



My Life My Story



Genesee



United States Air Force

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I relate so much more to Veterans. That's usually my circle. The connection, if you walk into a room and meet one Veteran, you can talk to them all day long. It doesn't matter if you are a Marine or Air Force, you have something to talk about, a friend; and you know they will have your back.

I was born in June 1993. I was raised here in Reno, Nevada and have an older brother and sister. My mom was a single mom when she met my stepdad whom I call my real dad. He has a son and a daughter. I am right in the middle; it's crazy. We are one big blended family. I went to Spanish Springs High School and graduated in 2011.

I was more of a tom boy growing up. I was fascinated by people in uniform. I wanted to be a cop, so I did the police explorer program through my school, just anything I could do to become a cop. I realized how competitive it was, and I started looking into the military. I knew I could get in the military right away, but to be a cop I had to wait until I was twenty-one. I went to the Army recruiter first. I didn't tell my parents. The Army sold me right away. I said, "Well, I am signing today."



They said, "No, you're not; you're only seventeen. Where are your parents?" I told my mom, and she said, "Absolutely not." I had to work on her for a couple months. Then she said, "I might consider it, but you have to investigate every single branch." This wasn't fun, but I am glad I did because I loved the Air Force.

I thought I would do four years in the military then, I'd become a cop; I would have the experience and knowledge.



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Turned out, the Air Force wasn't taking anyone for active duty unless I wanted to be in special forces – not my cup of tea. I ended up going National Guard in April 2011 and still in high school.

I was seventeen when I had started drilling with the guard. I was the youngest one. It was a bit intimidating, especially since I was the only person that was going to be a cop in our Student Flight. My instructor wondered if I really wanted to carry all the gear and if I could handle it? I was nervous, but I knew I wanted to be in law enforcement. I was pumped at the thought of carrying a weapon and the gear. "Yeah, let's do it."

At the time, I was working at Johnny Rockets as a server. I got a call from my recruiter, and she said, "Hey, you are leaving for basic training on Tuesday." "No, I am not, I am not ready." No joke, I had to drop everything, quit my job, and go. I wasn't supposed to leave for basic training for another six months.

I went to Lackland Air Force Base for basic military training. I was there eight and a half weeks and then, they let me march across the street to my tech school. I was there another four months for training from October 2011 to March 2012.

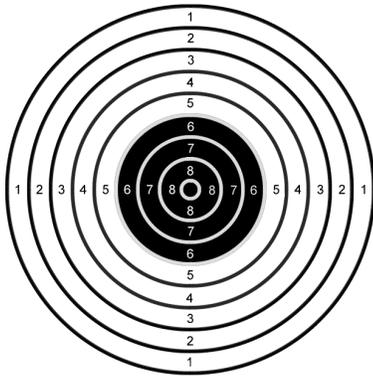
When I got home, I started going to school at TMCC and back to work at Johnny Rockets. I wanted to live independently, so I got another job at UPS in the morning. I worked some long days for six months.

I got offered a combat arms training and maintenance position, which is basically a small arms weapons instructor.



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CATM (combat arms training and maintenance) is a sub position in Security Forces. They do all the training on weapons for the base.



I was the only one that had shot expert with the pistol and the rifle in my squadron, and the opportunity presented itself. You had to have shot expert to go to this school.

I will never forget, the day before I was supposed to leave for training. They said, “Hey, you need to score five more points on your ASVAB for mechanical before you can go to school.” No time to study, I had to take the test. I was thinking, “Well, if I didn’t get it last time, why would I get it this time?” Luckily, I passed; I don’t know how, but I passed.

I did my training at Lackland Air Force Base, again. The coolest school I have ever been to. It was two months of shooting, nonstop shooting and understanding the mechanics of the weapons, how to take them apart and put them back together. I really enjoyed it. There were three women in the course, one failed.

I didn’t have a full-time position yet. It is super competitive in the guard. I tried going active duty, but this was during the draw back. I just kept asking for any full-time opportunities. I was telling my leadership I want to be here. I kept doing it until the squeaky wheel got the oil, and I got the full-time Security Forces position. I loved it, just loved it. This was all in 2013.



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Anyone that was going to be deployed had to go through a shooting course before they deployed. This meant officers down to enlisted.

Security Forces were the elites, the weapons' gurus. If you had an issue, you came to us. The hardest part of my job was critiquing the men. They didn't really like being instructed by a female. They wouldn't listen. Once they failed, "Hey, are you going to listen now?" That was always fun, proving the men wrong.

I got out because I was injured in 2014. The whole unit was getting ready to deploy, and they needed a cadre for this specific training in Fallon. The person needed to be weapons' savvy. The person who was supposed to go couldn't. They were like, "You're going." "Alright, cool."

There was so much training, Humvee training. On the last day of training, we had helicopters and fake IEDs to simulate explosions. I was so pumped for our deployment. At the last minute, they switched my driver. The driver I got was a lieutenant who had very little experience in the Humvee. We were doing an exercise, and you had to go full speed. You can't see once the dust gets kicked up. We were going too fast, and he swerved to miss a pole on our right side, and almost hit a truck on our left side. He swerved again and hit a mound of dirt, which sent us airborne.



