SHE SERVED
MAGAZINE
Celebrating Women Veterans



Inside:

14 WOMEN VETERANS SHARING THEIR STORY

COVER: VETERAN SHON BARNWELL TALKS ABOUT VISIONARY LEADERS

VETERAN RITA COSSIO SHARES ADVICE TO HELP YOU MOVE FORWARD

VETERAN MICHELLE LOPEZ TAKES SERVICE AND SACRIFICE HEAD ON

Second issue:
OCTOBER 2023



VA Resources for Women

DON'T WAIT ANOTHER DAY TO CALL AND ASK FOR HELP.

Women Veterans Call Center:
855-VA-WOMEN

Veteran Crisis Hotline:
988 (press 1)

Caregiver Support Line:
855-260-3274

VA Benefits Hotline:
1-800-827-1000

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	VA Resources for Women
4-5	Behind the Lens and How to Host a She Served Photo Shoot
6-7	Letter from the Editor
8-9	Veteran Shon Barnwell
10-11	***Visionary Leaders*** written by Shon Barnwell
12-13	Veteran Ila Mettee-McCutchon
14-15	Veteran Raven McKinney
16-17	Veteran Zenaida Colon
18-19	Veteran Kimberly Homer
20-21	***One Step at a Time*** written by Rita Cossio
22-23	Veteran Elaine Williams
24-25	Veteran Kimberly Burt-Whately
26-27	Veteran Rita Cossio
28-29	Veteran Pamela Adams
30-31	Veteran Erical Hill
32-33	Veteran Gina Rogers
34-35	Veteran Sandra James
36-37	Veteran Sharika Towles
38-39	***A Journey of Service, Sacrifice, and Resilience*** by Michelle Lopez
40	How to Make a Donation to She Served

BEHIND THE LENS:

It takes a village, or a **"squad"** in this case to put together a magazine. We bring you a sneak peek of the work in progress. **Thank you to everyone that supports our storytelling mission.**









EDITORIAL STAFF

MANAGING EDITOR & PHOTOGRAPHER
Martina Schmidt

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Kimberly Mortson

EXECUTIVE EDITORS
Martina Schmidt, Bill Bean, Sheryl Binetti, Tracy Farley, Ange Keskey and Julie Miller

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS
Shon Barnwell Rita Cossio Michelle Lopez

CONNECT WITH US

WEBSITE
www.sheservedinitiative.org

EMAIL SUBMISSIONS
martina@sheservedinitiative.org

FACEBOOK
@SheServedcelebratingwomenveterans

INSTAGRAM
@She.served





HOST A VETERAN PHOTO SHOOT

To host a **She Served** event visit the website: www.sheservedinitiative.org.

General criteria: The space needs to be indoors, and approximately 20x20' in size, with at least an 8' ceiling height (preferably 10') with electrical outlets.

Photoshoot Details: Photoshoots are reserved for female veterans only. Each Veteran will get a 30-minute professional photoshoot. They can bring props or mementos to be used during the session.

As the host you should be aware that each Veteran that wants to participate will need to fill out an intake form of basic information, provide a short biography of their military career and post military life, and provide a clear photo of themselves in uniform (their official service photo is best, but other photos of them in uniform are acceptable if it is clear and in focus so that their face is recognizable). I can comfortably accommodate approximately 10 women a day if the timeslots are scheduled in advance.

Expenses: I do not charge the Veteran or the host a photoshoot fee. However, as you can imagine I do have expenses. I ask the host to provide suitable lodging, air fare and/or reimbursement for gas, and my meals during the photoshoot. Visit **https://sheservedinitiative.org/host-she-served** for all the details then contact us to be a host!

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



She Served is far more than your typical photoshoot; it's an opportunity to celebrate the remarkable stories and experiences of women who have proudly served in the military. Sure, it's fun, and it involves all the exciting elements of a professional photoshoot – from choosing the perfect wardrobe to makeup, hair, lights, cameras, and striking poses. However, it goes well beyond the glamour and captures the essence of each woman's journey.

In addition to the stunning photographs, each participating woman has the chance to share her unique story through a dedicated article that accompanies her photos. These articles are a window into their lives, showcasing their time in the military and what they are up to now. Our remarkable women veterans come from diverse backgrounds; some served for one year, while others dedicated three decades of their lives to service.

Among our participants, you'll find those who still are actively engaged in community service, women who have ventured into entrepreneurship, dedicated mothers raising families, and those who are enjoying well-deserved retirements. What sets these women apart is the shared commitment each of these women made at some point in their lives – a pledge to serve their country alongside their brothers in arms.

Behind every one of these women veterans is a unique and invaluable story, filled with experiences, insights, and wisdom that can inspire not only fellow women veterans but women from all walks of life. Our mission is not only to celebrate these incredible individuals but also to raise awareness in the public eye that women have served and continue to serve as proud veterans.

We invite you to join us on this journey as we introduce you to the next 14 remarkable women veterans. Through their stories, you'll gain a deeper appreciation for their contributions and be inspired by their resilience, strength, and unwavering dedication to our nation.

Martina Schmidt

WOMEN VETERANS BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Humble Warrior
WELLNESS & YOGA
humblewarrior.org/

Garden Believer
& Aquascaping
https://www.facebook.com/GardenBeliever/

Georgia Military Women
https://www.facebook.com/georgiamilitarywomen/

Shon Barnwell EVENTS
https://www.barnwellevents.com/

HOPE
CENTER FOR VETERANS
https://hopecenterforveterans.org/

design conciege @Home
Powered by Dream Designs & Innovations
https://designconciergeathome.com

Heaven On Earth Catering
http://heavenonearthevents.com/

Shon

Shon Barnwell served in the United States Air Force for 25 years, reshaping organizations on five continents. During her career, she provided expertise in project management, logistics, process improvement, training, and consulting. Shon served in numerous leadership positions at the squadron, group, wing, numbered Air Force, and major command levels. As a Force Support Superintendent, she was responsible for all matters affecting morale, welfare, resiliency, retention, recruitment, and readiness of 71,000 personnel. Shon rose to the rank of Chief Master Sergeant – a rank that reflects only 1% of the enlisted force.

