



MY LIFE, MY STORY

NATALEE



UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

1977-1979



Paving the Way



Sean kneeling in the "Field of Flags" in Newton, NH wearing the Veterans Memorial 11K race shirt.

Natalee

I was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1956 as the third daughter of what would become a family of seven girls and two boys. I was born with a breathing anomaly that would cause me to stop breathing and often turn me blue, then I would have to be rushed to an emergency room. My grandmother told my mother "hold this one tight for she's not long for the world." Not only did I prove my grandmother's words wrong, but I became her favorite grandchild. Being so sickly, my cares were always addressed much to the chagrin of my other siblings. But we grew up protective of each other in a downtrodden neighborhood of Chelsea. We were our greatest allies.

Succumbing to poverty, I dropped out of high school when I was 16 and worked the fast food chains, dead-end jobs without hopes for success. In 1976 I changed my life forever by joining the Air Force at 19 years old. Joining the service as a female in 1976 was a different type of world than it is now. In 1972, the Equal

Natalee

Rights Amendment was passed, supposedly paving the way for women.

The temperament during the 70's was great strife, war, and peace demonstrations that became deadly. Women's worth was still seen as one of motherhood, cooking, and cleaning. In my day, if you joined the military, you were either gay or looking for a husband. And to traverse into a man's field? Unheard of!

I was born-post Korea and WWII into a very patriotic family wearing the uniform with pride. My dad (Army) met my mother through my uncle (Navy). But when my eldest sister joined the Army Reserves and came home in full regalia, she was spat upon. From my duty as a patriot, strong military influences, the despicable acts upon my sister, and the need to find my path in life, I took the call and joined the Air Force. It was a Friday and I would have to wait until Monday to join my unit. I cried the entire weekend. On Monday I found my way to report for duty where the sergeant in charge took an immediate dislike to me. I wondered if he had hoped that I would not show up and avoid the hot mess that was about to happen.

Life as the only female was horrifyingly difficult, the men either hated me for being in their space or wanted to jump me. There was no in-between for a girl of 19 on the flight line. I was mis-treated from the time I stepped off that plane.

Some men requested I be transferred, others



F4-C Phantom jet



Natalee

catcalled, made snide remarks, or refused to work with me. My own crew would send me out for aircraft parts ending with the numbers "69" that did not exist, and I was constantly touched inappropriately, a few did worse than that

I was transferred within my squadron as no one knew what to do with me. One day I was hurt on the flight line and was awakened to a man pretending to give me mouth-to-mouth while fondling my breasts. From that date forward I was in constant pain. The pain became so unbearable that I was transferred back to Lackland AFB where I had been in bootcamp, to their main medical facility - Wilford Hall. After enduring months of treatments there without success I was medically discharged in 1979 with what would eventually be diagnosed as Fibromyalgia in 2004 and PTSD/MST in 2011.



Natalee aged 19. Lackland AFB Bootcamp 1977.

After Texas, I went to California with my then husband; he had been my best

friend in Okinawa where we were married, more out of necessity than love. I believed my harassment from the other soldiers would end if I was married. It did not. The unwanted sexual advances from other soldiers continued until my transfer





Gillette Stadium "Finish at the Fifty" road race 2017.



Race entries 2017



Natalee is the founder of Stoneham's Veterans Memorial 11k Race, an 11K at 11:11 on 11/11. Established in 1999, this was the only 11K race dedicated to honoring military service members, Veterans, and military families.

Natalee

into a clerical assignment. The harassment finally ended when I was transferred into another field as an Orderly Room Clerk.

In California I was blessed with 4 kids in 5 years. But it was also traumatic as I lost an identical twin girl, and less than a year-later, an 8-week old boy. While scoring high in mechanical aptitude, I had tried to fail the Administrative test. Thankfully I didn't fail because it helped to mark my success. I taught myself how to type, took the latest software instruction, and became top in my field as an Executive Assistant to CEOs. My dream job arrived in 2009 when I became the City of Melrose's 1st Female Veterans Service Officer.

However, in 2011, after a prolonged loss of memory reared its ugly head via PTSD/MST, I was once again hospitalized; 4 months in lock down, 3 months in the Women's Intensive Treatment Program, and 10 months recovering in Virginia. I next made my way to Bridgewater State University where I graduated cum laude in 2019. From the many writing courses I took, I intend to write about my experiences during a volatile time in American history.

Natalee

With all my experiences in the service, I believe firmly that it was the best thing I did. Becoming a Veterans Service Officer is a close second. Being in the service and enduring what I did made me the person that I am today. I walked the trail with 6 others that opened the path for military women to be accepted into non-traditional jobs and I'm proud to be part of that history. It's a much different world today because of us.

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7 of 9 siblings from oldest (bottom) to youngest (top) Missing (oldest) Debi, Suni, Natalee, missing Leslee, Philip, Alicia, Jon, Valeria, and Deanna



4 of 6 grandkids front, center is youngest Kate, (L-R) Annabel, Luke and Jeffrey.



Youngest Marie, Natalee, Son (eldest) Frank at wedding reception of daughter Christina.



3rd place winner at the 2018 Tufts University Forensics Practicum finals with other Bridgewater State University award recipients. Graduated *cum laude* with a bachelor's degree in Public Relations and minor in Strategic Communications at 62 years of age. 1st in family to attend full time college with education being the culmination of a lifelong dream.

