

## '80s Ladies recall first year experiences at USAFA

Checkpoints magazine sent an email to the women of the Class of 1980 and asked them to respond to a few questions. We received several responses, which are printed here in their entirety.

The questions included:

- 1) Did you have a sense that you were a part of history when you came to the Academy in 1976?
- 2) What made you want to be part of that first group of women among the Cadet Wing?
- 3) Do you feel it was it a particular challenge for you and the other women, seeing as the Academy was unaccustomed to having female cadets?
- 4) What lessons did your Academy experience, and your experience as one of the first female cadets, teach you?
- 5) How did that experience change your life, do you feel?
- 6) Are there any stories you can recall from your first year that perhaps emphasized the unique experience that the female cadets encountered that Doolie year?

Sue (Henke) Laushine

- 1) Yes, I knew that it would be historic to have the first class of women at a military academy. I graduated from high school the year before and was dismayed to find that they did not take women. No one in my family was military so I had no information. I enlisted in the Air Force because of that only to find that, once I was at Basic Training, the academy was opening to women. I applied through the enlisted ranks and started that first year. I think I was the only prior enlisted airman to come right to the Academy without going through the prep school.
- 2) Being in the first class of women at the Academy was not a priority for me. I wanted to come to the Academy because I came from a very poor family and I saw the Academy as a way to obtain a first class education as well as experience many of the other opportunities available. Being prior enlisted, I saw serving in a military as a wonderful opportunity and a small price in exchange.
- 3) I did not see that it was a particular challenge because of my gender. I found it rather amusing that people got wrapped around the axle about so many issues including bathrooms, uniforms, hair style/length, physical standards, etc. Just as today we are getting wrapped up about the new transgender/homosexual issues. Attitudes of individuals were the only real issue. Having grown up with a single, disabled mom, I was very independent, capable and believed I could be whatever I wanted. I found the traditional thinking a bit bizarre. This was 1976, after all.
- 4) The Academy taught me what it teaches ALL cadets regardless of gender. I loved the Academy. I took every class available. Graduated with 199 credit hours by double overloading almost every semester. I was like a sponge. Not sure I retained everything. Sure would like to repeat some of my courses with more life experiences to relate to the subject matter. Unlike some of my female classmates, I did not feel prejudice against me. Nor did I experience any sexual pressure. I dated classmates and

upperclassmen and never had that issue.

5. Being in the first class of women to graduate from USAFA did impact my life. Mostly, because other people see it as a big deal to graduate with the first class and that we were groundbreakers. I did not feel that I did anything extraordinary by being in the first class. Like I said, the Academy gave me so many opportunities that I would not have had otherwise and I was just grateful to have been able to attend.

6. One experience I had during freshman year left me with an idea of the prejudices that were out there. A general was scheduled to make a visit to the Academy. He wanted to meet with some female cadets so several of us were selected. We put on our skirts, pumps, white gloves and berets and marched over to Arnold Hall. He asked us what we could possibly contribute to the Air Force. He did not believe that women would contribute anything worthwhile. I think we were all a little flabbergasted but managed to tell him that we could contribute as much as any of the men. He was not convinced. Fortunately, throughout my Air Force career, I did not meet many people like him. I worked in Special Operations for a good portion of my career and was never treated as anything but equal. My only complaint has been that it is still very difficult for women to have a family and a career in the military. Most of our higher-ranking female officers are single with no children. Our male counterparts, on the other hand, are seen as more stable, and therefore, better leaders if they have a wife and children. It became increasingly difficult to balance the two. I left active duty after 13 years because, as my husband and I rose in rank, it was clear we were not going to be able to stay together. I finished my Air Force career as a reservist IMA because of this. The Reserve program was a great fit and very rewarding. It's just a shame that there is still such a double standard in this area. My story is not particularly interesting but wanted to share it since it will probably differ from many of the ones you will receive. I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to attend USAFA and serve in the USAF.

Kathleen Utley Kornahrens

1) The press certainly made it seem so. There were so many cameras pointed at us, and reporters following us around. They didn't help our cause to be treated the same or accepted. Our faces in the papers and magazines mostly resulted in upperclassmen in our faces.

2) I wanted to do something different with my life. My father was career Army, my mother Navy and my brother went to Vietnam. Certainly being in the military was not different, but the Academy option for women opened horizons for me to make my mark.

3) There are no words, or are way too many, to explain the challenge. From ill-fitting boots to being called something meaning female dogs as we walked the marble strips, there were constant obstacles.

4) I learned what a group of pioneers, albeit accidental pioneers, can do. I certainly never grew up planning to be a USAFA cadet but had tools (discipline, belief in myself, family support, belief in a greater goal than my own) to sustain me through the rigors and the challenges. I appreciate that USAFA taught me so much about personal strength, camaraderie, following and leading and the value of service.

5) I believe in change when appropriate, in support of others through their challenges and knowledge that opportunities in life cannot be orchestrated but one's best self is the greatest asset when opportunities arise.

6) Originally the Op plan 76-75 (the pink plan, as it was called, because of its pink cover) was forecasting for the admission of 44 women. Those female cadets would be one flight within one squadron or one squadron, possibly 41<sup>st</sup> Sq. on its own. But more sound reasoning prevailed. Calculating that the Air Force Academy was to provide 16 percent of women to the overall Air Force, and the Air Force at that time had approximately 600 women, then 96 should graduate. With an attrition rate of about 35 percent ... then the initial acceptance should be 150. On June 28, 1976, 157 of us walked up the Bring Me Men ramp.

Our experience toward acceptance into the cadet wing was very much a joint effort. Not any one of us could have done it alone. We all played a part: made a small breakthrough in the athletic department, excelled at drill on the terrazzo or added respect for our cause by efforts in Fairchild Hall's classrooms. We marched alongside the men of '80 right through until graduation. And we never could have succeeded without our male classmates. They helped us along, prior enlisteds who taught us to shine shoes, or avid runners who explained techniques. They pulled an arm over their shoulders and helped us through and over and under on the assault course. They were only in the newspapers or magazines if they happened to be standing behind one of us, or sometimes were even asked to move out of a frame for better pictures of the women of '80. They were called out for having women in their class but stayed unified with us to be — not men and women — but the Class of 1980. They are an integral part of the story of our journey to graduation. They have been unsung these past 40 years but are very much our brothers in the achievement.

Once, during a noon meal formation, the squadrons were allowed to fall out as a pep rally. Firsties drove on the terrazzo with real, female playboy bunnies perched on their cars. The "fall out" part was great for us as Doolies, but seeing the bunnies and the men's reaction to them made us, the Niner (CS-09) women, cringe. So, with creativity and spirit we fashioned a bunny uniform wearing our issue blue unrevealing bathing suits, our athletic shorts, our parkas with a rolled white sock pinned on as a tail and the hood half unzipped and held up by our mushroom cap berets to make ears. We added our shined black combat boots and marched out to proclaim ourselves "Niner Bunnies." We got the upperclassmen's attention, the kind that seemed to appreciate that we could laugh at them and at ourselves and we could and would be a part of the tradition of spirit as a part of the cadet wing.