Shon deployed in support of Operation Southern Watch in Bahrain to aid equipment prepositioning, She supported Operation Iraqi Freedom to establish future expeditionary manpower requirements and support emerging combat operations. Lastly, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, Shon maximized the airfield beddown plan.

Shon's most significant take away from her military service is that Leaders have three main goals: Solve problems; support the pack (mission and people); and develop new leaders.

After retiring in 2014, Shon started an event planning company to provide professional, engaging, and memorable experiences for clients and their guests. She has launched 250 successful conferences, workshops, and special events, and delighted more than 35,000 people. In 2018 the National Veteran-Owned Business Association (NaVOBA) selected her company as a Minority Business Enterprise of the Year finalist. She leverages her travels to 26 countries to provide premier hospitality services.

Shon is passionate about developing and mentoring next generation leaders. In 2020, Shon launched a publishing company and released her first book, "*Leadership Is About Behavior, Not Titles: Insightful Traits for Action, Impact, and Results*." Click here to find the book online.

When asked what she would like the public to know about women veterans, she stated,"Women Veterans have amazing stories. Ask them about their Service and Legacy!"

Shon's husband, Andre teaches 8th graders math. He's a retired USAF Master Sergeant. Their lovely daughter, Aliyah, started her career as a federal employee at Fort Gordon in Augusta, Georgia last spring.





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"I never lose –
I either win or learn."
~ Nelson Mandela



VISIONARY LEADERS:
DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE ONE?

WRITTEN BY SHON BARWELL

Effective leaders are visionary – period! They have the ability to see the big picture – all the while – creating solutions before problems occur. During my 25-year military career, my high level of emotional intelligence, creativity, strategic risk-taking, and collaboration allowed me to turn vision into reality.

The following excerpt from my book, "Leaderships Is About Behavior, Not Titles" highlight one way I leveraged my talent as a visionary.

You can only have two things: reasons or results. - Les Brown, Speaker and Author

During my first tour of duty at Ramstein Air Base in Germany in 1992, I was selected to be a lead Quality Air Force Instructor. The selection process was very competitive, so I was honored to serve on the instructor cadre. A few days after the announcement, however, doubt started dominating my thoughts. I was excited to be an instructor, sharing information and insight, and shaping behavior. I was equally nervous because class attendees included many senior-ranking people.

The doubts flowed like a massive flood. Why would a Chief Master Sergeant or Colonel with decades of operational experience listen to a Staff Sergeant lecture on customer service or innovation topics? What could I possibly teach this group about taking care of their team? How would I hold their interest during our one-day training session? Would this yearlong quest end as a major failure or a brilliant success?

I accessed my creativity—gained early in my career when Master Sergeant Keith picked me to conduct impromptu training sessions. Then, I thoughtfully evaluated my facilitation skills—developed as a youngster looking over my siblings after school while our grandparents worked. Certainly, I possessed the skills to be successful as an instructor regardless of the training attendees' rank or knowledge. I reflected on the hours spent preparing for award panels and promotion exams—my discipline and dedication were indeed intact. Although the senior leaders had years of learned experiences, I brought new and diverse perspectives on processes, technology, and business practices to the discussion. The moment I decided not to allow fear to paralyze me from moving forward, I stepped out of my comfort zone, and magic happened! I leveraged my talent and tenacity to lead boldly.

At the time, I was an avid tennis player, so I decided to use tactics from the sport to relay quality concepts. Even if most of the attendees never played tennis before, they'd witnessed highlights of professional players on a sports outlet or two. When we discussed strategy, I would ask the group which tennis players had the best serve. I'd then ask the group what elements of the serve were effective. Some responses included speed, shock value, ball placement, and surprise.

Instantly, the group began sharing stories on how delayed responses to priorities adversely impacted their organizations (bad news never gets better with time). Others identified how advanced planning and training allowed the unit to stretch limited resources or anticipate surges or challenges.

Next, I'd introduce the concept of "court presence" by drawing a tennis court on the board. I'd solicit comments from the group based on a variety of scenarios. I'd ask the group what action they would take if they stood close to the net and the opposing player lobbed the ball over their head? Or what would they do if they were standing at the baseline and the returning play narrowly

cleared the net? What if the player returned the ball to the opponent's left backhand, and they were too far to the right? As the discussion unfolded, the group began making analogies relating to "Where are we as a unit?" "Where do we stand in comparison to like organizations?" Also, they discussed, "Where do we need to go?" "Are we watching our blind spots?" "Are we listening to our customers—internal and external?" The conversations were very lively!



The third tennis concept presented to the group focused on "touch" to address the issue of power. When I was close to the net and the opposing player was at the baseline, I would gently tap the ball over the net for a soft return. Similarly, when leaders implement change, a soft and consistent touch is required to secure consensus, buy-in, and trust. When I caught the opposing player off-center or scurrying to regain their court presence, I'd return the volley very forcefully. When leaders must make time-sensitive decisions, they are direct, precise, and prompt.

> *"I had the privilege of working closely with CMSgt (retired) Shon Barnwell during my Air Force career and she epitomizes servant leadership in every way! This book is essential reading for anyone interested in connecting better with the people around them—so critical in these unprecedented times."*
>
> **— Brigadier General Kenneth Todorov, USAF, Retired, Deputy Director of the Missile Defense Agency, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Fort Belvoir, VA. Sector Vice President, Northrop Grumman Defense Systems**

Lastly, the final topic discussed was "mindset." I have lost many tennis matches because I failed to keep thinking positively. Beating myself up about an error on a previous play made me lose my focus, causing more mistakes. I asked the group to share how they performed in the presence of a leader with nervous energy. How effective were they when a leader constantly shifted priorities, goals, or expectations? How often were they successful when leadership didn't trust them by supporting their decisions, or more damaging, criticized them in the presence of peers or subordinates? Through our discussion of mindset, leaders were able to identify and reflect on the impact of their individual leadership styles and the use of power.

