successful integration of women...and the integration of successful women.

About Me—Know Your Limits and Ignore Them

I have a passion for change and a need for speed (and being outdoors).

In 1999, Ted, my classmate and spouse, and I decided to pursue our business careers in two cities we love -- Boston, Mass and Park City, Utah. The former for its metropolitan heartbeat, New England charm and "chowda", intellectual & ethnic diversity, and the Red Sox. Park City for its laid back attitude, mountain lifestyle, and proximity to seven ski resorts.

Ted joined a fast-growing technology start-up in Utah and I had been recently promoted to Vice President of Logistics and Global Customer Support for a publically traded hardware technology company just northwest of Boston. It was a job I dreamed about after b-school—strategic influence, P&L responsibility, international travel, teams in various locations, strong leadership, a company ice hockey team and a nice compensation package.

In Utah, we bought a house at 7000 feet with a magnificent view of the Uinta Mountains and rented a place in Boston. Our plan consisted of one of us flying east or west every other weekend. In 12 months we would reevaluate and decide where to live--together. Six months later I was flying west more than Ted flew east.

Visiting Park City, I went to what is now known as the Utah Olympic Park—the site for the luge, bobsled and skeleton events for the 2002 Winter Olympic Games. I watched people “slide” down this ice culvert at 70 mph. Working my way down the side to the end of the mile long snake, I saw a newspaper article taped to a window with the headlines “IOC Approves Women’s Bobsled for 2002 Games.”

I started asking questions and convinced a bobsled “pilot” to give me a “ride”.

Riding in a bobsled is like getting in a metal garbage can and rolling from Redoubt 4 to the River Courts—it is violent, noisy, and fast. A pure adrenaline rush—you either love it or are extremely scared by it, never to try it again.

As a young child, I had Olympics dreams. First as a gymnast like Olga Korbut and then as a diver like Greg Louganis. A frightening diving accident in middle school left more mental than physical scars, and I quit the sport.

At age 34, I found my sport, and had one long shot to become an Olympian. I did not want to say, “would of, could of, should of”—so I decided to just do it. As Wayne Gretsky, the great one said, “You miss a 100% of the shots you don’t take.”

I flew back to Boston, met with my boss and our CEO, thanked them for the wonderful opportunities they afforded me at GenRad. I shared I had one chance to make my Olympic dream come true and the rest of my life to work. And that I was resigning to pursue that dream. They grinned as they both had once played minor league baseball and too once dreamt of athletic glory in the major leagues. When I shared the news with my department, they thought I was crazy.

So began an uphill climb for a downhill dream.

About Bobsledding

Bobsledding is one of the original Olympic sports. From its beginning in the late 19th century as an exclusive winter pleasure, it has now evolved into one of the most physically and mentally demanding sports in the world.

It's like Formula One racing on ice. Imagine traveling almost a mile in less than 60 seconds at speeds approaching 80 mph (now 90 in Vancouver). Crews are subjected to a pull greater than 4-Gs—more than an astronaut aboard the space shuttle feels.

Bobsledding is a world of multi-million dollar tracks, precision engineered sleds with drag coefficients more slippery than a Ferrari and razor sharp runners built with sophisticated metallurgical process. From the top level of physical condition of the athletes to the intense competition to gain every technical edge, no other sport can boast of being a true mixture of sport, science and technology.

Women's bobsledding is a two-person event. A bobsled team includes a pilot and a brakeman. From a standing start; the crew pushes the sled (approx 425 lbs) in unison on ice for approx 50 meters. This distance is typically covered in less than six seconds and speeds of more than 25 mph are reached as the crew leaps into the sled prior to the first corner.

I quickly learned the importance of sharing my dreams openly and loudly.

While only two slide down the track, it takes a team of many more to get you to the start block.

