

IN THE ARENA

A Plebe's Life at the United States Naval Academy

Cathy Maziarz

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CATHY MAZIARZ

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*To Tully, who inspired me to write this and
who held my hand along the journey.*



P R E F A C E

I NEVER INTENDED TO BE A WRITER. To this day, it is still a mystery to me as to how this was written. What I do know is that I always had a story, but it had been locked inside of my heart. Locked until a small child entered my life, and with him was the key.

My nephew Tully entered my life in 1998. By that time, I had earned a teaching degree, lived in New Zealand, and had taught on a Navajo Indian Reservation. By the year 2000, I had climbed to the Base Camp of Everest and backpacked solo through Europe. By 2002, I turned my attention to my hometown of Maryland and began an outdoor adventure business. Tully was four at the time and joined me on my various adventures. Besides kayaking and fossil hunting, Tully began to show an interest in the military. Luckily, I knew of a place that would expose him to his newfound interest and so much more: the United States Naval Academy. It did not take long before Tully and I were making weekly visits to the Academy.

Little did I know that these simple visits would change my life forever. The sights, the sounds, the questions of a child, forced me to relive the memories, to understand them more clearly, and to ultimately share them with others.

This is a true story, a memoir of a plebe at the United States Naval Academy. It is written as a series of flashbacks that occurred as Tully and I visited the Academy. Real names have been changed, except for publicly recognized individuals. Conversations among the characters are based on my journals, memories, and interviews. The visit occurred in the spring of 2002, and the flashbacks occurred during my Plebe Year from July 1994 to May 1995. All other dates are approximated.

I want to apologize now for any mistakes I may have made regarding my work. I ask you to keep in mind that Plebe Year at the Naval Academy is a year is hard to remember and easy to forget. It is a year of emotional stress, physical pain, and demanding academics. It can cause the mind to lock the memories away or keep them in a blur.

Actually, what am I saying?

I take that all back! If there are any mistakes...

"NO EXCUSE, SIR!"

Like I said before, I did not intend for this to happen. But since it did, then I am hoping that the purpose for writing this will be revealed.

Maybe it is intended to focus on the positive, to present an encouraging and uplifting view of the Academy. For it is too often, that the focus is on the few negative incidents that overshadow what the Academy is all about.

Or maybe, it simply is intended as a story to thank those who have gone before and to inspire those who may soon follow...

All that I can hope for is that it will inspire you to live your life *"In the Arena."*

THE MAN IN THE ARENA

*It is not the critic who counts,
not the one who points out
how the strong man stumbled
or how the doer of deeds might
have done them better.
The credit belongs to the man
who is actually in the arena,
whose face is marred with
sweat and dust and blood;
who strives valiantly, who errs
and comes short again and again,
who knows the great enthusiasms,
the great devotions, and spends
himself in a worthy cause;
who if he wins, knows the triumph
of high achievement;
and who, if fails, at least fails
while daring greatly,
so that his place shall never be
with those cold and timid souls
who know neither victory nor defeat.*

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

CHAPTER 1:
WE'RE NOT IN
KANSAS ANYMORE
.....



Annapolis, Maryland; U.S.N.A., May 2004

“Do you think they will see me?” The voice of a scared four-year-old squeaked out from the bushes beside me.

“What? Where are you? Tully! Where did you go?” I spun around, pretending to panic as I looked for my MIA nephew.

“I’m here, Aunt Cathy!” A tiny hand poked out from the top of the jungle of shrubbery.

“Oh, there you are! You are camouflaged so well, that I had lost you for a minute!”

Tully was dressed from head to toe in a collage of green, brown, and black. His square-top camouflage hat was pulled down low upon his head. His brown hair was shaved short on the sides and longer on top, a miniature High and Tight¹ worn by his emulated heroes. His small jungle camouflage t-shirt was tucked neatly into a pair of matching cargo shorts that hung down to his ankles. Tully looked up at me from beneath the shadow of his hat, his eyes wide with excitement. His fair skin, and sky-blue eyes softened the tough look he was dressed in. Tiny freckles kissed his white cheeks.

“Don’t worry, they won’t see you!” I said reassuringly. “Just be brave and don’t make a sound, okay?”

Tully nodded as a smile stretched across his delicate face. I reached down and took his hand in mine as we walked quietly through a large,
.....

