

All of us want to believe that we were put on this earth to do something special with our lives. As a 4th generation military officer, I had to make the decision whether I wanted to continue this tradition in my family or let my brother handle it for our generation. When I made the decision to go to law school, I decided at first he would be the one to continue the military tradition within our family, but as the months pressed on, the realization that JAG was an inevitable passion in my life consumed me.

We never realize the dark skeletons we have in our closets until we are asked to fill out a character and fitness report, asking everything from did we ever pull someone's hair in the first grade to whether or not we took a sip of alcohol prior to the day we turned twenty one to whether or not we had committed misdemeanors or worse felonies. The issue here is whether or not you choose to tell the truth, with the very distinct possibility that if you didn't, you could get caught and miss the most important opportunity of your life. In my very young twenty two years I had done some pretty rough things with my life, things that probably would discount me from the Air Force, but I tried my hardest to explain myself in the application. Unfortunately, looking at it on paper made me realize what a disappointment I would be to three previous generations of military men in my family if I disgraced the family name by admitting to prior indiscretions.

Staring up at me were four years of dim-witted, immature decisions that could possibly ruin a career I didn't contemplate having 3 months earlier, but now with every fiber of my being wanted more than anything else. Fight or flight kicked in, and I decided to fight. I fought all the way to interview, where the inevitable question of, "what were you thinking," was to come up.

On January 20th, 2008, at approximately thirteen hundred hours on Luke Air Force Base, Col. Healy asked me the inevitable question, "Is there anything with regard to your character and fitness explanation you would like to tell me?" I wanted to blurt out all the reasons I had done what I had done, why it was stupid, when I did them, how I was a changed person, and what those experiences meant now. This was my time to make the decision of how I was going to go out.

I could have lied. I hadn't given him the application yet, in fact, I made two different copies. One with all of my indiscretions written down, to the moments, dates, and people I could remember being there with me, and the other one blank, showing the perfect military brat. In this application I was the epitome of perfection, just like the neatly shined shoes my father used to set by the door at the end of the day and the socks he would fold in perfect 45 degree precision that would lay to the right of his perfect boots.

I turned to the empty application, the one with all the "no" boxes checked, and handing it to the Col. I said, "sir, if you could throw this paper away, I have some things I would like to share with you." For the next twenty minutes, I went into

each excruciating detail of my past, the bad things I had done and the good things that followed. The Col. sat there diligently, hands in his pockets, his nicely polished boots crossed at the floor until I was finished. I expected him to tell me to get up now and take the application with me, but instead he asked a simple question, “and now . . . how do you feel?”

I sat there for what seemed like an eternity, no one had asked me how I felt about the things that I had done. Frankly, my family would have liked to forget them, and I chose not to usually remember them. “Sir,” I responded with, “for me, a huge weight has been lifted off of my shoulders. I told the truth, and the world didn’t come crashing down around me. While I would have loved not to have made the mistakes I did, I am a better person for them. I respect who I am, all of me, for good and bad. I believe that these indiscretions make me no less qualified to be an Air Force officer or a Judge Advocate, but in fact they make me more qualified, because Sir, I was honest, and the most important thing we should be looking for in officers and judge advocate’s is this self responsibility.”

Two months later, Col. Healy called to congratulate me for getting into the program. He told me the committee was sincerely impressed with my incredible accomplishments in my young life amidst many internal and external struggles. That day I joined a family of previous war veterans and four generations of colonels. I was the first woman in my family to make it. That day I brought honor to my family, not because I had made it into the Air Force, but because I had been honest with the outside world for the first time. In that moment I knew I would be the best officer to serve in the McCauley family because I brought a new meaning to the word honor.