That team formed here at West Point with Coaches Jerry Quiller and Scott Richardson and Dr. Nate Zinsser. I wrote to Q with an introduction, a dream, and an explanation of wanting to learn how to sprint. (One thing you should know, I

was not a runner in any sense of the discipline). Within 48 hours of receiving the letter, then sprint Coach Scott Richardson researched bobsledding, called me and issued the operations order. He invited me to West Point initially for six weeks of intense training.

Staying with friends stationed here, the 3x day works outs commenced:

- 0600 sprint session with Richardson—which include pushing a VW bug down by the river;
- 1200 strength & plyometric sessions with Coach Knute Hjentes, a veteran of four Olympic Games in the discus;
- 1545 work out with the track team.

It was a little like being back in Cadet Basic Training—bottom dragging, sleep deprived, perpetually hungry and being pushed to ones limits.

My friends suggested I call the Center for Enhanced Performance. Dr. Nate Zinsser answered the phone. In one rapid fire burst, I introduced myself, my goal and the purpose of my call. He asked, “How much do you weigh?” Dumbfounded and sent back to my cadet days with a flashback to height and weight tests in the barracks hallways, I responded. He replied “ Isn’t that a little light for a bobsledder?” Maybe so I said, but I am strong, fast and very hard worker. “ He told me to meet him in his office in an hour. Nearly a decade later, Doc Z, one of the country’s leading sports psychologists, remains my dear friend and mentor.

In December 2001, I competed with Shannon Harnett, my brake women an 8-time World Highlands Games champion, in the Olympic Trials. As we waited what seemed like an eternity at the on-deck position prior to our fourth and final run on the second day of trials, I paused for a moment to look around and to breathe in all of the energy prior to focusing on the track.

That moment is forever cemented in my mind. The crowd at the start—family, friends and supporters from Park City--Ted my husband, my mom and dad, Doc Z, all cheering and Col Thayer (my dog) barking. The signs waving, the cow bells ringing, and the butterflies fluttering.

It was at that moment I learned that life is not about the breaths you take ... but by the moments that take your breath away.

I drove personal records on both runs that day. We finished fourth in the trials. The top two teams qualified for the 2002 Olympic Team and USA # 2 with pilot Jill Bakken and brakewoman Vonetta Flowers, won the gold medal in the Olympic debut of Women's Bobsled.

It was an awesome adventure, one from which I learned the importance of knowing one's limits ... and then ignoring them. It led me to places I have never been physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally.

11 years ago I left shoreline of Boston for the mountains of Park City with the gut feeling that the natural beauty of the state and its abundant recreational opportunities would elevate my overall quality of life. Within a few months, I called Park City home. The quiet mountain town brought me closer to ski runs, mountain trails, nature and community on a daily basis. Having lived in seven states, this sparked my connection to community, drew me into nature, and gave me a sense of well being that permeated my life and re-focused my career path.

Wanting to give back this community, I became the Executive Director of the People's Health Clinic, a non-profit focused on providing health and medical care to uninsured residents. While I knew little about health care delivery and the practice of medicine, I had the business acumen and leadership needed to transform the organization's business model to create financial stability ensuring access to healthcare for many. It seems that our elected representatives have forgotten that access to affordable health care is a moral issue not a political one.

Genius of Porcelain on Steel:

Porcelain on Steel: Women of West Point's Long Gray Line was borne out of my experience as a high school volleyball coach in 2004.

For pre-season conditioning I developed a training regimen consisting of: sprinting, plyometrics, strength training, stretching and team-building exercises. Regardless of the skill level of my athletes, my goal was to ensure we were the best-conditioned and disciplined team in our league.

In addition to preparing my team physically, I too had a goal of getting back in shape after having given birth to my daughter, Carlyn Ann, 6 months earlier.

Several of my teenage girls showed up to the first practice wearing tank tops with spaghetti strap bras, open skate shoes and a considerable amount of jewelry. Not what I had anticipated at a high school in a ski town obsessed with fitness and the mountain lifestyle.