¹ *High and Tight*: A standard hair cut in the United States Marine Corps, in which the hair is cut to a stubble at the back and sides (using clippers with no guard comb attached) and short (around 1/4 inch) all over on top. Alternatively, the top may be cut into a short flattop. The top contrasts with the back and sides, in which the hair on top looks like a lid on a jar, hence a Marines nickname: “jarhead.”

opened gate. The iron gate was flanked on both sides by a grey stone wall. We passed the iron and stone sentry and continued along a sidewalk lined with flowering bushes and small trees.

It was a beautiful Maryland day. The sky was a pure blue, marbled with swirls of white clouds. The sun was shining, and the cool seaside air was blowing through the new spring blossoms, which fell like snow upon the ground. Tiny birds sat at attention in the treetops, each singing their own cadence. I glanced up ahead at an enclosed guard post in the middle of the road. There were two Marines, dressed in fatigues², standing at attention inside the small-windowed box. A black car passed us and immediately stopped at the post. One of the Marines stepped out from his post and approached the car. With a slight bend in his perfectly poised body, he glanced into the driver's side of the car. He then quickly took a step back to the position of attention, while his arm sprung to the brim of his hat for a perfect salute. He slowly pulled his arm back down to his side, as if resetting his spring-loaded limb. The car moved forward after its rite of passage.

"Tully," I whispered, slowing down.

"Yes, Aunt Cathy?"

"There are the Marines. Are you ready?"

"Yes," he whispered quickly. Tully immediately left my side and ducked behind a row of bushes to the right of the sidewalk. One of the Marines stepped out of his post as he saw me approaching. With his rifle held in both hands, he maneuvered stiffly around the bunker of sandbags that were placed in front of the post. He crossed the street and moved toward me with a sense of poise and control.

I glanced over at Tully and gave him the hand signal to start moving.

Tully laid on his stomach, and with his head and butt low to the ground, he began moving underneath and around the bushes. I had taught him how to "low crawl," a form of movement that a soldier uses, in which you stay low to the ground by pulling yourself forward with your elbows and knees. As the Marine was approaching me, Tully was slowly making his way past the guard post.

.....

² *Fatigues*: The military clothing worn for field duty; camouflage.

"Good afternoon ma'am, may I please see a form of ID?" The statuesque figure stood with a firm grip on his rifle as I fumbled through my straw purse. The sleeves of his camouflage top were rolled up into a three-inch cuff above the bicep. The tightness of the cuff made his muscles bulge with hardly any room to breathe. His black toe-shined combat boots were laced up with his pant legs tucked over the rim. He was an image of dress parade perfection and at the same time, combat readiness. His cloth nametag had black lettering that read "Michaels."

"Here you are," I said handing the Marine my driver's license.

As he took my license, I noticed the bushes to the right of us, one right after the other, shaking with movement.

The Marine tilted his head down to where his hat and chiseled jaw were perfectly aligned. As he looked at my license from beneath his square brimmed hat, I noticed him glance over towards Tully, and suddenly a smile appeared, softening his hardened face. As he handed my license back, I quickly said, "You don't see anyone else, *do you?*"

The Marine's dusty-brown eyes appeared out of the shadow of his hat, as he lifted his head into a position of attention. I smiled and gave him a wink, hoping he would play along with me.

"Ahhh, No ma'am. *I sure don't!*" The Marine turned to his buddy who was standing back at the post.

"Rodriquez, do you see anyone besides this lady here?"

"That's a negative, Michaels, I only see one visitor."

Michaels began to circle me. He began to come to life; it was as if air had been breathed into a statue of stone.

Tully let out a small giggle of excitement as he peered through a clump of tall grass.

"Wait," said the Marine, "I think I just heard something! What was that noise?" His command voice deepened with urgency.

"Uuuuhhh, nothing!" I replied acting along. The Marine carefully walked over to the bushes where Tully was hiding.

"I heard something, but I just don't see anything!" He shook his head as if completely confused. "Whatever it is, it sure must a good soldier."

"Why is that?" I asked smiling back at the Marine.

"Well, a good soldier is one who can stay hidden; one who knows how to camouflage."

“Oh, and a really good soldier would be one who could even sneak by the United States Marines, right?”

“Yes ma’am. If that was the case, they should probably join the Marine Corps; we could use a good a soldier like that!”

“Well, if I know of anyone, I will pass that along. Also, thank you for the great job *you* are doing; for protecting this special place.”

“Your welcome ma’am, and you have a nice visit today.”

“Thank you.” I nodded my head towards Tully indicating to the Marine how appreciative I was of his kindness. He had made my nephew’s day.