By the end of the year, I doubled my teaching requirement and helped shape the strategic Quality Training Plan for more than 1,000 people—and remained the only junior Non-Commissioned Officer on the team. Oh yeah, I also won the 1995 Ramstein Intramural Women's League Tennis Singles Title! When confronted with an unimaginable task or challenge, it helps to step back and evaluate the effort in the simplest terms possible. Review your AIR strategy: action, impact, and result. Ensure you are improving awareness, confidence, expertise, knowledge, ingenuity, talent, and skills. Thankfully, I didn't let fear dominate my decision to move out of my comfort zone to embrace a new and rewarding opportunity.

"I always did something I was a little not ready to do. I think that's how you grow. When there's that moment of 'Wow, I'm not really sure I can do this,' and you push through those moments, that's when you have a breakthrough." - Marissa Mayer, Businesswoman and Former Chief Executive Officer of Yahoo

Reprinted with permission from the Author, Shon Barnwell

Here's my parting question for you, "What would you do if you knew you could not fail?"

BUY SHON'S BOOK ONLINE

Use discount code SHESERVED to receive a 15% discount on your book purchase at:

https://store.bookbaby.com/book/leadership-is-about-behavior-not-titles1

This offer is valid through Veterans Day Weekend.



WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Our greatest weakness
lies in giving up."
~ Thomas Edison

Ila

Ila Mettee-McCutchon accepted a commission into the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in 1971 while employed as a psychologist at the University of Alabama Medical Center. Following Basic Officer Training she held several assignments, prior to 1974, when she transferred to the Military Intelligence Branch and was appointed a regular Army Officer of Military Intelligence. She served in various command and staff positions, prior to 1994, when she assumed command of the garrison at the Presidio of Monterrey. In 1995, she assumed the additional roles of Installation Commander and Commandant of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), Presidio of Monterrey. Ila retired from the Army as a colonel in 1997.

Ila strongly believes that volunteering and giving back to the community is important. Both during and after her military career, Ila served in numerous volunteer and public service positions in her local community where she retired. Among others, she was elected as a supervisor for Monterey County, a City of Marina Calif. Council Member, and served three terms as the Mayor of Marina. She also served on the executive boards of the Girl Scouts of Monterey Bay and the Monterey County United Way. She was an active member of the Marina Rotary, the Marina Chamber of Commerce, the American Legion, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Since relocating to the Gulf Coast area, she now serves as the 1st Vice Commander of the Destin American Legion Post 296. When Ila is not busy supporting the Destin American Legion she enjoys a well deserved Martini and socializes with her fellow veterans.

Ila is married to her husband of 48 years, John McCutchon, who is also retired from the Army. They said their vows at the Special Forces Chapel in Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, and have one daughter, Erin, and three grand dogs.

Ila's advice to her fellow women veterans is to always look forward and not backward, and to act as though someone is watching – as someone usually is. Ila would like the public to know that women veterans are equal to their male counterparts and their service is just as important.





Raven

For four years, Raven McKinney served in the United States Marine Corps as an Administration Specialist. In Okinawa, Japan, she was part of the Inbound Unit, which processed Marines new to Okinawa. She was also stationed in Cherry Point, North Carolina, where she worked with lawyers. In this role, Raven was in charge of legal documentation, including handling witnesses.

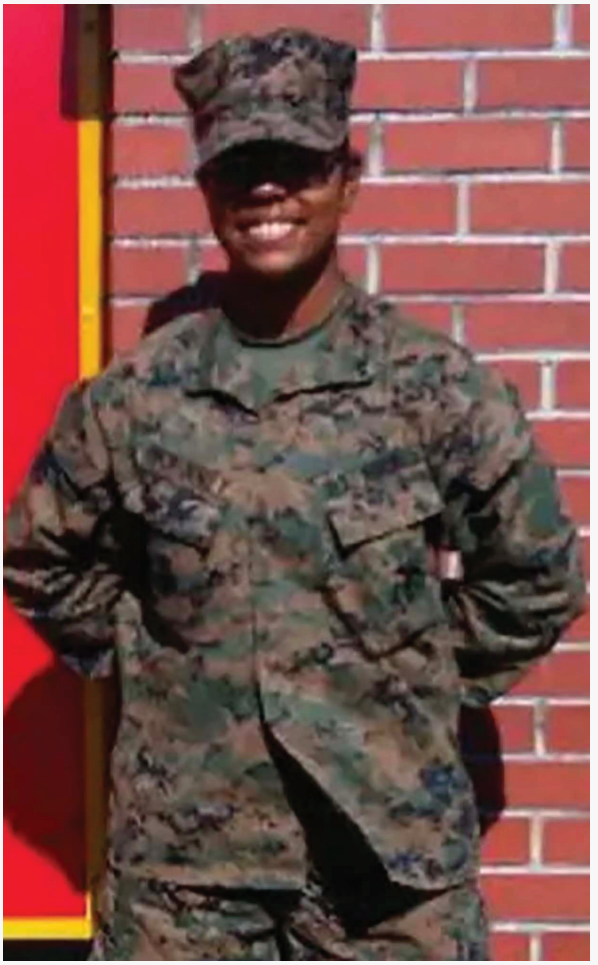
Her most significant takeaway from being in the Marine Corps was the importance of integrity and teamwork. She feels that integrity produces trustworthiness and that teamwork is necessary to accomplish any mission or task.

