



Julie

Years of Service 1987 - 2016
Las Vegas, Nevada



VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System





My Life MY STORY



JULIE



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Julie

I can remember being on watch in the middle of the night on the way down to Antarctica, and the entire ship went dark; it just shut down. It's interesting when you're on a ship with all that noise; and all of a sudden, it goes silent in the dark of night. You think, "Something happened; this is wrong." It's creepy!

I'm an Air Force brat—born on an Air Force Base in New Mexico in '67. I was the last, an "oops." I have three older brothers—six and a half, nine and ten years older than I am.

My mother's first thought when she found out I was a girl was, "Oh shoot, now what do I do about the rooms?" Three boys and then, she got this little girl.

I'm very comfortable with boy chaos. I have granddaughters now, and I am having to learn about girl chaos. I do much better with the boys because we have three boys, too. I know what to do; I know what to buy for birthday presents—it's easy...Legos.



We lived in New Mexico for about a year--I don't really have any memories of it--before moving to Massachusetts. My mom was from Massachusetts, and we lived there to be near her family for a couple of years while my dad was in Vietnam. When I was three, we moved to Long Beach, California. My dad was transferred there after he returned from Vietnam. He'd been wounded, and I remember going with him to the Naval hospital in San Pedro for his therapy.

My dad retired from the Air Force when I was about six. We stayed in southern California for nine years until I was twelve. Then, he took a job at the Nevada Test Site, and we moved to Las Vegas.



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I graduated from Bonanza High School and did a year at the University of Nevada Reno. I decided I wanted to join the Coast Guard.

I entered the Coast Guard Academy in '87. I first applied in '85 after graduating high school. I was accepted, but came up to UNR for that year, then applied again.

I had applied to the Air Force Academy, Coast Guard Academy, and West Point. My primary driver for selecting the Coast Guard was they didn't restrict women to certain positions.

I did not apply to the Naval Academy because my father was an Annapolis graduate, and my brother was in the Navy. They said they'd hog tie me and put me in a closet until I was too old to apply. They believed the service climate was not friendly to women at the time. The Air Force had told me I was too short to fly, and I never had much interest in the Army.

On July 7, 1987, I reported into the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut along with 356 other cadets. The first summer at the Academy is "swab summer," basically boot camp.



Second summer, I did the range, went to our cadet aviation training program, and sailed on the US Coast Guard Academy sail-powered training ship *Eagle*. You get a lot of deck experience there.

Third summer, I did the tall ship *Eagle* and the aviation training programs again.



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Then, between junior and senior years, I went out on the USCGC *Midgett*, a three hundred and seventy-eight-foot cutter in the Bering Sea for ten weeks.



After four years at the academy, I was commissioned ensign with 205 remaining classmates.

I got really lucky since they were allowing the first female enlisted crew onto our polar ice breakers that year and needed a female officer onboard. Because of that requirement, none of the guys could take the billet; and I was fortunate enough to be able to select it. I was assigned to the Coast Guard Cutter *Polar Sea*, hull number WAGB-11. It was the biggest ship in the Coast Guard at that time.

I was a deck watch officer—kind of a jack of all trades. The Coast Guard doesn't specialize quite as much as the other services tend to. You can specialize to a certain degree; but for the most part, we are more generalists.

I only got seasick once. That was on the first day we got underway for Antarctica on the CGC *Polar Sea*. We were home ported in Elliot Bay in Seattle. You had to cross Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca before you reached the Pacific. We left late afternoon, early evening. Of course, it's calm then—no seas.



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We made the turn out of the Strait into the Pacific in the middle of the night. Now, polar icebreakers are ships that are designed to go a ground. Instead of having a nice sharp keel which stabilizes, they're rounded. Picture a football, seam side up. There is just a smooth, round hull. If you hit the seas on either of your

quarters, they roll like crazy.

I had gone to bed when the water was flat calm, then woke up in a dark cabin in rough seas. Unfortunately, I was breaking in; and I got put on the first watch with the most seasick guy on board. It was bad, but you stand your watch. The next day I was fine.

The Polar ice breakers are responsible for breaking out in the McMurdo Sound, in Antarctica, so the resupply ships can get in to provision crews that are going to winter over. We were supposed to depart Seattle in February for a trip north, but we got word in October that we had to get underway by November fifteenth.

Our sister ship was scheduled for that Operation Deep Freeze, but it was having significant break downs that required her to go into dry dock. We were part way through a dockside for repair and refit, which was to last until that coming February, followed by a shakedown cruise. The yards never finish on time, much less accelerate; so, the contract shipyard workers, instead of working eight to ten hours per day, were onboard twenty-three hours per day until we put out to sea. Our engineers had a hellacious first three weeks underway because things kept breaking.