We may have originally come to USAFA, up the Bring Me Men ramp, as female cadets, but it wasn't long before what we truly aspired to was to be cadets, period. Our goal was to be part of the wing, one of all the cadets who made up the wing of the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Bonnie Houchen

1) No

2) My parents had mortgaged their home twice for two older male siblings so they could

attend college. I was faced with finding my own way or marry. It was my mother who suggested I look into the service academies. She thought it would be challenging and something I could handle.

3) The challenge was greater for the men, administration and fellow male cadets. They had to deal with their own anxieties and questions in regards to women attending the once all-male institutions.

4) Perseverance and determination.

5) Never underestimate the strength of women. You can do anything.

6) The female cadets were housed together the first semester in Vandenberg Hall. Integration was not fully implemented. I was a "jock" and excused from a Saturday morning run with rifles. I had three other roommates who were not. When the upperclassmen came to retrieve my roommates (loudly of course), I was told I had 10 minutes to get the room in SAMI order. As soon as they left, 10 doors popped open and my fellow female cadets from other squadrons walked into my room with sponges and cleaning supplies. They told me to get dressed and they would take care of the room. When the upperclassmen returned, my room was SAMI ready and I was in perfect service dress. The look on the upperclassmen's faces was priceless. They could not believe the room was ready for inspection. This would not have happened without the help of my "sisters." They did a brief inspection and quietly left.

It was a blessing we were together the first semester. We were able to support each other in spite of squadron assignments. I don't believe our fellow male Doolies would have done the same, early on.

Janet Therianos

1) Yes, but as a 17 year old I didn't really pay much attention to that fact. Like many around me, I just wanted to survive the cadet experience! And I appreciated that I had the chance to serve my country through an AFA Commission.

2) I think the better question is: What made you want to be part of the Academy ... period. I doubt there were many or any women who showed up that first year because it was an opportunity to be a "first." It was, however, an opportunity to get a great education with the follow-on to serve our country as an Air Force officer. And until 1976, females didn't have that opportunity.

3) Absolutely, it was a challenge. I would say this about the cadets and staff at the Cadet Wing when we arrived: There were supporters, observers and disgruntled/angry individuals. I know I experienced the whole spectrum, and I know my classmates did, too. But even as a young person, if you have a focus in life and a support group somewhere, you can make it past the impediments.

4) As a Christian, I know that my "quiet time" with God helped me past the normal challenges a cadet faced, as well as helped me past the hate and anger I experienced. For the first time in my life, I learned what it meant to be hated just because I was different, and that was an eye-opener. I would say then that these experiences changed my life by drawing me closer to God and making me aware on a larger scale to the challenges a person who is "different" faces. I think that leads to a more observant, aware, compassionate leader. What better way to learn about the ups

and downs of life than to experience it, right?

5) I'll let my other classmates help you with that one. Thank you for giving everyone an opportunity to participate. I cherish my time in the USAF, and I know my experiences at USAFA made it all possible. For that I will be forever grateful!

Ginny Caine Tonneson

1) Absolutely. I was in the very first group of female appointees they announced and the media was everywhere. I remember feeling very embarrassed about all the attention. I received phone calls from People Magazine, national news networks, etc. They sent camera crews to my school, my house, my basketball games, running, a surprise going away party, packing my suitcase, and more. They even had a camera crew ride in the backseat of the car with me filming as my mom and dad drove me the seven miles from my house in Monument to USAFA that first day. As I'm sure you will hear from everyone else, there was a huge media presence during BCT and at key events that first year. I felt bad for the males in our class since we were the ones receiving all the attention.

2) When I was in high school, my best friend, Toni, and I were in the library where we saw a stack of postcards you could send in to get info on the Academy. I knew females could not attend, but we dared each other to send in the cards anyway. Toni received a nice information packet, because they apparently thought she was a male. I received a letter telling me that the Academy was not open to women, but I could try ROTC. That got me fired up. When I was recruited to swim there, I felt like that was my chance to show that females belonged at the Academy just as much as males did.

3) Honestly, I think the Academy did a commendable job of trying to think through issues ahead of time. They obviously missed some things (such as have female restrooms available during BCT check-in), but there will always be things that come up which nobody anticipated in situations like that. My experience at the Academy was very positive. Certainly there were some people who did not particularly like the idea of admitting females there, but I didn't go around looking for that, and I didn't let it bother me. I never felt like an outsider ... my classmates always made me feel like I was one of the team.

4) Don't sweat the small stuff! Also, I learned about time management and not to be self-conscious when in a situation where you are a minority. Those things have served me well during my USAF and post-retirement careers.

5) It made me into the person I am today.

6) Absolutely. Four of us on the women's swim team went to Nationals as Doolies and came home with All-American honors (Ginny Caine, Bonnie Schaefer, Julie Richards and Karen O'Hara). However, because we were a first-year team, the policy was to only award us junior varsity letters! They thought better of it the following year and awarded us second-year varsity letters, but it still stung.

June (Van Horn) Lindner

1) Yes, I think all of us felt we were part of history, especially since the press made such a big deal of it. It hit me more later.

2) I love challenges – physical, mental and spiritual. Sometimes I like to push myself out of my comfort zone, and this definitely fit the bill. Also my brother was a 1974 grad and I have a ton of respect for him and wanted to follow in his footsteps. I was accepted to Iowa State veterinary school within two weeks of being accepted at USAFA. I think the only reason I chose USAFA was it had an age limit so this was my only chance. (I had prior college.)

3) The challenge for some of us was being somewhere where many let us know that they didn't want us there. It helped us support each other and dig deep inside to make sure we really wanted to be there. You know, every Doolie gets called names – we just got called different names. I think one problem was some Academy officials saying they never changed any standards. That is true academically and militarily. But, of course, the physical fitness standards were different for women. It would have been best if they had been more upfront and said, yes, there are different standards physically for men and women, but the effort and challenge required is as close as we can make it.

4) Always be yourself and do your best. Both at the Academy and in my years in the Air Force, I always felt I needed to continue to prove myself. It made me a better person, officer and pilot. Girls weren't allowed to be average pilots. If we were good, guys were amazed and exalted us way too high, making us work harder not to fail. If we weren't that great, they would feel we were "typical females" who couldn't hack it as well as the guys – no middle ground. So I worked my tail off to be in the first group. I certainly wasn't more talented – I just worked harder and had a good reputation that I worked hard to keep.