Raven is the mom of a five-year-old son and works as a clinic coordinator for a pregnancy center, where she handles scheduling resources, coaches, performs front desk duties, and coordinates donations from the community. In addition, Raven has a network marketing business, McKinney International, through which she helps families establish financial independence through business ownership. She is passionate about helping women discover their identity through Jesus Christ.

Raven believes that it is important for the public to be aware that “we are women of strength, functioning through our God-given ambition to serve our country.”

For My Sister Vets: James 1: 2-4: "Count it all joy when you are faced with various kinds of trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”







WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."
~ Matthew 6:33



WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"You can do this."

Zenaida

Zenaida Colon served in the United States Navy for 30 years as an Aviation Support Equipment Electrical Technician attaining the high rank of Master Chief Petty Officer. She served at many duty stations including: USS Bataan (LHD 5), NAS Oceana AIMD Master Jet Base, MV-22 Osprey, SPAWARSYSCEN Norfolk, USS WASP (LHD 1), USS John C Stennis CVN 74, Reconnaissance Squadron Four in Patuxent River, MD, AIMD NAS Pensacola, FL, AIMD Naval Station Roosevelt Road, PR,Naval Aviation Training Group Detachment 3033 in San Diego, CA and US Customs Service Chicago, IL. She is a plank owner and member of the first female group onboard the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis. As amazing as her list of accomplishments goes, she states that her most significant were being selected for Chief Petty Officer, earning EAWS and ESWS qualifications, sailing around the world and crossing the equator (shellback).

Zenaida participated in Operation Urgent Fury (Grenada), Operation Enduring Freedom, various maritime security operations, as well as Operation United Response in Haiti.

After retiring from the Navy, she worked as a manager in the Medical Device Field but currently is fully retired. This allows her more time to follow her passions which include helping care for rescue dogs as well as teaching and empowering young people.

She has been married for 26 years. She credits her husband for supporting her career. Their immediate family has consisted of the many pets they have raised over the years and still miss them all. Currently, they have nine rescued dogs!

From her vast experience, Zenaida has gained the knowledge that "Perseverance, everything in life is achievable with continued effort. Never give up."

Zenaida's message to the public is this, "Women Veterans have performed the same jobs as men over the years. I want the public to know that we served with honor to our country and earned the title and want to be recognize as such."

For her fellow veterans that may be struggling she offers this advice, "Struggling is a good thing. It is in the struggle that we learn the most. It will pass, and we will succeed. Embrace it!"





Kimberly

Kimberly Homer served in the United States Marine Corps for four years as a Motor Vehicle Operator and Supply Technician. During her time in the Marine Corps, she provided support to the Persian Gulf War packing and shipping medical and first aid supplies to troops deployed overseas.

Her most significant take-away from her military service, Kimberly says, is actually becoming a Marine! She remembers it as "by far my greatest accomplishment!"

After her military service Kimberly worked as a correctional officer for the United States Department of Justice. She is now retired and devotes her free time to numerous volunteer organizations. She serves as a board member of the Jack Hadley Black History Museum, is a life member of the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice, a charter member of the 2nd Infantry Regiment Unites States Colored Troops Living History Association, and on the planning committee for Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Leon just to name a few. She is also a member of the Valdosta State University Alumni Association.

When Kimberly is not volunteering she enjoys spending time with her mother, two sisters and two nephews.

Kimberly's hobbies include crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles and cryptoquip puzzle. She also enjoys attending sporting events, exercising, and volunteering.

Kimberly would like to the public to know that women are veterans too, and she wants to remind her fellow women veterans to make yourself a priority.





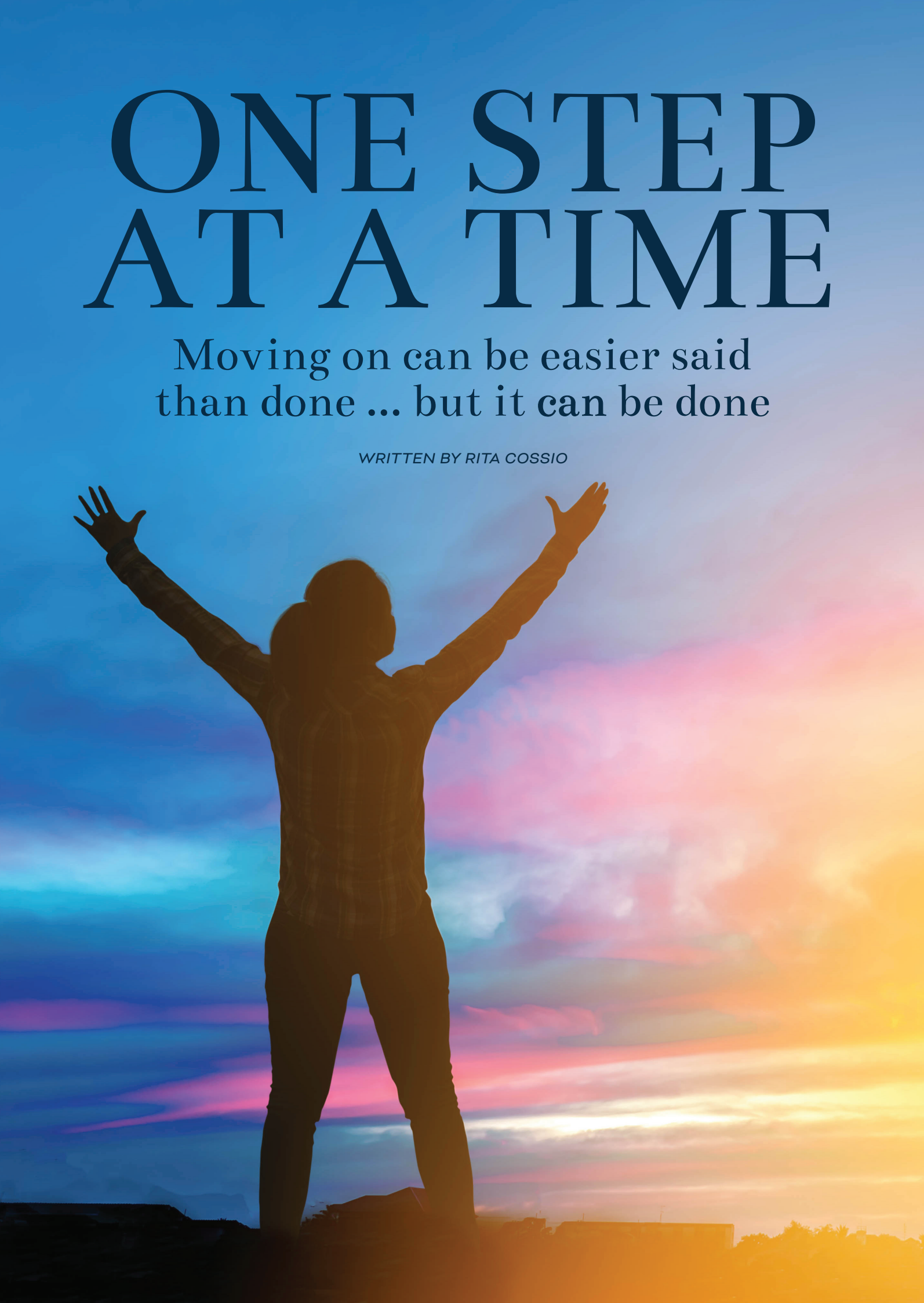
WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"If it is to be, it's up to me because I am somebody."