The Marine took one more walk back and forth along the edge of the bushes, pretending to look for Tully. With a shake of his head and a shrug of his shoulders, he turned around and returned to his post. The two Marines watched as I left, with smiles that would soon harden over. After I cleared the post and was at a safe distance from the Marines, I stopped and glanced over at the bushes.

Among the green, was a small face peering out. Tully’s blue eyes were filled with excitement. I gave him a thumbs up and signaled for him to pull out. He slowly emerged out of his pretend jungle.

“You did it, buddy,” I said as I hugged him. “You were such a good soldier, you snuck by the United States Marine Corps guards! I think they could use a good soldier like you. You were so brave and disciplined.”

Tully turned around smiling with delight as he looked at the guard post.

“They couldn’t see me, I was so camouflaged. I snuck in!”

“You sure did. You completed your mission!”

Tully loved the military, so whenever I had the opportunity, I played along with his passion, heightening the excitement and glamour of it all. I had turned a simple ID check at the guard post into a top-secret mission with the objective to sneak past the U.S. Marines.

I turned around and looked down the road. The Marines had gone back to their post, and back to the position of attention; their eyes fixed on the gate, and their smiles hardened over. I looked past the post to the iron gate that we had just passed through. The blue-painted gate was connected to the fifteen-foot-high gray stone wall that branched off to the left and the right. The wall enclosed the United States Naval

Academy. The wall separated two different worlds, the midshipmen’s “Annapolis” and the city of Annapolis. Visitors were granted permission to enter the Academy at certain times through one of the three gates. Two enlisted Marines were always posted at each of the gates. Their duty as keeper of the gates began back in the year 1865 when the first permanent Marine detachment was stationed at the Academy. They had been brought to lend their “martial presence to ceremonial occasions.”³ In keeping with the old traditions, the Marines symbolized the Academy’s prestige and pageantry, however today their duties go well beyond that. They filter the passage of visitors, greet, and salute officers, and provide protection. Their main duty of defense, which is often overlooked, has become more evident as of “9/11.” The sandbag bunkers in front of the posts are a sign of this important duty; the safeguarding of our future officers.



Tully sneaking past the Marines at the main gate of the Academy

I looked down at Tully who was filled with the excitement of the world he had snuck into. I desperately wanted to share this world with

³ Sweetman, Jack. *The US Naval Academy: An Illustrated History*. (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1979), 94.

him. His eyes sparkled with the glimmer of Academy gold; the glimmer that had blinded so many outsiders. Visitors blinded with prestige, parents blinded with pride, and small boys blinded with wonder. They would all catch a small glimpse of a world that would fascinate and intrigue them; a world filled with fine-looking officers, marching bands, sailboats, and ornate stone buildings cradling the waters of the famous Chesapeake. The glimmer was blinding, and I wanted Tully to be able to *see*. I wanted him to see this world as if he had worn the Navy “Blue and Gold.”⁴ I wanted him to see beyond the glimmer to what the Academy was all about.

I took Tully’s hand as we looked back at the gate. “Welcome to the Naval Academy, Tully! You are very brave to come here today.”

I promise that we will have fun today and that you will learn all about this special place!”

“Can I sneak past the guards again?” Tully asked as he tugged at my hand.

“Sure, but how about on our way back out?”

Tully nodded his head in agreement, as a mischievous smile stretched across his face.

As I continued to stare at the gate and the large gold emblem of the Academy at its center, I began to think about the day when I had first passed through that gate—my first day in this shiny new world.



Annapolis, Maryland; U.S.N.A., June 30, 1994

I was 19, salted from a year in the Navy, and I had just landed on the shores of a new world. The journey had seemed long and tedious, but my ship had finally docked. I did not happen upon the shores by chance, but I had earned passage by hard work and determination. It

.....
4 *Blue and Gold*: Navy’s team colors.

had been a dream of mine ever since I was a young child, and now as I stood upon the legendary banks, the new world was within my reach.

The land that spread before me was carpeted with green grass and flowerbeds. Grand oak trees lined brick walkways and ornate stone buildings stood tall and majestic. A river cradled the land and ran its waters into a nearby bay. The air was hot and the breeze, salty. The summer haze blurred the horizon, creating a watercolor of sailboats painted upon a sapphire blue. I closed my eyes. It was quiet, except for a lone seagull’s cry and the toll of a buoy’s bell. When I heard the familiar voice blow by, I pictured the restless buoy, rocking obediently upon the sparkling blue waves. I pictured the waves crashing up against the jagged barrier of rocks, leaving behind pillows of white foam nestled among the cracks. I could smell the salty air and feel its stickiness upon my face. I rested in the sun’s warmth and the buoy’s toll for a moment longer and then slowly opened my eyes.

