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**Mary Harrington
"Serving Their Country"**

"I just found out I might be able to go to the Naval Academy!" said an excited David, one of our Marine sons stationed at Cherry Point, North Carolina.

"How could you do that?" I questioned. I had always thought that only the very wealthy, who knew how to "do things" or "had connections", could get into West Point, Annapolis, or the Air Force Academy. It didn't seem likely that our homeschooled (and more than a few steps from wealthy) red-headed boy could be part of that elite.

David proceeded to tell me that if his commander gave him a nomination and if he scored high enough on his SAT test, he could get an appointment. He was looking for a way out of the humdrum life of being stationed in Cherry Point.

Soon after that we flew out to Annapolis for one of David's leave periods to visit the Academy ourselves. The counselor told us that yes, in fact, they were considering homeschoolers. This was 1995, and the first homeschoolers were just coming of age.

"What does he need to do?" I questioned the chief petty officer who met with us in the Admissions office.

"Get a recommendation from his commander, and his staff will guide him through," he replied.

"Do you realize he is homeschooled?" I asked, thinking that this would put everything on hold.

"Yes, but we are considering homeschoolers now, and we'll rely more heavily on his SAT scores than his high school grades."

We left, wondering what lay ahead. A few months earlier in July, when everyone in David's entire platoon all got exactly the duty stations they had asked for except for David, I tried to reassure him that the Lord had something else in mind for him. It was true, but we did wonder what.

David began the process of applying at the Academy. His twin brother Douglas was not as interested in going, but he said he would consider it. Since we were new at this, we applied not only through the military but also to our local congressman for nominations. It turned out that David received two nominations, although he didn't need the second one. During that same time, Douglas had been applying through his commander and had received a nomination as well!

You may be wondering why anyone would want their son to go to a military school. We had looked at so many colleges, and found that even the most prestigious often had a very left-leaning perspective on moral issues. When David and Douglas wanted to join the Marines shortly before their eighteenth birthday, we decided to let them do that. We have always had a lot of respect for the Corps, and we knew that their moral values wouldn't be compromised there.

What do the service academies have to offer? First and foremost, they teach a strong moral code of ethics. We were able to sit in on some of their classes later on after they began at the Academy. In one ethics class, the teacher asked the little class of eleven students, "What would you do if you were commanding a ship at sea, and one of the enlisted women wanted special leave to get an abortion?" Ten of the eleven students were pro-life. He also asked that same day, "Jesus said to turn the other cheek, and yet we are military; how can we reconcile those two principles?" The class all understood that they could bear personal injustices by turning the other cheek, but that they had a responsibility to defend and protect their fellow-citizens as military officers. Applied Christianity. Is it Biblical for us to send our sons off to prepare for war? Psalm 144:1 states, "Blessed be the Lord my

Rock, who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle."

Second, although they are required to be open to all faiths, the Naval Academy has located the chapel directly in the center of the "Yard". This is by design. It is a Christian chapel and its decor reflects that. Students are given time to attend church and to join in Bible studies and choir activities.

Third, the academics are at the highest level. There are nineteen majors available, and although the emphasis is on Navy leadership, a student can major in Engineering, Chemistry, Computer Science, History, Physics, Political Science and several other areas. If a student graduates in the top half of his class, he may qualify for the Navy to pay for his Master's Degree program, perhaps in Law or Medicine.

Fourth, the Navy keeps these students in top physical form. They are required to attend all football games, and you may have seen them doing pushups when Navy scores a touchdown against their arch-rival Army. If you want a top-notch education for your son, a service academy excels in every discipline.

So, you are considering this with your student. Now, what can you do? There are a few ways to gain a scholarship to any of the service academies, two of which we pursued.

When your student is in high school, it is very important that he studies math, hopefully through precalculus. He needs to take a minimum of one year of chemistry and one year of physics. Begin to prepare for the SAT test in the sophomore year. The minimum score that the service academies look for is 1150, but your student really wants to get a 1250-1400, if possible. The SAT can be taken more than once, with only the higher score factored in. To help his thinking processes, he needs to read and critique great literature. (An excellent help is Dr. Jim Stobaugh's *The SAT & College Preparation Course* available at www.forsuchatimeasthis.com)

Contact the service academy of your choice during the year he is 16. They have programs to help you prepare, and some offer summer sessions for high school students to become acquainted with campus life. Become acquainted with an admissions counselor.

During the junior year or when he is 17, your student should contact your local congressman and volunteer to work one morning a week. This is a good way to become known by the person who has ten nominations to give out each year. He can also write to your senators and even the sitting President, giving his reasons for wanting a nomination.

One tip which the counselor told us is that the academies keep a record of each time you contact them, when you are looking for information or telling them where you are on the path toward admission. This is a positive thing. The student who really wants to go and shows it by keeping in touch with them will be chosen over the equally qualified student who does not call.

The admissions counselor assigned to your student will let you know if there is anything further he needs to do. Let's see: background in math and science, literature, good SAT test scores, application for nomination. Now your student needs to be thinking of his essay which will put him in a position above others with whom he is competing. A desire to attend is what they are looking for. Make it powerful! Write it, rewrite it, and rewrite it again. It is extremely important.

When your student gets his nomination, he may be offered NAPS (Naval Academy Prep School) instead of a direct appointment. Take it. It is merely an extra year to prepare the student before actually going into the Academy, and it gives the student time to learn military procedures. It is especially helpful for homeschooled students who may not have followed a traditional course of education.

The other way, which is the way our sons got their appointments, is much easier. They joined the Marines, applied for a nomination through their commanding officer, scored high on their SAT tests,

and were appointed.

In the recent past there have been many successful homeschoolers graduated from the service academies. Among those we know are Ryan Easterday and Jon Shaeffer. Because of them (and our sons too!), the academies are now actively seeking homeschoolers for midshipmen and cadets. They recognize that homeschoolers think creatively and add to the stability of the student population.

Where are my creative sons today? Both married to lovely young women, Douglas is stationed at Mira Mar Marine Base in San Diego, where he trains troops in defensive Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Warfare. David is in Florida, finishing up pilot training.

The academies train tomorrow's leaders. Alumni include presidents, captains of industry, statesmen, and others who have made a difference in the direction our country takes. The bonds formed between men serving a common goal are strong and durable. Academy graduates are the men who will lead America to greatness once again. Homeschoolers are already headed in that direction; the Academy only takes them further.