Within the first 15 minutes of practice, like a three-round shot burst, I issued a few rules:

- 1) The 3B's rule (no this is not the Be Bold, Be Brief and Be Gone rule)—no breasts, butts or bellies are to be visible while training, practicing, playing or anything else volleyball related.
- 2) Athletic bras and shoes are to be worn and tied. I found myself having to show some high school girls how to tie a pair of sneakers (a lost "skill" caused by Velcro straps and flip-flops).
- 3) The third rule was push-ups. One of the girls queried: "What type of push-up—"a man push-up"? As far as I knew and learned from Drs Tandy and Bennett there is only one type of push up. We all assumed the front leaning rest.

At the end of that first week, I was exhausted and concerned but also inspired.

Why This Book

Americans are bombarded with images of women selling everything from beer to cars. Nothing wrong with doing that, but it is “how” it’s done that concerned me. Young women searching for role models may have difficulty seeing past the “sex sells” mentality that ties a woman’s worth to her looks. At that time nearly ubiquitous publicity garnered by the likes of Britney Spears, Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan helped to create an underlying belief that one has to “sell” their body and looks to be deemed successful. Sexual allure is enshrined as the Rosetta Stone of esteem, confidence, power and success.

Concerned about whom some of my athletes admired, I began thinking about some of the women that I went to school with (*name a few in the audience*) and served along side in the Army. Those women are role models, and if my team learned about some of them maybe they would consider pursuing paths that they had not previously been exposed to.

Research by psychologist Dr. Penelope Lockwood concluded that women need role models more than men, and women benefit more than men from having same-gender examples of success.¹ Imagining one’s own potential is not on the radar screen for young women who lack role models. For many young people of both genders, the journey to develop one’s potential often begins with an understanding of what is possible. Meaningful role models, both in and out of military uniform, reveal possibilities.

Inspired to share the stories of West Point Women, *Porcelain on Steel* introduces a group of role models who are ordinary women, not celebrities, but have extraordinary stories of their journeys of perseverance and integrity.

¹ Lockwood, Penelope. (2006). [“Someone like me can be successful”: Do college students need same-gender role models?](#) *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 30, 36-46.

While numerous books about West Point, its history, and its graduates have been published, no single book focuses exclusively on the stories of the **Academy's women graduates**. Only five books out of some 10,000 have been published solely about West Point women. Four are individual stories: three are non-fiction and the other a young adult fiction. The fifth is academic in nature and the basis of Lance Janda's dissertation for his doctor of philosophy degree, *Stronger than Custom: West Point and the Admission of Women*.

1. In the Men's House by Carol Barkalow, 1980
2. Dress Gray by Donna Peterson, 1982
3. Tough as Nails by Gail Dwyer, 1981
4. Battle Dress by Amy Efaw, 1989 (a young adult fictional novel)
5. Stronger than Custom: West Point and the Admission of Women by Lance Janda

Putting the Book Together

The group of women selected for the book spans the range of classes that graduated women from 1980 through 2007, and contains a mother and her daughter. The inclusion of a wide variety of experiences and voices, both inside and outside the Army, reflect a spectrum of post-West-Point life history for all graduates.

Each chapter of this book could be a Foreword to each graduates own book, should she write one.

Publishing Odyssey

18 months ago best-selling author John Grisham told me to prepare for rejection and lots of it -- the first 15 agents and 16 publishers he approached said "no" to him! Unfortunately, I surpassed his high water mark for denial. In the process I learned that getting published is worse than finding a date for ring weekend.

Patience has never been my strength, but perseverance has. I knew all I needed was one yes.

Ironically that one yes came from a Navy veteran and a retired Marine Lt. Colonel Dennis Lowery and Jim Zumwalt, co-founders of Fortis Publishing -- all from an introduction made by Hae Sue Park, my dear friend, classmate and ski teammate. Fortis, as some may know, is Latin for "strong, courageous and resourceful". Dennis & Jim are committed to ensuring the stories of West Point women are not written with invisible ink. I think we make a great joint team.