5) The work ethic. I was raised on a farm in Iowa and already had a great work ethic. My brothers and sister and I all did the same work – whatever was required.

6) I had previous college, so was the only female and the only freshman in law class. When I came into the room, the prof made me move from the second row to being the only person in the front row. Fortunately, others added on the class, so I wasn't always alone in the front. The prof proceeded to tell horribly dirty jokes, starting at me the whole time. I think even some of the guys were embarrassed. I just looked down at the table. Every class for many weeks, he called on me to stand as he asked me questions about the homework. Fortunately, I absolutely loved the content of the class. That reason, and fear of being made fun of, made me study this class really hard and I seriously always knew the answers to his questions. After a few months, the dirty jokes and excessive questioning stopped. I got an "A" in that class. The guys were as kind as they could be to a Doolie, and I appreciated that. It never occurred me that I could turn the professor in. I am glad I didn't – it wouldn't have changed his attitude. Also, the press made us out to be gods at times – I know news sells. But it wasn't fair to our male classmates who were working as hard as we were. It could have caused a rift in our class, but our male classmates were better than that. At graduation, I was No. 11 in our class. The press ran up to me for an interview, but I told them I wouldn't talk to them until they talked to all the guys (including another female) ahead of me. They never came back, and I was good with that. I was also a glider instructor. One summer some high-ranking official came to the airfield and they assigned me to give him a glider ride.

It was wrong – there were guys there with more experience than me. I have just always felt that no one should get something based on his or her sex or race.

Karen (Cole) Selva

1) As much as one can appreciate the concept when they are only 19 years old. Certainly it was not hard to miss that we were the first class of women and that what we did, what we said and how we behaved was going to set the tone there on out. I think it was less about “history” and more about the weight of the responsibility to do well. Not just well but great so that someone did not later say the program failed because we failed.

2) I did not personally want to be part of the “first group of women among the Cadet Wing,” per se. I was, at the time, more interested in the NASA space program. Space had been a huge part of all our growing up years, and I can’t imagine that there were not lots of cadets — female and male — who did not go there with some glimmer of an idea to pursue space. To be part of that you had to be a pilot (at the time). To be a pilot you had to have graduated from USAFA as only a very small percentage of pilot training slots went to OTS or ROTC grads. It was a natural progression. In fact, I had applied for the Class of 1979 and received a nomination from my Congressman, who was part of the congressional delegation pushing for women to be accepted to all the military academies.

3) That goes without saying. Interestingly, the question you should be asking is whether we have any idea as to why that was? It was the mindset of the majority of the male upperclass cadets and much of the cadre (academic and commandant staff). It is not like there had not been women in the military in one fashion or another for decades before that. It should not have been all that difficult to assimilate us into the culture there. Women had their own basic training boot camp that certainly was not as physical as USAFA, but the military training aspect was already there (marching, drilling, clothing, etc). While women in sports were not as ubiquitous as they are today, it was not as if the U.S. did not already field women’s sports teams or individual athletes in the Olympics or elsewhere on the world arena. Yet you would think that when we showed up it was the huge momentous thing to physically train women. I fully appreciate that it was not until the passage of Title IX in 1972 that schools (elementary, middle, high, universities) began to think about sports for women in a broader perspective, but the changes had already begun and were on-going by the time the passage of that legislation occurred. As an aside: The previous year, I was at UC Berkeley where two of the gym classes I took were in what had begun as the woman’s gymnasium in the early 1900s and the facilities were pretty funny to think about — courtyards to relax in, little in the way of true athletic function, locker rooms geared toward privacy, no track — just a field where I surmise at one time they played a genteel form of field hockey. By 1975 that had all changed, and we were offered most of the classes offered to the men (not boxing, wrestling or football) and the classes I had with men didn’t seem to have an issue with women in them. Again, the issues we saw said more to the mental state of the men than the women. (Emphasis here — not all the Men! Several of us 80s Ladies eventually found some of those men willing to accept the women and we married them.)

4) Perseverance. You can trudge your way through any experience if you just persevere and never give up. It taught me to look at myself as an officer first, who just happened to be a woman. I did not look at myself as a female cadet but as a cadet that happened to be female. The goal was to fit in and not stand out, which may explain why we collectively did not seek to huddle together in female-only programs outside of sports teams. Consequently, that attitude carried through in my officership. Most importantly, it taught me to be the most knowledgeable and capable person on whatever task I was assigned. Knowledge is after all power.

5) Oh, my gosh. I have long thought that the USAFA educational experience was the most well rounded one of any university or college anywhere. It gave me a breadth of information that allowed me to move through a variety of career fields with relative ease. I might not have the depth needed initially, but I had a sound understanding of the basics and could then delve into the specifics as needed. Kind of makes you dangerous from a work perspective because you can branch out in so many different directions. In fact, I won a few battles now and again because people underestimated what I knew, what I could understand and what I could teach myself. The female cadet experience taught me not to put up with crap from anyone. I just didn't tolerate it. I had to do it at USAFA because it was part of the program, but I sure as heck wasn't going to accept it when I left. I didn't yell or scream or get flustered by harassment or efforts to hit on me, which for some reason gave me an aura of "do not mess with that one." I'm still that way and I seriously doubt that any of that would have been true except for USAFA.

6) Bras: Not unique to me, but despite the stress of day one, I still found it amusing to watch the upperclassman's face turn beet red when I asked how we were supposed to fold our bras per the regulation if they had underwires in them.

Tendonitis: Lots of tendonitis, because the boots were not made for women who were engaged in very physical activities. There was not enough experience (even from the Lackland perspective, I suspect) to teach us how to adequately pad the ankles to prevent the boot from damaging the tendons. That, by the way, became a source of ridicule on the part of the men — taunts about being wimps when they had no clue as to the seriousness of the damage that could and, in one case, was done.

The Tailor Shop: That first day, the tailor shop didn't know how to put a hem in a skirt, even though they seemed to be able to put hems in men's trousers. Many of us were sporting staples in our skirts to create our hems.

Panty hose: We would go to the cadet store for panty hose, which we ran through (figuratively and literally) twice a day at least by carrying briefcases and running at a brace on the marble strips. And there would be none available, even though the racks appeared to be full. Why is that? Because they were buying an assortment of all that was available in both sizes and colors. However, we were pretty much one size and limited to wearing suntan, taupe and black (but the black only if we were actually black).

Tanya Senz Regan

6) First day equipment and clothes issue: I thought USAFA tried valiantly to "accessorize" every female with bras, panties and overcoats. Fitting women, as I am sure they learned, it MUCH harder than fitting men. Hence, men's aversion to going

shopping — an endless chore to get the right fit. However, because we were fitted in an assembly fashion, often the clothes were not even close to the right size! I ended up with a size 14 raincoat ... yes me, the smallest person in the Class of '80. I thought they had issued me a tent!