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In route to Antarctica, we stopped in Sidney, Australia. From there we went down to a little town called Victoria in New South Wales. That's the part that I remember most. Sidney is a big city. Victoria, on the other hand...well, it was December twenty-third. We were to be underway on the twenty-fourth; so, on Christmas Day, we would be at sea. To help us celebrate before we left, the town folks welcomed us into their Christmas celebrations. For about ten years afterwards, I actually stayed in touch with an older gentleman who hosted a group of us.

Christmas Eve we headed south. We were going down to break out the channel for the resupply ships at McMurdo. A couple of days, perhaps a week behind us, were a fuel tanker and a cargo ship carrying the resupply for the science research station at McMurdo. Up to this time, all their restocking had been done by C-130's. The channel that we were going to break out was packed down to make a runway.

When you are breaking up the ice, you feel it. When you're hitting ice three feet deep, it will just hit and break through with a constant rumble; but ice breakers are designed to run aground and break ice up to thirty feet deep using a back and ram. You back up as far as possible, get up as much power as you can and ride up on the ice. The weight of the ship crushes it down. It's a rough ride!

Ice has distinct characteristics depending on how old it is. If it is fresh packed ice from that year, the ship will just break through, even if it is thick. You will just do the back and ram and keep going. If you get into a field of multi-year ice, it's different. The longer the ice sits there, the more salt leaches out, and the harder the ice becomes.



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We got to do some bathymetric surveys in uncharted waters and go on a penguin rookery. We saw Emperor Penguins. They were very interested in us. Very curious. We had National Science Foundation guys with us who were doing surveys and ice cores. The Emperor Penguins would be right there checking out what the crew was doing.

We get back to Seattle and were slated for a north trip. We had seven weeks to get resupplied and make repairs. We went south through the Panama Canal, then up to Norfolk where I got off.

I was assigned to the CGC *Polar Sea* for about fifteen months. I got off right before we went to the North Pole. I had received orders to the District 13 Aids to Navigation Office.

I was now back in Seattle in a staff job working with the buoy tenders and Aid to Navigation Team. This covered the entire Pacific Northwest, not counting the Alaska region. I was there for over three years and met my husband there. We were married in 1995. He was also in the Coast Guard.



After a year at the planning office from '95 to '96, I transferred to the Atlantic Area Aids to Navigation Office in Portsmouth, Virginia. I was there for a year, then left active duty in 1997. I left due to the difficulties of managing two careers in a service as small as the Coast Guard. I went to an assignment in the Coast Guard Reserve and spent three years in the Atlantic Area Rescue Control Center.



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It was a very active unit. We covered search and rescue coordination from three miles offshore out to Bermuda. It was a good fit for me.

After a time in DC, where my husband was attending the Senior Service School, we transferred west to Petaluma, California. There, I went to an expeditionary unit, Harbor Defense Command 111.



It was in a high-OPTEMPO reserve unit—sixty drills a year and fifteen days annual active duty time. Our primary exercise area was Korea. Over the next year, I spent six to eight weeks in Korea.

Following the Iraq invasion in January 2004, I went to San Diego for two months for workups, then off to Kuwait for port security and harbor defense missions through September of that year.

My husband then received orders to Washington, DC, for an assignment to Coast Guard Headquarters. We ended up there for five years. He had to do the move himself--with one pre-teen, a cat, and a dog—as I was still assigned overseas.

Ultimately, I was assigned to a unit that was primarily civilian. It had only three people in uniform: the CO, the deputy, and the reservist. After two years, I requested an early rotation back to Norfolk and ended up working in the same kind of job as Seattle—the contingency planning shop. I did that for three and a half years; then my husband retired. We move here to Reno in 2009. Our parents were in Vegas and California.



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I received orders to Alameda, but that unit was inactivated. I went to a new shop where the reservists were placed. The commander there hadn't dealt with reservists before, so it fell to me to teach her how to manage a reserve program. I was an O4, lieutenant commander.

In 2011, I put on full commander, O5. In 2012 after a year at the Reserve Incident Management Team, I was assigned as the Senior Reserve Officer for Seattle. I worked for the unit commanding officer there, commuting from Reno to Sector Puget Sound as advisor on all matters relating to two hundred reservists. I reviewed all reservist training and was the reservists' advocate with the command. It was a tremendously enjoyable assignment.



For my final military position, I was assigned to Sector Anchorage in Alaska as the Senior Reserve Officer; and I also filled a liaison officer slot for arctic operations. The commute to Alaska was difficult though, so I retired in June 2016.

Now, I'm here in Reno and have my own small business in tax preparation. I enjoy being out with the dogs, hiking and running. We have two Siberian Huskies and often foster Huskies for a month or two for owners that need a little help.