ONE STEP AT A TIME

Moving on can be easier said than done ... but it can be done

WRITTEN BY RITA COSSIO



Moving on, what does that even mean? It seems with our military careers that's all we've done is move on, right? So what does it mean to us now? We are civilians and some of us retired. Does it mean to be constantly moving on in thought, action and/or location.

After the military, my mind was all over the place, luckily, my last location was in California and that's where I grew up. So after my retirement ceremony, I stayed in place. But my thoughts were erratic and conflicted and as for action, I wanted to rest and restore my mind. I felt liberated from restrictions, requirements and I had no one I had to report to, Freedom!

Discharged from the Army after 40 years! I was so elated and there were so many things that were going through my mind about travel, eating, exercise and employment. I wanted to do so many things but I didn't have the energy and I still needed money. I procrastinated and told myself that I had time. I got a job. But time moves quickly and before I knew it, I had not really done anything different than I had for the last 40 years of my military career. I felt like I was between deployments and waiting for the next set of orders, and then I realized that there were not going to be any more orders. I had to start thinking for myself and what I wanted in my future. As I contemplated what I wanted to do, it occurred to me that I wasn't that woman soldier anymore. And in someway, it was terrifying, but also liberating.

For the first time in my life, I could decide what I wanted to do and who I wanted to be for the rest of my life. Life is not over when we leave the military, it's actually a new beginning! I started by making a bucket list, and thinking of the things I wanted to do, not so much the places I wanted to go, but the things I wanted to do. Some of those things included going back to school and taking classes in cooking and horticulture. I wanted to take dance lessons, play the guitar and make new friends!

Making that bucket list was so much fun, it allowed me to dream and plan new adventures. It made me realize that I could do things without the restrictions of the military. Now my life begins and it's a whole new journey. Adjusting to civilian life and being around family 24/7 is not what I thought it would be. After being away from family for so long, I realized they were not be how I remembered. I was realizing how much relationships and friendships meant in the military with my battle buddies and the people that had my back. The family moved on without me in their daily lives, new cousins, new babies, etc. And I began to really understand that the military camaraderie and the mutual understanding amongst military members is different than family. In the military, there is an understanding of what we soldiers go through. Family tries to understand and sometimes it not possible. They love me, but they don't understand. This is the hard part of moving on- not having the camaraderie and trying to reconnect with family.

The bucket list, it's still there and I'm still trying to do those things but I'm really moving along a different trajectory. I'm trying to make sense of what my life is now, and the responsibilities are different. I long for peace and a worry-free life. My life is constantly moving on, I'm adjusting to the new cadence in my life after the military. The cadence is definitely different. I remember that the military cadence songs had a call and response structure, now it's just words and no response. But for me, the cadence is - ***Hey! Hey! All the way, I love to live life every day! Hey! Hey! All the way, I need to make it to another day! Hey! Hey! All the way, it's just me and I'm ok!***

It's been eight years since I retired, I've moved on! My military life will always be a big part of me, and the lessons learned will never leave me! The memories, good and bad will get me through my life today and help me through he adventures of tomorrow. I've found new friends and many are retired veterans like myself but I have others who have no concept of the military or its nuances. They respect me and my choices and feel honored to know a veteran. With my military veteran friends I share a bond, we reminisce and share experiences that bring joy, laughter and comfort! My biggest "aha moment" - I wouldn't do it any different, it was an honor to serve! ***I've moved on!***

Respectfully, Master Sergeant (Retired) Rita Cossio



WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"People will forget what you have said or done ... but never how you have made them feel."
~ Maya Angelou

Elaine

Elaine Williams served in the United States Air Force from 1978 to 1994 after graduating from Kettering University as a mechanical engineer. During her time in the military, Elaine's most significant accomplishments included directing and coordinating efforts among 10 facilities at the West Coast Space Shuttle Launch Complex, at Vandenberg AFB, in California. She provided real-time intelligence support for the Pentagon during Operations Desert Storm/Desert Shield and served as the first female weapons test engineer at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. Elaine also deployed to Somalia to manage civilian contracts supporting military efforts. As a result of her outstanding work in Somalia, the United Nations hired her upon her retirement from the Air Force to manage civilian contracts in Rwanda and Uganda.

Elaine's most significant takeaways from her military service are her love of country, comradery, trust, and team spirit as well as the value of organization and accountability.