Anyway here's one very memorable event. Eva Turner (now Wallace) was my roommate. Eva and I were complete opposites when it came to responding to upperclassmen's — let's just call them — "directives." If they said jump, I could have been a high jumper. Eva, on the other hand, was like a Zen Princess — just calm and pretty matter of fact. One day, we somehow were lucky enough to be "bestowed" with a Special Inspection. The upperclassmen were in our faces, yelling at us, pulling our undergarments from our drawers to ensure the articles were appropriately marked in the left cup of bra's and throwing things out of our drawers and closets. Eva was her usual calm, cool and collected self, not giving the upperclassmen any satisfaction. Frustrated, they finally got right up in her face and yelled, "Miss Turner, Miss Turner, BEAM DOWN!!"

Marge Glazier Schell

1) I turned 18, just six weeks before leaving for the Academy, and when I first signed up I had no clue just how big a deal it was going to be. I was on the televised 6 p.m. Detroit News four times before leaving home. The last time I was interviewed was the morning of our flight to Colorado Springs. I remember they put all of us going to the Academy in a special conference room at the Detroit Metropolitan Airport. The cameraman panned the camera around the room and showed all the guys (maybe 25 on that flight) wearing their low-quarters to break them in before starting training, so the shoes would not give them blisters. Then they interviewed me. I was interviewed on camera and 25 guys had their shoes on camera. I did not go looking for this kind of publicity, but being the only woman from Michigan attending USAFA and only one woman from Michigan attended West Point as well, we just got it. Once we got to the Academy, the upperclassmen seemed to relish taking every newspaper article about us and posting it on the bulletin board, editing it like they were English instructors and that the words that were printed were the exact ones we had said, exactly as we had said them, no typos, misquotes or misinterpretations. It was almost an "us against them" feeling some of the time, and especially when we saw things like that. There were also guys within our class, in particular, who were every bit as welcoming and accepting who let us know that none of that mattered and they were on our team and cheering for us. They made it worthwhile when someone else was tearing you down — you knew you had many of those from our class who were there backing us, fighting along side of us.

2) I had already applied for a ROTC scholarship. When the academies suddenly opened up, my counselor threw the brochure at me and said, "Do this too." I had wanted to be a part of the military. Even when others were anti-Vietnam, I still wanted to be in the military. I had two nominations to West Point and was accepted there much earlier, but held off answering them waiting until I heard from USAFA first. I was not pilot-qualified but that did not stop me from wanting to be a "Zoomie" instead of a "Ground Pounder." My father had served in the Navy at 17 at the end of World War II and again in Korea

but was never sent overseas.

3) Duh! They were so unprepared from the uniforms (one kind of bra will fit every shape girl!?). And the only ladies bathrooms were in the women's area! So if you were in 20th Squadron and needed to use the facilities, you had to return all the way to the other end of Vandenberg Hall. (Was there one bathroom maybe near the barbershop/butcher (sorry that slipped out)/ beauty shop?) Liz (Zemple) Griffin had to have shoes made for her by using a children's shoe because her feet were that small — size 3. I had to have shirts custom made because my arms were one inch longer than the standard. They had guessed what the proper size for us would be and I was only 5'8" — they were bringing in the most well-rounded, smartest, most athletic, best candidates. Who would think that at least some of us might stretch the physical norms in some fashion. They should have at least surveyed for basic size information so they could prepare?

4) That I can do far more than I ever thought possible when properly motivated! And I am not quitting today — maybe tomorrow, but not today!

5) It opened up experiences that I never would have had otherwise and will always be grateful for, especially for the tough and grueling parts that taught me that I am tougher than I thought I was. Because life is still asking me to be tough, as I am sure it is with many of you.

6) I shared a room with Andi (Ungashick) Beckham and Patti Tanruther. That first SAMI, we came back from breakfast and were measuring all the drawers in the room for the correct spacing. Patti had the ruler when we were called to attention but did not think she had time to put it in the drawer. So she hid it up the sleeve of her Alpha blouse — her right sleeve. We waited 20 minutes, afraid to move because of all the people walking past our rooms and she could not sneak the ruler into the drawer. Our inspectors came and checked the room over, found their dust write-ups or whatever and left. They gave a backwards salute, never looking back at us, and left. Patti quickly put the ruler in the drawer knowing that if she did not take the chance and get rid of it she would get caught for sure if anyone else came in to check on us. That same inspection, Andi had a very unique alarm clock. It was a Raggedy Ann and Andy clock and it had some crazy song like, "Good morning, good morning, it's time to get up and start the day! Good morning, Good morning, it's time to go out and play!" Well, someone reset that clock from 6 a.m. to go off during the middle of the SAMI. We always suspected our ATO Lt. Sheridan, but never had any proof. You should have seen us flying around trying to get that turned off and back into position before anyone saw us!

The other experience was after Christmas. I was one of the ladies who was chosen to go and join the 3rd and 4th groups, that up until that point had not had women in them. I had been in 10th Sq. and went from 10th Sq. to 24th Sq. Things started off OK, but one day we were asked to put up a squadron bulletin board to show our squadron pride. We did not have any ideas about what to do, and so we put it off. Finally, it was put something up or we would get written up. In the guy's area, the Farrah Fawcett Majors poster was everywhere! You know, the one with the red bathing suit and the sexy hair? Well I got an idea and bought a muscle magazine. I cut out every picture in it and put them on the board with the caption "BRING ME MEN!" It lasted two days before we had

to take it down. Before it came down, we had almost every officer on base, I think, come through and give an opinion! We put up some squadron symbol, one of the guys gave us, and nobody questioned us or hassled us about that bulletin board for months. I remember doing 16-count crutch drills while on sick call with Andi (Ungashick) Beckham (her idea) because she was bored and wanted to stay in practice. I also remember hacking her tape bandage off her ankle with my trusty, dusty penknife one night because her foot had swollen so much it was painful. She probably really needed surgery but stuck in there because having surgery might very well have washed her out right then.

I remember during SERE, when Andi (Ungashick) Beckham was put in the "tiger cage" and you had to prowl around and pretending to be a tiger. She played the tiger kitten and instead of prowling on all four's and growling like everyone else in the cage, she sat on her feet swatting one paw in the air meowing and playing with the other imaginary tigers tails and butterflies. Not quite the first year, but too good to keep to myself, even if it is only for our little group.

Karen Wilhelm

1) Not really. Of course I knew we would be the "first class with women," but I was pretty naïve about the implications. I was an enlisted airman stationed at Andersen AFB, Guam, so we were pretty isolated from news reports or any hoopla. I understood it was important and a first, but it never dawned on me that this was a "really big deal" until I arrived.