So who are a few of these good women

Take for example **Dawn Halfaker '01**. As a combat military police platoon leader in Iraq, Dawn lost her right arm in an ambush. She questioned her ability to continue serving her country. Yet the retired young captain found another way to secure and protect the peace. She founded [Halfaker & Associates](#), a growing \$10 million company dedicated to providing national and homeland security services.

There is **Lillian Pfluke '80**, a retired Army officer. Three years after surviving breast cancer, Lil cycled nearly 6,000 kilometers cross-country with Lance Armstrong and the Tour of Hope to raise awareness of cancer. She then applied her physical prowess and entered the 2006 Master World Bicycle Track Championships where she smashed the world hour record on the velodrome. Recently, Lil founded [American War Memorials Overseas](#), Inc, a non-profit group dedicated to preserving, promoting and documenting America's overseas wartime legacy of non-government war memorials.

There is **Lissa Young**, '86, an Army aviator qualified on three different aircraft. As the commander of a high altitude search and rescue unit in Alaska responsible for the tactical war fighting response force in mountain and arctic environments as well as for extracting stranded mountain climbers off of North America's highest peak, Mount McKinley. After 16 years on active duty, selection for promotion to lieutenant colonel, and permanent assignment as BS&L professor, Lissa was asked to resign her commission because of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. She said, "My sexuality put me in violation of an Army policy, and I had no recourse for appeal, other than to launch a campaign against the policy, which I refused to do. I was 40 years old, and half of my life had been spent dedicated to serving the Army. I did not want to spend the second half of my life attacking it. I also knew that I did not want the

rest of my life to be defined by this single moment.” Lissa chose to embrace her dismissal as an opportunity to begin again. She is completing her doctorate at Harvard University studying the History of Science and how war has shaped the discipline of Social Psychology.

Jackie Stennett, '90, grew up in South Florida. the daughter of a Jamaican immigrant. At a very early age, Jackie's mother instilled in her the importance of education. Jackie was set on attending the best undergraduate college that could prepare her to become an architect—until she received a brochure from West Point. Jackie has a fundamental belief about the impact of service, particularly as it relates to the education of children. “Every child, not just those born into privilege or wealth, should have a role in defining the course of their nation and their world. Their words should be heard, and through advocates' involvement, we can help to amplify their voices.” Today, Jackie is a social entrepreneur working with *LeadAmerica*, a national youth organization.

Acknowledgements

A single chapter about a person provides a mere glimpse into a life. It is not her life's story. There are two graduates who have died in combat, 1st Lt. Laura Walker '03 in Afghanistan in 2005 and 2nd Lt. Emily Perez '05 in Iraq in 2006 whose stories of service, courage, and sacrifice are missing from this collection. Their deaths are too recent and too painful, and so not included. I, and many others look forward to their stories being told in the future.

Continuing the Work/Honored Role Series

Between 1980 and 2009, 3,397 women graduated from West Point and have served selflessly in the Nation's armed forces. They are soldiers and wives, mothers and daughters. They are doctors, lawyers, teachers, clergy and entrepreneurs. They are athletes and artists, cancer survivors and coaches.

As I embarked on this writing journey six years ago, I quickly had more stories than I could possibly tell.

In October I began a series titled "Honored Role". For most of these women, West Point and their experiences in the Army have served as a launching pad that allowed them to make significant contributions to their communities.

We know of the many leaders, icons, history makers, star athletes and celebrities. We know less about those that served our Nation. My goal is to change that.

“The Corps Has” (Be Prepared to Adjust Fire)/Conclusion.

Today the corps is 666 women strong (14.3%). There are 106 women on the staff and faculty, representing 18%.

As old graduates, we are fond of saying “The Corps Has.” The Corps has—gotten stronger especially since women arrived, competed, performed and led as cadets and as staff & faculty.

The biographies of the women who shared their stories are a mere sample of the total. A recruiting poster for West Point states: “Much of the history we teach was made by people we taught.” West Point’s women are making history. While women may have changed the face of West Point, they have left untouched the ideals of duty, honor, country, and service to our Nation.

Thank you and Beat Navy!