Elaine has been married for 41 years to Warren Williams. She attributes her successful military career to him. They have four daughters: Whitney, Michelle, Morgan, and Rachel and three grandsons: Jeremiah, Dalton, and Hendrick.

Elaine is retired and "still trying to figure it out.". She is a member of the Destin American Legion, Post 296. She puts together the newsletter and occasionally cooks breakfast on Sundays.

Her main hobby is her family. However, she also enjoys scrapbooking, quilting, and drawing.

Elaine wants the public to know that, "Women veterans are dedicated professionals. We add a sense of family to our jobs which helps to make the work more personal." Additionally, she wants her fellow sisters to know that it takes time to adjust to any major life changes. Becoming a civilian (again) only means you change the uniform. The lessons the military teaches apply to all of life situations. Use them wisely.





Kimberly

Kimberly Burt-Whatley served in the United States Air Force for over 24 years. She started her career in the enlisted corps as an Engineering Assistant. She later attended Officer's Training school and became a Contracting Officer. As a contracting Officer she was responsible for procurement of aircraft, weapons, janitorial services, maintenance services and buildings, or as Kimberly states:" I bought beans, bullets and beds."
As a contracting officer Kimberly deployed to Iraq twice to support Army operations in the Sunni Triangle and Al Asad. Kimberly also supported Operation Support Democracy in Haiti and Operation Desert Storm.

Her most significant take away from her military career is that life is short and she is replaceable at work, but not for her family. She also is grateful for her great careers she had in the military and the lifelong friends she gained. Kimberly currently works as a contracting officer for the federal government.

In her free time Kimberly is passionate about raising funds for cancer cures and awareness. Her and her twin sister walk several miles each year for organizations such "It's the Journey", raising awareness for breast cancer and "Pledge the Pink" raising awareness for mammograms. Just before the pandemic hit, these walks hit home as Kimberly's mother who was diagnosed with breast cancer, got to ring the bell signifying the end of her chemo treatment. So far Kimberly and her sister have raised over $60,000 and she proudly states:" We walk for those who can't."

Kimberly has two sons age 21 and 25. Her two sons got to experience many adventures while they followed her around the world while she served in the military. After Kimberly retired from the military, she reconnected with her high school sweetheart and they are now happily married.

To raise awareness for Women Veterans, Kimberly would like the public to know that, "We can handle more than most people would ever imagine or give us credit for! The military breaks us down at times but we also have a support system that builds us up. We've seen many more things than we can share. BUT WE SERVED!!!!

To her fellow veterans Kimberly would like to say;" There is no harm in asking for help!"





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"To the world you may be one person but to one person you may be the world."
~ Dr Suess



WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Self worth - the only one who gets to decide your worth is you."
~ Nikki Banas



Rita

Rita Cossio served in both the U.S.Army and the U.S.Army Reserves for a total of 40 years as a Military Intelligence Analyst, Psychological Operation Non-Commissioned Officer, and Human Resource Specialist. She enlisted in 1975. Her first station was on an English Air Force Base. Aircraft would deliver film to her and she would put it on a light table for Military Intelligence to interpret. She is a Vietnam era Vet and also spent time in Berlin dealing with espionage and intelligence gathering.

In 2009, she served 16 months as a Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Specialist for a three star general. At this command she helped people who were discriminated against or sexually assaulted.

Rita's most significant take away was service in honor. She learned to make sacrifices and always do the right thing. Her military service continues to help in daily situations and in life struggles. Being a person of honor and integrity in today's world, allows her to continue serving her community and fellow veterans every day and to do it selflessly.

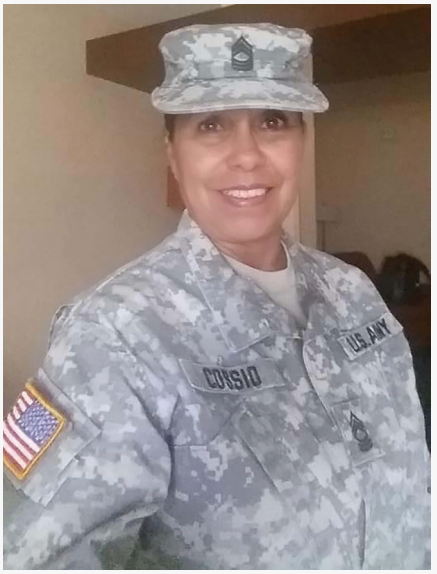
Rita's parents migrated from Mexico for a better life, the "American Dream" and Rita has always been proud of her culture and ethnicity.

Enjoying retirement and her phenomenal daughter of whom she is so proud, her life today consists of volunteering for different organizations and serving her community. She loves to read, walk in the beautiful outdoors and spend time with her daughter, dogs and family. Rita belongs to the Upstate South Carolina Women Veteran Group, American Legion Post 3, Disabled American Veterans and the Quilt of Valor organization. She is passionate about life and living it to the fullest, people and the value they bring, children, animals and the things that she can do for both.



To the public: "Women Veterans are part of the military and part of society. We served proudly and with honor. Please recognize us for the women we are today, yesterday and tomorrow!"

For women veterans who may be struggling, remember the lessons of pride and honor you learned in the military. Continue to respect yourself and achieve all that life has in store for you. Always be beautiful, strong, creative and capable in all you do! Most importantly know this, you are not alone, we are a Veteran Family and we love you!





Pamela

Pamela Adams served for 28 years in the United States Navy Reserves as Dental Tech, Hospital Corpsman and Career Counselor. As a Dental Tech/Hospital Corpsman she provided assistance to the medical officers ensuring a hundred percent readiness. As a Career Counselor she provided in-rate training, financial counseling, career path goals, and assisted finding mobilization opportunities for new sailors. Pamela participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2004 and 2005. She was deployed to Arifjan, Kuwait where she assisted the Dental Officers providing dental services for the coalition forces.