2) My goal wasn't to be "part of the first group." I wanted a college education and to become an officer. My shop chief had recommended that I consider getting a commission. A short time after that (October 1975), President Ford signed the bill permitting women to enter the academies. I decided that was a good option to pursue. Luckily, the Academy liaison officer at Andersen and my commander (a cross-commissioned West Point grad!) were all for it.

3) Well, duh! (Sorry, I couldn't resist.) Of course we faced challenges unique to us — the first being that there was a significant percentage of the staff and upper class cadets (and even some of our male classmates) who felt we shouldn't be there. I don't know how many, and it probably wasn't a majority (there were plenty of people who supported us and went out of their way to do so), but there were definitely enough to make their sentiments known and have an impact on our day-to-day existence, especially during BCT and Doolie year.

4) There were many. On the positive side: don't fixate on the naysayers and opponents, stay focused on the objective (graduation and a commission), and just keep going until you get there. I also learned to avoid showing "weakness" or vulnerability — and that's not necessarily a good thing. For me, it meant I was sometimes reluctant to ask for help or support when I needed it. Worse than that, it meant I sometimes didn't offer help or support to others when they needed it.

5) In every way possible, but (not to get too philosophical) how are we to know what might have been? I do know my original intent was a four-year enlistment, GI Bill funded civilian college, and a civilian job as an engineer. USAFA opened the door to a career

built on service to a greater good and leadership of some of the finest people our nation has to offer.

6) A million of them – how much space do you have?

The powers that be were focused on big-picture concerns, so some of the smaller decisions failed the logic test – like issuing all the women the same size black socks (small) and pantyhose (medium). I'm almost 5-1, so my pantyhose bagged around my ankles. My six-foot roommate could barely get hers pulled up high enough to walk in them and was desperately afraid they would fall down.

Putting us only in the first 20 squadrons and in the "women's area" on the end of Vandenburg Hall made a certain amount of sense, but had some negative consequences they either didn't consider or thought were outweighed by the advantages. It divided the cadet wing into two wings – the one with women and the one without. Definitely not a good thing. It isolated us from our squadrons and our male classmates. And it led to all kinds of crazy rumors – we were "at rest" in the women's area, we had bathtubs in the latrines (really – who would have time to take a bath?!), and even more bizarre, we had a kitchen up there. The notion of keeping us concentrated so we could support each other was not a bad idea, but we needed to be part of the wing, not our own little entity. Of course, there's also the theory that they put us all together so they wouldn't have to convert more than a couple of latrines to women-only.

Kathy Campbell

1) Absolutely. We were the first class with women!

2) I wanted to serve in the Air Force and felt that it would be the best training.

3) I definitely felt it was a challenge for the women, but I also felt it was just as much a challenge for the men. No matter how much you learn about the Academy before you go, you cannot be prepared for all the trials you encounter. From academics to athletics to military bearing to teamwork to emotions to leadership — all present a challenge to any cadet — male or female.

4) I learned the importance of discipline, teamwork and perseverance.

5) I learned that if I set my mind to it, I can do anything, and I can withstand anything. One of the best gifts, however, was the bond of friendship developed between all the women in my class. All these years later, we still support each other and appreciate our wonderful variety of personalities and accomplishments. The bond between us is something that was unique to our class, and for that, I am very grateful.

6) When I was offered my appointment, the media descended. My parents collected the newspaper articles and enjoyed listening to the radio/TV spots. It turned out that others were also noticing the news. After basic training, we moved to our new squadrons for the academic year. One day, while we were getting our rooms in order, a cadet appeared at our door. Our room popped to attention, chins in. This cadet stood at the door and said, "Bishop, you don't know me, and you probably never will, but I know you..." With that, he turned and walked off. Not having allowed my eyes to stray to his nametag, I didn't see his name, and I don't remember what he looked like. I don't know if we ever had any interactions while I was there, but I did find myself at times wondering if he was watching and waiting to pounce if I made a mistake. And I never did

find out who he was.

Anne (Martin) Fletcher

I am including an excerpt from my unpublished memoir of our first year experience. Although the memoir is full of unique experiences, I am submitting an incident that neither the men nor future generations of women could experience — curler inspection. Experiences that did not make the cut in my memoir include how, 35 years after we broke the barrier at the service academies, multiple publishers turned down my literary agent's proposal because "military memoirs by women don't sell" and how in the summer of 1977 an Army captain at Ft. Benning, GA, nearly sent me, Dara Snyder, and four of our female classmates home for outrunning his cadence to catch up to the men's flight and finish our daily run with them during Airborne. The Army forced us to run at the slower "female" pace even though every one of us met the male standards. I still bristle as I recall that humiliation.

1) Definitely — all the press coverage before admission made sure of that. I bought a diary and kept it because I thought my experience would be historic.

2) Ironically, I didn't care about being first as much as I cared about wanting to be an astronaut — and the path to becoming an astronaut at that time required being a military test pilot and that path was most likely to include graduation from USAFA or USNA. Although women were not medically pilot qualified when I entered USAFA (our gender excluded us), I correctly gambled that pilot slots would open by the time we graduated. I eventually chose not to follow the astronaut path and to vicariously live that experience through Susan Helms and Eileen Collins (spouse of another classmate).

3) It was a particular challenge for everyone at the zoo, maybe the Class of 1979 more so than anyone else. Our admission coincided with a separate decision to switch to "positive training" so future lieutenants could better motivate the hemorrhaging educated enlisted force in the Air Force. It also created a sea change in how American culture saw women. Were we soldiers or were we women? Our class — male and female — demonstrated that traits like courage, loyalty, discipline, intelligence, endurance and ingenuity are not gender-specific. Of course neither are cowardice, self-centeredness and laziness. We females supported but also policed each other, and only the best graduated. Unlike at West Point, we also went out of our way to maintain certain "feminine" traits; for example, even though I rarely wore skirts to high school, I frequently chose the uniform skirt at USAFA — once the tailor shop finally managed to fix it (after about four fittings and numerous chewing-outs for dressing like a bag lady). I found it significant that the men's uniforms were designed by Cecil B. DeMille while the head of the tailor shop — who had never fitted women before — designed ours.

4) 1. That I can face my fears and conquer them.

2. That I have more endurance and resilience than I ever believed possible.

3. That it is easier to hide emotion when being yelled at than when being sympathized with.

5) It taught me to expand my boundaries in all aspects of my life, except, perhaps, socially. Even now I find myself irritated when others break rules, even inconsequential ones. Oops, did I just admit that to the whole AOG?

6) Note: I changed the names of two women who did not graduate "Vicky" and "Gina." Excerpt is from Groundbreaker: Coming of Age in the First Class of Women at the United States Air Force Academy, copyright Anne Martin Fletcher 2015.