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When we landed, wearing all our gear, the compression squashed my back. I have a herniated disk in my lower back, five herniated disks in my neck, tilted pelvis, degenerated disk disease, and all kinds of stuff that came with that. I tried to fight it; I tried everything. I said, “I wasn’t injured, and I needed to go on this deployment.”

There was no way I could get medically cleared. My whole unit had deployed, and I had to stay back. I felt like the red-headed stepchild and heard all the comments that came with that: “You are just milking your injury, you’re this, you’re that.” I fought so hard; I didn’t care.

At first, it was you aren’t injured, you are fine, rub some dirt on it and let’s get going but with back injuries, you don’t realize how much you use your back until you injure it. After two months of them saying it’s fine it’s just a bruise, I knew something was wrong.

I went to my personal doctor, and he said, “Oh yeah, you hurt your back, and it’s going to be like that forever.” My doctor told me I needed to change something, or I was going to be crippled before I was forty.

I had to tell my leadership. They weren’t happy. They ended up pulling me off the deployment, and it was almost like I was being punished for it. I was told it was a liability. I understood, but my unit was going, and I wanted to be with my unit. I didn’t feel I had fulfilled my part; I didn’t serve like I wanted. This was May 2014.

I was Security Forces and a combat arms instructor. If I was teaching a class, I took them to the range; but if I wasn’t teaching then, I was patrolling the base, and I had to wear the gear. It really fluctuated. I had to dig deep, and I had to keep telling myself, “I’m not in pain.”



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After a few months, they were like, “Hey, you’re clearly not carrying the gear, and you are struggling. You need to start looking for another job.” I was devastated. I had to make that decision not to reenlist. They wanted to med-board me, but I said, “No.” I wanted an honorable discharge in case I wanted to come back.

I finished my enlistment in the CATM in 2017. I did two years in Security Forces and four years in CATM.

I got Chief, my service animal, when I was injured. He is my healing puppy. He got me through some of the toughest times in my life. He’s my boy.



Being a woman in the military, I had a unique perception because I was in an extremely male dominated career field. In CATM, I was the only female. It was definitely different. You can’t think of yourself as a female anymore. You are held to the same standards as the males, if not more because you are the female. If I got a promotion over all the men, I got it because I deserved it. I was constantly having to prove that I was a good airman.



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My experience wasn't bad till I got injured. That's when the comments came. The harshest comment I heard when I was injured was, "This is why females can't be in this career field." Oh, no, no, no, a female can do that job. I did that job! What happened to me was a freak accident.

If I am not able to be in the military, then I'm not going to be a cop on the outside. I had to do a complete self-evaluation.

I got lucky. The Veteran's Resource Center was hiring at a bottom position. I went and did an interview, got my foot in the door. I climbed my way up through the ranks and now, I am a Veteran Service Officer. I love it, absolutely love what I do. I'm glad I started at the bottom because I learned so much. I'm twenty-five, and I am excited about where I am. It took a lot to get here.

I work hand in hand with Veterans who have disabilities, maybe went through the same thing that I went through. They got injured, weren't supported, and didn't know what to do. I help them navigate the VA process, help them get their benefits, and be a voice for them. I have been there; I know how it feels. I love being an advocate.

I also work with the VBA and Capitol Hill; they are resources. I love that we work with the homeless population. I don't think any Veteran should ever be homeless. Those words shouldn't be in the same sentence. I'm able to help get them off the streets and into permanent housing with a check from the VA and a thank you for your service.

Vietnam Veterans are who we are serving the most right now. When they got out, shell shock and PTSD wasn't recognized.



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Some got out and turned to alcohol, drugs, and gambling. They lost their families and friends. Some are homeless and choose to be. Some are stuck in their ways because they never got the treatment or the resources we have today. I've seen that side, and I have also seen the ones who fell on hard luck when life happened. They just need a hand up, and they are good to go. It's great to see them on a good road, absolutely.

I want to help Veterans because that helps me too. I continue to serve but in a different way. I get more out of serving the Veterans than I probably would have being a cop.

I still have about a year of schooling, and I am continuing my classes online. My degree will be in business marketing. I love getting out



there, meeting people and talking. I don't know where I'm going to end up, but I know I have to keep growing.

Wounded Warrior Project is starting to come back out here. I go to that and let them know that I am a Veteran Service Officer if they need help.

One of my best experiences and something that I am very proud of is when I came back from basic training and tech school there wasn't much information on what to do next. You had to figure it out because you are too scared to ask. I started looking into a mentorship idea.



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I put some things together and created a mentorship program. I was going to show the airman the ropes and take them to the persons they needed to see. I brought it up to leadership, but they didn't really like it. I kept on doing it because it helped the other airmen. It started getting attention from our Wing, which made me a bit nervous. They called me in and ended up adopting my program for the whole base.

I was selected to represent the Airmen of Nevada at the Enlisted Leadership Symposium at Camp Dawson, West Virginia. They flew me to West Virginia, where I met the Command Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force. He coined me in front of three hundred people. I also went to the leadership training, a week-long training, and met many top leadership people in the Air Force. It truly inspired me, not just as an airman, but as a person. It really opened my eyes.



I struggle with the VA. I've had absolutely great doctors, but I've had four doctor changes. I am very grateful to have the VA, but I would like them to look at the person as an individual who served their country. We all have those days when we are struggling, but you are serving American heroes whether they are homeless or have a ton of money – look at them as a person, not as a number.