"Pride" is Pamela's most significant take away from her military service. In serving, she gained self-respect and pride. In order to serve, she had to sacrifice by leaving her four year old daughter behind. It was bittersweet to serve so that others can have their rights protected, including the pursuit of happiness, as she felt her own was being challenged. Upon leaving the navy, she was able to serve as an Ombudsman to the local Navy Operational Support Center (NOSC) Greenville, South Carolina.

Pamela is a single mother to her three girls aged 22, 16 and 14. She has a Bachelors of Science in Interior Design/Interior Architecture. Currently, she is the business owner of Dream Designs & Innovations and Design Concierge at Home.

Pamela supports Upstate Circle of Friends in their Vet Forward Initiative. A Neighborhood & Historical Preservation Advocacy that she started and is a Planning Commissioner for the City of Greenville Pamela also volunteers as a director during the Juneteenth GVL Mega Fest.

Pamela is passionate about the local Black Artist community and the organizations that she volunteers her time. She started the Black Girl Art Club for Middle to High School girls creating a social and creative environment to learn different types of art expression from Black Women Artists.

Pamela believes that the public should know that "Women Veterans are The Imperative Key to the success of our country's peace, progress and state of emergency strategies."

For her sister Veterans, Pamela offers this advice. When faced with things in your life that you are not able to change, you must find peace in that and stay there. This includes people (family, friends, co-workers, etc.). You have to work hard and pursue your place of peace with those things in your life that you can control, this also involves your children and your health.

WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Protect your peace."



Erical

Erical Hill served in the United States Navy for 10 years as Culinary Specialist cooking for over 5,000 cadets at various commands.

Her most significant take away from her time in the Military was learning about different cultures. She believes that we may have different cultures, but we all bleed the same blood. She has made many friends for life, and considers most of them her family.

Erical started cooking at the age of ten years old with her mother and grandmother. So, after graduating from High School it only made sense to her to join the Navy as a culinary specialist.

After her time in the Navy Erical worked for Super Target as the Senior Team Leader over the Deli and Grocery department and also managed a Popeye's Chicken restaurant.

Erical's real passion however has always been the catering industry. To realize her dream of a owning her own catering business she partnered with several catering companies in Jacksonville, Florida and Atlanta, Georgia to learn more about the industry. It wasn't long after that she decided to attend culinary school at Cordon Bleu and Helms College to perfect her craft. She then started her very own catering business, Heaven on Earth Catering LLC. Erical and her team currently offer catering for various types of special events, professional cake design, decorative services, and ice sculptures. She is now looking forward to her next venture, launching a food truck called Heaven on Earth Catering Kitchen, which will specialize in vegan, soul food, seafood, salads, and much more.

You can connect with Erical on FB at Heaven on Earth Catering, LLC and her website http://www.heavenonearthevents.com/

When Erical is not busy with her catering business, she volunteers at Genesis Joy House, an organization that supports homeless veterans. Erical once was homeless herself and she now shares her experience with other veterans to help them learn that there is hope.

It is important to Erical that every veteran knows they can thrive through any storm and to never give up!







WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Count it all joy."

WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"She has fire in her soul and grace in heart."



Gina

Gina Rogers served in the United States Air Force for 35 years as a Personnelist. She provided civilian and military human resource support to general officers in the Air Force Reserve. She deployed during Operations Joint Forge, Desert Shield/ Desert Storm and Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Freedom. Gina is a recipient of the 2010 Department of Defense African American Diversity History Recognition Award.

Gina's proudly looks back at her military service. She feels the military made her the person she is today – confident! She learned to not be afraid to challenge herself and to give herself a pat on the back when she accomplished a task that she was afraid to do.

Gina's current occupation is being retired! She just recently retired from the Air Force and is loving every minute of it. Her and her fur baby cat Snookie enjoy each other's company, and Gina is content spending time by herself traveling, shopping, enjoying spa days and just being in her own presence.

Gina is passionate about protecting her own peace and being in the presence of like-minded people. She is an absolute news buff and when you meet her in person you will likely see her deep into the local newspaper, scrolling the internet for news or solving various puzzles.

Gina's message to the public is that women veterans are fearless and wonderfully made to complete any mission we are given.

Gina's advise to her fellow veteran women is to hang in there. You may feel like no one's sees your pain, but you will see the greater good of your reward once you work through the struggle. Your sister in arms will always grab hold of you to keep you going another day.





Sandra

Sandra James served in the United States Army for 20 years as an Equal Opportunity Advisor. As an Equal Opportunity Advisor she developed and implement policies and procedures to ensure a comprehensive Equal Employment Opportunity program is implemented at all levels within the Command and advise commanders and their staff at all levels on the effectiveness of the program.

During her time in the Army she supported the Persian Gulf War, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. During these conflicts, she served in the rear, working hard to still get the job done with less soldiers and taking care of the families left behind.

Throughout her twenty years in the United States Army, she learned discipline and teamwork. Sandra feels joining the Army was one of the best decision she has ever made and is thankful for the opportunity to Serve.

Sandra is a Minister of Word/Dance, and Missionary at Tabernacle of Church International and has been to Haiti, South Africa, Jamaica, Belize, Costa Rica, and Guyana, providing clothes, toiletries, books, medicine. She also helped build schools, libraries, and tiny houses. Sandra obtained her Master of Divinity Degree, at Beulah Heights University and is passionate about ministering to the homeless in downtown Atlanta every Sunday with Church Beyond Walls.

Sandra would like the public to know that, yes, we are veterans, too! She urges her fellow women veterans to share their knowledge and mentor the ones coming behind them.

Sandra has a loving, supportive husband; Raymond James, four children and seven grandchildren.







WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve."



WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Just believe. Anything is possible if you believe!