This world that spread before me had been founded in 1845. It was a world weathered and aged by tradition, but one that had never lost its reputation as a world built on America’s greatest values. Men and women of great character had founded it, and it continued to pass these values on, giving birth to presidents, great leaders, and heroes.

My ship had docked on the banks of the Severn River, and I stepped onto the shores of the United States Naval Academy.

“Let’s go!” I said glancing at the two girls standing beside me. I had arrived with two of my closest friends, Abby and Kala, classmates of mine from the Naval Academy Prep School. We had just finished a year there together, where the strongest of friendships had been forged.

We began walking towards the main entrance of Bancroft Hall, the dormitory of the Naval Academy. We had been instructed to report to the Main Office one day before the rest of the new arrivals. We were dressed in our enlisted white uniforms with olive green duffle bags heaved over our shoulders. As the three of us quickened our pace under the shadows of the towering stone building, we suddenly heard yelling from up above.

“Welcome to *hell*, ladies!”

We stopped and looked up to see a midshipman leaning out of a 3rd story window. The three of us looked at each other and began to laugh.

“This isn’t Kansas anymore,” Abby said with a smile. Abby was repeating what Major Parrino, our Executive Officer, had once said to us during our first day at NAPS. The Major had quoted the “Wizard of Oz” to get across the point that we were now part of something new. He did not care if we were from Kansas, California, or Maryland; we were now in our new home, the United States Navy.

Kala, Abby, and I ignored the welcoming midshipmen as we walked across the open courtyard and up a set of large marble steps into the main entrance of Bancroft Hall. We stepped into the middle of a marbleized grand foyer, the Rotunda. Pillars of marble circled the foyer as winding staircases wrapped around from both sides. The floor was laid with tiles of rose, green, and beige marble. Doorways were rounded and elaborate light fixtures adorned the Hall as chandeliers or as wall-mounted candles. The ceiling rose high creating hollowness to any sounds floating throughout. The Rotunda echoed the grandeur of what Dorothy must have found when stepping into the Emerald City.

To the left of the entrance was the main watch station for all of Bancroft. It was manned and operated twenty-four hours a day by the midshipmen. To the right was a long corridor closed off by a set of double doors, the curtain that hid the inner workings of Oz. These were the offices of the Superintendent, the Commandant, and other high-ranking officers, the great wizards of the Academy.

The girls and I soaked up the magic that we found ourselves standing in. We were so proud to be at the Academy; it was a dream that had come true. We had our picture taken to commemorate the moment, standing arm and arm beneath the dome of the Rotunda. After we received our assigned company numbers and locations of our rooms, the three of us split up to find our rooms and unload our gear. I was assigned to 34th Company, and my room was located on the 3rd Deck of the 8th Wing.

I had to go to the southeastern most point in Bancroft Hall, one of the furthest points from the Rotunda. The 7th and 8th Wings of Bancroft were the newest additions and had been built on to Bancroft in 1961. Their proximity to the water was a picturesque advantage, but their distance from the rest of Bancroft was a disadvantage.

With no Yellow Brick Road to follow, I soon found myself in a maze of corridors and passageways. Little did I know that I was in the largest college dormitory in the world;⁵ one with 4.8 miles of corridors and 33 acres of floor space. I passed through various companies, evident by manned watch posts and decorated bulletin boards. The halls were quiet, and the tiled floors shined with the reflection of overhead florescent lights. It was an eerie silence and reminded me of the stillness out at sea with a looming storm off in the distance. After I made the hike out to the 8th Wing and the climb up to the 3rd Deck (4th Floor), I found my room and immediately dropped my duffle bag of personal items.

I walked over to a full-length mirror that was bouncing a ray of sunlight onto the polished floor. As I looked into the mirror, I saw that stranger staring back at me; her eyes were filled with blue and with innocence and youth. There was an expressionless look upon her face, as if not knowing what to feel or being too afraid to feel. She was dressed in a stiff white uniform. She stood straight and rigid. Her thick blond hair was braided back tightly against her head. A navy-blue neckerchief was draped around her neck and tied with a sailor’s knot. Her bibbed white blouse was lined up perfectly with her straight white skirt. The sunlight glistened off a shiny silver eagle that was pinned to the front of her hat, which she held in her hands. Her polished white heeled shoes poked out beneath a pair of panty-hosed legs. A black lacquered nametag was pinned above her left shirt-pocket. It was engraved with yellow lettering that read, “ERVIN 98.”