### **Curler Inspection**

Bangs and the door shaking in its frame woke me up. "Ladies, get on your bathrobes and into this hallway, now!" Lt. Gathright bellowed with a voice that belied her tall, willowy frame. Bleary-eyed, I peered at my calendar and the room clock. Today was Sunday; 7 a.m. reveille was another 10 minutes away.

"Come on, Anne, get your robe and shower shoes. Almost everyone's outside already." Sandy thrust my robe at me. Zombie-like, I marched to the wall outside our room and braced myself with my back against it.

"So, ladies, you think it is funny to move around government equipment?" Gathright paced back and forth in front of us, like Patton in the movie we watched during B.C.T. "What's wrong, you got it into the elevator and couldn't get it back out?"

Head facing forward, I rotated my eyes to look at Allison on my left. She made the tiniest shrug of her right shoulder, indicating that she didn't know what was going on, either.

Gathright raised her voice, "If you are going to steal a CQ desk, you better well do a more impressive job of it! I found it immediately. Now you women are going to put this area into tip-top, military shape and keep it that way until you convince me you can show the men the proper way to conduct a spirit mission! You have 30 minutes to return the desk, clean the public-use rooms, and make these hallways gleam. Fall out!" I ran to the elevator to help move the desk (and to see the elevator, which I never had) and collided with women running toward the storage closet to get the buffer. After the desk was in place, Gathright pointed me toward the latrine. On my knees beside the toilets, I scrubbed the seams between the porcelain and the tile floor with a nail brush. It's just dirt, I told myself. Luckily, the floor was clean to begin with. Still, why was I here cleaning next to a toilet with a brush, when my plan was to get an engineering degree and be an officer?

Another woman rushed by, tossing a rotten banana peel she discovered behind the file cabinet in the ATO office, into the trash. Upperclassmen from First Squadron wandered down the hall, pointing out infinitesimally small spots that the women missed. My classmate tried to rinse the black dust out of her rag and returned to the hallway, where she got yelled at for not cleaning well enough. I redoubled my efforts; her job seemed worse than mine. I mindlessly enjoyed the relative peace of sitting on the cool floor, without thinking about how my hands were scrubbing it.

Beside me, Vicky said, "I think the ATOs hid their own desk, and staged this." The one thing every woman agreed on was that it wasn't one of us who had moved the desk. "Time's up, Ladies. Fall-in! Uniform inspection. You have ten seconds."

Mayhem ensued as we scrambled to hide the cleaning materials and lined up against the wall. Then — silence. I pressed my back into the wall. Powdery cleanser covered my loosely-tied robe, dirt stained my knees, and my hair dangled in my eyes.

Another ATO came into the Women's Area and assisted Gathright by writing down the

discrepancies she pointed out. As if in an In Ranks Inspection, Lt. Gathright stopped in front of each fourth class woman and looked her over from nose to toes, then back up to the top of the head before returning her scrutiny to the cadet's nose, observing every millimeter of the Doolie's appearance. As the officers approached, I silently pleaded to them, *Please don't say anything, please don't say anything to me.* I knew I looked like a mess.

Looking at me, she said, "Gross bathrobe."

I heard somebody snicker. Was it the assisting ATO? Our "uniforms" were ludicrous. Gathright's face held neutral, but her eyes crinkled.

The cadet standing next to me had curlers in her hair — she must be Andrea Ungashick, the swimmer with long hair. Gathright said, "Improper headgear." I doubted any cadet had ever been inspected before with curlers in his hair. I chuckled with my lips firmly closed, as did Andy. Gathright moved on.

Staring at a cadet wearing unauthorized pajamas that cartoonishly resembled a sailor suit, Gathright intoned, "Notify the Naval Academy — Canoe U. Recruit."

The corners of Gathright's mouth twitched, and suddenly she laughed with all of us. She did have a sense of humor!

Allison Hilsman pounced on the reference to the Naval Academy, our service rival, and forestalled any incriminations for us losing our composure by shouting, "Beat Navy!"

Gina Donati, who lived across the hall from us, joined Ali and they led us in a noisy spirit rally, clapping, stomping our feet, and reciting all the Air Force cheers we memorized, even, "Go Gringos!"

An ATO held out the CQ phone receiver so we could hear the Command Post duty officer shouting for us to be quiet, so we segued into the Air Force Song. Everyone, even the wandering upperclassmen, had to stand at attention, while we sang the song better than any male chorale ever did. Afterwards, we returned to our places against the wall. Here we were, trying to keep a feminine appearance in our spare time, standing in a hallway wearing disheveled sleep clothes and curlers, being punished for an act we didn't do, sharing a sense of humor and still cheering the Air Force Academy for our opportunity to show the world what women were made of. Our camaraderie enveloped us, even at attention. Lt. Gathright paced in front of us once more, looking every woman in the eye. Then she stood in the center and said, "Ladies, I am proud of you. Dismissed."

Peggy (Davis) Hillebrandt

1) Not really. My father was a West Point grad, so I had a strong sense of the education and opportunities that a service academy would provide to me. And, even back then, understood that the education would be more than merely academic. I wanted to experience that and see what I'd learn from it. At 17, the idea of being part of history, or making history, was not at the forefront.

2) I grew up the daughter of an Air Force test pilot. So I spent most of my early years at Edwards AFB where we lived next door to other test pilots, as well as future astronauts like Apollo's Jim Irwin. It was a "true blue" childhood in the best sense of the words. In elementary school, I knew about the legendary Pancho Barnes, and by high school

regularly babysat for Gen. Jimmie Doolittle's grandson (who was a captain at the time.) Growing up around that, you couldn't help but want to be part of the Big Blue. My dad was a West Pointer, and many of the folks he worked with were service academy grads as well. As a kid, I liked their independent spirit and their devotion to something bigger than a day-to-day job. So the opportunity to attend a service academy had great appeal to me. At the time, I was not focused on being in the first group of women at the Academy, I just had a high regard for the people around me (and those who'd come before them), and wanted to be part of that Big Blue, worldwide club.

3) I think at that time, the service academies were an adjustment and challenge to everyone who entered, other than perhaps the Prep School folks who already knew what to expect, because the daily activities were anything but routine. In some regards, it was an easier transition for me than for others because I had grown up surrounded by Air Force officers, NCOs, enlisted and family members who worked closely together, were focused on the mission and had been in combat and hazardous duty jobs, so some of the training did not seem as alien to me. There were certainly small pockets of resentment toward the women, and some institutional changes that created some tensions. But, by and large, as women we received a lot of support from our classmates. I would think the bigger adjustment was for folks who'd never been around the military, more so than for the women versus the men.