Sharika

Sharika Towles served in the United States Navy for four years as an Aviation Storekeeper. She was responsible for handling the ordering process, keeping track of inventory levels, and dispensing clothing, electronics, aviation hardware, and maintenance equipment to appropriate personnel.

Her time in the Navy taught her to take initiative and set and execute goals, a trade that she now applies in everyday life and running her own gardening business.

Gardening is therapy for Sharika - she loves exploring new flowers and plants. It is not unusual for Sharika to find herself planting in the dark. Oftentimes her husband Leon has to remind her that the moon is out!

From that passion Sharika founded Garden Believer and Aquascaping, LLC where she designs and installs water features such as fountainscapes and ponds. She loves to create the perfect landscape for her clients individual needs, lifestyle, and budget.

Before she started her business she was a Success Coach at the Georgia Veterans Center (VECTR) where she taught a Boot to Business class to transitioning military and veterans that was sponsored by Small Business Administration.

Sharika is married and has three grown children and three grandsons.

Sharika would like to pass along to other women veterans who may be struggling to watch the words you speak over yourself. Speak life to your situation no matter how hard life gets. For example, " I will make it, I am awesome, I will never lack anything another day in my life".

https://www.gardenbeliever.com
https://www.facebook.com/GardenBeliever/







A Journey of Service, Sacrifice, and Resilience

WRITTEN BY MICHELLE LOPEZ

At the age of 11, my life took a significant turn when my father retired from the Navy and decided to settle our family in a small town for his new career. This transition marked a distinct shift for me, having attended four different elementary schools in various states prior to this change. The prospect of residing in such a quaint Wisconsin community failed to resonate with me, and I struggled to find my place in it.

A pivotal moment in my life came after high school when I found myself at a crossroads, unsure of the path ahead. I yearned for adventure, to explore the world and gain a deeper understanding of life beyond the confines of a 9-to-5 job with minimal time off. Inspired by my father's tales of globetrotting adventures, I felt that staying in Wisconsin would be too mundane for my restless spirit.

It was the 1970s, a time when not many women considered a career in the military. But I was undeterred, determined to chart my own course. As I embarked on my military journey, I was undiscriminating about the job I would undertake, eventually landing in the role of a warehouseman in the Air Force's Supply career field. Unfortunately, my initial choice lacked proper mentorship, and I faced challenges from some colleagues who held reservations about women serving in the military. Nevertheless, I was fortunate to work alongside others who embraced a more inclusive perspective.



My family likely never anticipated that I would go on to retire after a remarkable 28 years of service. My tenure began in Supply, where I spent my first six years, before I underwent a transformative journey. I retrained into Social Actions, specializing as a substance abuse counselor, and watched as this role evolved into Mental Health over the years. Seeking a change from Mental Health, I embraced a new challenge as a First Sergeant, a role I held for eight years, ultimately concluding my career with a final two-year stint in Mental Health. Throughout my service, my choices had limited opportunities to bond with other women in the military, but my last two years afforded me the unique experience of leading ten enlisted women, fostering strong bonds and camaraderie that enriched my military journey's closing chapter.

My personal life was marked by a unique blend of early and late motherhood. By the time I retired, I was the proud mother of a six-year-old daughter and a two-year-old grandson. My aspiration was to complete my degree and become a devoted stay-at-home mom. My husband, a retired Air Force veteran turned sheriff deputy, shared this vision, as we both cherished the idea of raising our youngest child without the need for daycare. The shared responsibility of parenting allowed us to savor invaluable family moments.

Then, life took an abrupt turn. Tragedy struck as my husband lost his life in the line of duty just eighteen months after my retirement. The grief I bore during this period was nearly unbearable, leaving those initial two years a blur in my memory. Yet, I was never alone; my unwavering faith, the lessons in love, humor, and survival skills instilled by my remarkable parents, and the steadfast support of my friends, parents, sisters, and my eldest daughter provided the strength I desperately needed.

Grounding myself

In the wake of these life-altering events, all my meticulously laid life plans were dramatically disrupted. I began to perceive life from a different vantage point, deeply grateful for the experiences and lessons I garnered during my military service. These experiences became an anchor in the storm of grief, inspiring me to resume my college education, despite the years that had passed. I was resolute in my determination to finish what I had started, serving as an example to my daughter and others to persevere.Life took on a new form, a path I hadn't foreseen, but one that I learned to embrace wholeheartedly. My journey led me to explore the world, watch my youngest child graduate from college, take daring leaps by skydiving and parasailing, test my dancing skills in ballroom, surf the waves in Hawaii, and find solace living near the beach. Volunteering with several organizations became a means to rediscover purpose and give back to my community.

Most significantly, I forged deep connections with an amazing circle of women, more than I ever imagined possible, while also pouring my love and energy into my children. Oprah's words have been my guiding light throughout this journey: "Step out of the history that is holding you back. Step into the new story you are willing to create."

My life, once burdened by grief and uncertainty, has evolved into a beautiful narrative of resilience, reinvention, and boundless opportunity.

"Most significantly, I forged deep connections with an amazing circle of women, more than I ever imagined possible ... while also pouring my love and energy into my children."

*Did you know **women** are the **fastest-growing** segment of the military and Veteran populations? That's just one of the reasons we bring you ...* ***She Served.***

*Every individual featured in this magazine is **unique**, yet they share **similar** experiences from active duty service to what happened in the days, months and years after She Served.*

*We hope the Veterans we featured in the debut issue of this magazine **inspired you** with examples of their leadership, resourcefulness, knowledge and sacrifice.*

Your generosity enables us to continue the She Served Initiative. Donations help us continue to tell the **amazing stories of our women Veterans.** Additionally, it furthers our mission to raise awareness that women served in the United States Military **and** are Veterans too.

You can make a donation on the website, **https://sheservedinitiative.org/donate** or scan the QR code above.

She Served is a 501 (C) (3) non-profit organization registered in the State of Georgia.