Who are you? I thought to myself as I stared at the reflection. I turned away from the mirror, away from the stranger, that even after a year, I was still not comfortable with. As I walked away from the mirror, I heard footsteps behind me.

“Hey, Ervin.”

I turned around to see a large, 6-foot-tall man leaning against my doorframe. I assumed he was an upperclassman, so I immediately stood at attention. I noticed blue eyes peering out from underneath

.....
 5 *Bancroft Hall*: The Academy’s dormitory. It was designed by Beaux-Arts architect Ernest Flagg and built in 1901–06. Bancroft has eight wings, arranged, as on a ship, with evens on the port side and odds on the starboard-of five decks each numbered 0-4.

the shadow of blond hair. He seemed friendly and relaxed; the complete opposite of what I knew an upperclassman⁶ to be.

“How’s it going?”

“Fine, Sir” I replied, my voice escaping with confidence.

“You’re a Napster,⁷ huh?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Cool, well I wanted to come to say *Hi* and welcome you to 34th Company: *The Club*.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

He smiled and turned to leave the room. “Oh, and I wanted to give you a heads-up: it would be a good idea for you to memorize ‘Man in the Arena.’”

“Yes Sir,” I replied with a quizzical look on my face.

“It’s on the last page of your *Reef Points*,⁸” he said cocking back his baseball cap. I stared at his cap, trying to make out the logo on the front. At first glance, it looked like the Navy “N”, but as I moved closer, I realized that it was a picture of beer cans.

“It’s a passage by Teddy Roosevelt. *An important passage.*”

“‘Man in the Arena,’ yes sir,” I replied with all seriousness. However, I knew that there was no way I would be taking him seriously. *This guy*

.....
6 *Upperclassmen*: The name given to all 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year students at the Naval Academy, which would be equivalent to a sophomore, junior, and senior in College. A senior is called a “Firstie” or “1st Class,” a junior is called a “2nd Class,” and a sophomore is called a “Youngster” or a “3rd Class.” Another name for the upperclassmen that oversaw training during Plebe Summer, were called “Detailers” or “Cadre.”

7 *Napster*: Slang for someone that attended NAPS (Naval Academy Preparatory School)

8 *Reef Points*: A palm-sized book, 235-pages long, which is given to all plebes upon entering the Academy. It is a guide designed by the upperclassmen of the Brigade that is referred to throughout all of Plebe Year. Plebes are required to know it “from cover to cover.” *Reef Points*,¹⁰. *Reef Points* contains information such as: Academy history, officer insignia, famous quotes, and military conduct. It even contains a section called “Naval Academy Slang.” As a plebe, we were asked questions from *Reef Points* every hour of every day, from every single upperclassman we encountered. According to *Reef Points*, “Reef points are pieces of small stuff used to reduce the area of a sail in strong winds, making for smoother sailing, just as this *Reef Points* is intended to make your transition into the Navy a smooth one. In it, you will find information to orient you toward the different branches of the armed forces and their histories as well as the history of the Academy. Also contained in *Reef Points* are aids that you will use throughout your military career—take heed! A good mariner knows his instruments well; likewise, you should know this handbook from cover to cover. So, remember its words and live by them.” *Reef Points*, 9–10.

is a joke, I thought as I looked at the beer cans on his hat. I couldn’t even picture him in a uniform. It was easier to imagine him in shorts and flip-flops, sitting under the shade of a palm tree with a Corona in one hand and a guitar in the other.

“By the way, my name is Mr. Montgomery, and I will be your Platoon Commander for the first set of Plebe Summer.”

I nodded and smiled as Mr. Montgomery left my room. I felt a sense of relief, for if Mr. Montgomery represented 34th Company, then I was in for some smooth sailing. I reached into my pocket and pulled out a small palm-sized blue book. I flipped to the last page and found “Man in the Arena.”

There is no way I will be memorizing this anytime soon, I thought as I looked at the 119-word passage. *Like that guy, Montgomery was serious anyhow.* I walked out of my room with a sense of relief and confidence. I had come from NAPS and I knew what to expect. I was ready. I had stepped into a new world; a world that glittered with Academy gold.

The Emerald City was at my feet and I could have cared less that I wasn’t in Kansas anymore.