4) The Academy taught me time management and balance. I received a wonderful academic education from the Academy that allowed me to go on and earn a PhD, but what I valued the most from those four years was all the other experiences, in combination, that helped me grow as an individual, such as survival training, free fall parachuting and national and international travel. I also think it taught me to not be overwhelmed by life's larger challenges, but to persistently move through them, one step at a time. And it reinforced the need to stay focused and not be distracted by things that, in the end, are inconsequential.

5) That's a big question! I do sometimes reflect back on my years and think about foregone opportunities, and I can absolutely say that if I was at that fork in the road again, I would take the same path. It wasn't all fun, but it was all formative, and it opened doors of opportunity that allowed me to meet exceptional people and be part of something much bigger than myself.

Sandy Wallace

1) I knew that there would be extra media around, but I did not think of it as "making" history. I felt that the media was likely to make a big deal out of something that was not (to me) a big deal. It was just an open door that I walked through. I wish I had had more appreciation for the women who had fought hard for this open door.

2) Initially, I saw it as an opportunity that seemed to fit my talents and interests. I was athletic, competitive and very patriotic. As I continued through the application process, I came to realize it was an honor to be a cadet at the Academy. I had not been too familiar with the military before I went.

3) I don't think it was any more of a challenge being a woman there than it was for any other cadet who had a few extra, unplanned changes to their cadet life. For instance,

half of us had to change squadrons half way through the year. That was unpleasant and "unfair" but I know that there were other cadets who had unexpected unpleasanties as well. This change for us was an adjustment because it was the first year with women. However, actual military life was full of unexpected changes. To me it was an exercise in perseverance and flexibility.

4) To be flexible. Also, I received an extraordinary education, great athletic training, a great job in the Air Force and an opportunity to be a part of the greatest military on the planet. I worked with great people and learned a great deal about leadership and responsibility.

5) That experience has positively impacted everything I have ever done since. I hated the restrictions and the constant academic pressure, but the sum of the experiences — Basic Training, survival training, soaring, parachuting, travel, collegiate sports, leadership training, honor, friends ... and the list goes on — made it all worth it.

6) The first was the mid-year division. As I recall, the reason "they" decided to make half of the women change to squadrons 21-40 (we began in the first 20) was to alleviate rumors that we had bathtubs, hairdressers, special privileges, etc. When in fact, our situation was terrible because we were initially sooooo far removed from our squadrons that we had to spend extra time running to and fro from our women's floor and our respective squadrons. We had far too little time with our fellow male cadets the way it was. It was ironic that anyone believed that we had it "easier."

The second was the struggle "they" had trying to decide how to divide up the women on the three-man survival teams during our second summer SERE program. Weeks before the end of our Doolie year, they were struggling with whether to make the teams three-women teams, two women and a man, or one woman and two men. It just wasn't that big of a deal, but it was SUCH a big deal to those making the decisions. To think that anyone would try to make it the "best" mix — as if anyone would have control of such a situation in a real-life survival disaster.

Linda Garcia Cubero

1) While I knew that I was entering with the first class of women, that was not a deciding factor behind my decision to attend. I would have attended had it been the second or 50th class, simply because it was an amazing opportunity for a phenomenal education and to build skills and knowledge that would benefit me my entire career. But to answer the question, yes, I had a sense. I was the first woman from the state of Massachusetts to receive an appointment to any service academy. So when my appointment came through, the newspapers showed up at my high school, so I realized before I even got to the Academy that it was history in the making.

2) I did not attend to become a part of the first class of women. I attended to follow in my father's footsteps (he served for 20 years in the USAF), serve my country, and to get an incredible education. I just lucked out that I graduated high school in 1976.

3) Absolutely it was a challenge! I was told by numerous upperclassmen, and even by a professor, that no woman would make it through. It was also evident in many ways that they weren't quite ready for the first class of women.

4) I have given numerous motivational speeches during my career and shared what I

learned while at the Academy. I list some of those lessons below:

- I learned to fly a Cessna and jump out of perfectly good airplanes.
- I learned how to FOLLOW orders before I could become an effective leader.
- I learned how to spit shine boots and polish floors (no carpets at the time!), and how that translated into pride in your uniform and in yourself.
- I learned how to limit my vocabulary to “yes sir,” “no sir,” or “no excuse, sir,” and the value of the unspoken word, look or touch.
- I learned about an Honor Code that says, “We will not lie, steal or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone who does,” and that your integrity and your word are things that no one can ever take away.
- I learned the value of true friendship, and what it means to serve others before self.
- I learned that serving your country is not just about putting on a uniform every day, but service is about integrity, pride, honor, character, being part of a team, and personal sacrifice.
- I learned that the value of an education is not just from books or classrooms, but from your experiences, relationships and lifelong learning.
- I learned that the only barriers in your way are those you create yourself, for advances are not about gender or color, but about motivations and dreams.

5) I truly believe that my Academy experience enabled me to handle anything that came my way after graduation. I know my seven years as a JMO was very different from my peers. As a very green second lieutenant, I was stationed at National Level, assigned to DIA at the Pentagon. Second lieutenants were rare at the Pentagon when I arrived. As a young first lieutenant, I briefed the secretary of defense, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and the service chiefs while serving on a DIA Task Force. My last three years as a young captain were at USAF HQs at Langley AFB, where I was one of two command briefers to the four-star commander of TAC. I never even made it to Air Force squadron level during my seven years in. I know that my Academy experience enabled me to be successful at a very young age with unique assignments where I briefed the highest levels of DOD and military personnel. And I carried what I learned into the corporate world where I had a very successful career, in part due to perseverance and the fact that I ALWAYS stepped outside my comfort zone when taking a new position or sought the tough assignments nobody else wanted — skills I learned while at the Academy. The Academy also taught me the importance of giving back, something I have done my entire life, but more so now, in my current role as an employment specialist at Wounded Warrior Project, where I help Wounded Warriors and family members transition into civilian careers.

6) I vividly remember with a chuckle the first couple of SAMI's, when the upperclassman would open our underwear drawer. They had no idea how the bras and underwear should have been folded! The red faces of these young upperclassmen as they handled our undergarments was classic!

Betsy Pimentel

1) Yes, in the sense that it was the first year women had been admitted to the military academies, though I did not appreciate what a game changer it would be for the military as a whole and opportunities for women.

2) I had applied for AFROTC as a means to pay for college, and I was invited to listen to several cadets who visited my high school on Operation Grass Roots (sent cadets home to schools close to their homes the week of Thanksgiving). I had not heard of the Academy in advance of that but found that the combination of academic, military and athletic opportunities was very interesting.

3) I am not sure any of us appreciated the work the Academy did in advance of our entry date. While we learned of the ATOs early and the path-finding they had been through, I appreciated the fact that the Academy leadership was willing to continue learning and adapting as we went. Several specific examples included moving women into 3rd and 4th group at the semester break during our Doolie year and moving us into each squadron area at the start of our three degree year. Both of those changes were key to the integration of women into the wing.

4) The best lesson was to “never give up” and keep trying. The chance to try many different activities, positions in the squadron, summer programs, etc. gave me the confidence that I could move into completely new areas, learn the key elements and be successful.

5) I've been willing to take on new challenges that I didn't have previous experience in and become a leader both in the military, in commercial space companies and in private life.

6) Uniforms and sizing were the source of a lot of laughs and some frustration the first year especially. Being 6 feet tall, and with a Basic Training roommate who was about 5'1", there were many things issued to us that were the same size — and we weren't! Issuing pantyhose, black socks and athletic socks in a “one-size-fits-all” doesn't exactly work. When I put the athletic socks on, they were hidden in my shoes! And pantyhose don't stay in place well with only one size!!

Haircuts: Doing haircuts in the quick fashion done for the men didn't fit into Inprocessing day and the resulting women's cuts that later were handled with wet hair (no hair dryers in BCT) and baseball caps was pretty comical. Hair in all directions and largely uncontrollable.

Karen L. Kaylor

1) Only somewhat. I knew two members from Class of 1976, but didn't have tremendous knowledge of what all was entailed in becoming a cadet.

2) My father was a commercial pilot after having served as bomber pilot during World War II. I'd won an essay contest in high school on the importance of an airport to a community. That allowed me to earn a private pilot license in two months, before heading to Belgium for a year as an exchange student. Next, I attended University of California-Santa Barbara. While there, Congress passed the law granting women the opportunity to attend the service academies. One of my dad's golfing buddies was a liaison officer for USAFA & recommended that I apply. I filled out the appropriate paperwork, but didn't really know what to expect. I wasn't even aware at the time that women couldn't be pilots in the Air Force.

3) One of the first challenges was getting through the physical and medical exams. I was sent to Vandenberg AFB. Instead of pull-ups, women were expected to do “flexed-arm

hang.” But no standards were listed for a fail, pass or great score, as I don't believe they had any statistics to quantify acceptable scores. We just hung above the bar as long as we could, hoping it was good enough. For the medical exam, the clinic at the base didn't seem really prepared for females to be examined, with just young male med-techs for the chest x-rays with no female chaperons.

The next challenge was getting a nomination. Both my senators wrote back declining, as apparently they had completed their selections months, if not years, before. At least one senator indicated I was welcome to write back in two or three years, which would have put me over the age limit for entrance. (The law not passed until October 1975 for entrance in June 1976 — real short timeframe for application process.)

Overall, I do believe USAFA did a much better job preparing for the integration of female cadets compared to USMA & USNA. We even joked that USAFA had 20 years of progress unhampered by tradition, while our sister academies had 200 years of tradition unhampered by progress.

4) Put your mind to it, work hard and you can accomplish most anything — particularly with the support of your classmates (both male & female)!

5) The education was superb, and I believe it contributed greatly to my having the opportunity to serve as a commissioned officer well-prepared for many diverse positions (roughly 12 PCS moves in 20 years.) I also met my husband in 1977 at USAFA (Ken was 1978 grad) and we're still together!

6) There were a few “challenges” with uniforms. Initially, we were issued two skirts and one pair of pants (while guys got three pair of pants). I guess the hierarchy wanted the female cadets to stand out in noon-meal formation. Then the rules changed and we were supposed to wear slacks for formation, but skirts were OK for class. Rushing back to the room to change into slacks for formation. With only one pair of slacks, you couldn't wear them all the time and keep them clean and pressed for SAMIs. After a bit, upperclassmen were upset because our slacks weren't clean, but we couldn't send them to Denver Destroyers (the nickname for cadet laundry service), as we wouldn't have the appropriate uniform for next weekend. Eventually, someone came up with the “brilliant” idea that the gals would be permitted to wear winter-weight pants as their spare pair in the summer (boy was that hot), and summer-weight pants as spare pair in the winter (burr!).

Running on the marble strips wearing pumps, another disaster waiting to happen!

Having to ask upperclassmen how to properly fold bras in the dressers for inspections.

And we had difficulty complying with 35-10 reg on where certain items go on the closet shelf for inspections — particularly when three gals share a room. In addition to the wheel caps, flight caps, ball caps, etc. that the guys had, women also had to put their female berets, then bucket hats, and purses on the shelf. And there wasn't quite enough space. As the women's uniforms were more expensive than the men's, we ended up with less take-home pay each month.

Debbie Dubbe Gray

1)It was hard not to have a sense of being part of history at the Academy and in the U.S. in general. The mid-1970s was all about women breaking into new things in the working

world. As for me, I grew up in an AF family. I was the only child of an Air Force pilot and had spent my life moving around the world and being a part of the AF. I loved all my experiences! I went to the Academy to become an officer like my dad and hopefully a pilot. My eyes didn't make the grade for UPT, but I had a wonderful career as a navigator on the KC135, T 43 and VC 137, among all the staff and command jobs.

2) I always wanted to serve, so the Academy was a great opportunity for me. For me, it was about becoming an officer and serving, not so much about "making a point about what women can do."

3) That said, that first year was a challenge — some in the two classes senior to us didn't exactly welcome us! We supported each other and, on occasion, did midnight toga parties and spirit missions — like Valentine's Day. We went to CS-05 and wrote "Happy Valentine's Day" in lipstick on the mirrors by the CQ desk and put a few chocolates outside all the doors. At that time, we lived on the sixth floor apart from our squadron.

4) So, what did I learn? I learned a lot about both other people and myself. I learned to make my point about having every right to be there, in a quiet but firm way, and I learned how to disagree with others and still work together. Our male classmates were awesome and a great source of encouragement from the start. As time went on, and more ladies were in the classes behind us, things normalized.

I served 26 wonderful years and have now been retired for 10 — hard to believe! I now homeschool a 7th grader and I try to use my life experiences to help her prepare for her future. Kindness and understanding go a long way but standing up for yourself in an appropriate way is also important.

6) I also remember eating a lot of Oreos for "dinner" in my room after some evening meals where more training went on than eating! I still don't eat an Oreo without thinking about that! I also remember a few kind firsties in my squadron who would grab me a few boxes of Sugar Smacks cereal on the way in to breakfast and put them at my seat so I got some breakfast.

I also remember going to my first academic class that first semester. It was a math class and I was the only lady in the class. The instructor said, "Oh, we have one of those in our class." I had a tough time in that class — there are always a few! I remembered that when I went back to teach navigation as a captain — never alienate students; all deserve your attention and support. When I headed to Robins AFB out of nav school, I was again the only gal for a few years so I had more opportunities to show I could do a great job and be a good team member. My crews were wonderful and most were very supportive. I guess it was all meant to be, as many of these stories and lessons served me well as the vice commandant from 2003-06. Every cadet is unique and deserving of support to be successful.