

## “Everything Happens For a Reason”

That pivotal moment has arrived. One small envelope containing the confirmation that I already know. This is just a formality. As I look at this envelope, my heart races and my throat closes up. It shouldn't hurt this much. Why does it hurt so much?

I had always felt I am meant to serve a greater purpose. I have always been drawn to an internal need to serve and protect. To use my brains and abilities for more than just myself. That is why my junior year I made the decision to apply to the United States Naval academy. The military was always a path I intended on taking but my determination to get my bachelor's degree first had always made a big impact on my choices. The Naval Academy was perfect. I would be able to start my military career immediately and they would pay for my education. I would be receiving my education from one of the most prestigious institutions and at graduation I would be commissioned as a Naval Lieutenant. This was what I wanted more than anything. My applications to the civilian universities were already sent in. They were merely just back up plans, safety schools.

The application process for the academy is like no ordinary college application. Along with multiple essays and interviews with an application advisor, I also had to pass a physical examination, turn in a profile of my physicality, and receive a congressional nomination. The essays were the easy part, for I was always good at the written things. As for the physical fitness test, my basketball coach trained with me for three months to get myself up to par to pass the academy's entrance standards. The test involved running, sit-ups, pull-ups, sprints, and push-ups. It was a timed test and all events had to be finished within the time limit. It was the last piece to be submitted from my end. Once I had finished that portion of the application and submitted it, all I had to do was wait.

Shortly after submitting the final piece of the application from my end, I received a letter. It was an invitation to visit the academy for a weekend. An invitation only extended to those candidates the application board thought to have the most potential. It was an honor to be selected for this and I was beyond excited. The weekend entailed shadowing current students and attending some of their classes. Annapolis, Maryland was one of the most beautiful places I had ever seen and the moment I stepped onto the campus, I fell more in love with the idea of the academy than I thought to ever be possible. I knew right then that this was where I wanted to be in two years. There was nothing else that could satisfy my desires. I had spent my whole life preparing for just this, so I thought.

The final determining factor of acceptance was all that was keeping me from finding out if I was in or not. I had two opportunities to receive a congressional nomination. I could either receive one from the senator or the representative of my district. Each was only allowed to nominate two to the academy. My interviews were both scheduled a week apart in November of my senior year. I had no idea what to expect. I had never done an interview of any kind before. In a way, this was my downfall.

I walked through the door for my first interview for the senator's nomination. Before me sat eight men, four of which were in uniform and highly decorated military officers. All of a sudden everything went blank. I couldn't even think of my own name. I began to have a panic attack on the inside. On the outside, I kept my composure. I sat down and they began to ask me questions. Only a few questions in and I realized that it was not going well at all. At this point in my life I had not yet developed the social skills necessary to sell myself. I walked out of the office at the end of the interview and got in the car. I broke down, losing every piece of confidence I had.

Later that day, I reminded myself that there was still one more chance. Reminding myself that I knew what to expect and what kinds of questions to be ready for, I convinced myself this time would be better. The second interview did indeed go much smoother. It was one man who was very friendly. We had a few things in common to discuss casually and I felt calmer and more relaxed in this interview. I began to feel hopeful again, but at the same time, somewhere in the back of my mind, I still knew that it was not enough.

About two months went by and it was around the time the academy was getting ready to release its acceptance for the new class. I got the letter late at night, after returning home from my basketball game. I sat for a minute and stared at it. I got the mail that day so my parents did not know that I had it. My intuition was already telling me what it said, but I had to open it. I had to have that final piece of confirmation of what I already knew. I could feel my heart breaking with each inch of envelope I tore. I slowly unfolded the paper and read what I already knew. I did not receive a congressional nomination. I would not be attending the Naval Academy as part of the class of 2017. The board highly encouraged me to attend the Naval Academy Preparatory School (also known as NAPS) and then attend the Academy after one or two years. I did not want to spend five or six years in school, and that is exactly what NAPS would entail. I broke down, again.

From there everything fell apart. I had lost all my faith. I questioned everything I had ever done. I even went as far as to question God, asking him why he would do this to me. What did I do to deserve this? Even to this day I have never felt so vulnerable and alone. I went through the next few weeks like a stranger in my own skin. I spent my days just going through the motions. The only thing that gave me any feeling was basketball. Every day I stepped onto the court, the world disappeared. It was the only comfort I had and so I spent extra time in the

gym. After the first week, I had to tell my parents. That was the most difficult. I felt as if I had disappointed them. I felt so guilty even though I knew I had done nothing wrong.

A few months later I was getting ready for my graduation. While I had already accepted a scholarship from Northern Michigan University, I decided to explore other options one more time. I decided that if the Navy didn't want me then that was alright. After speaking with a recruiter about the different paths to get to where I wanted to go, I signed my contract and gave my oath to this country and the Constitution one week before receiving my diploma. I was determined to serve one way or another. On 30 July, 2013, I boarded my first plane, destination: Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The United States Army has done more for me in these past two years than the Naval Academy ever could have.

In a way, my rejection to the Academy made me a stronger and better person overall. Until that day I had never experienced that kind of rejection and heartbreak. Had never felt what it feels like for all of your hard work to be thrown back in your face. I thank God every day for putting me through that, because without that experience I would not be where I am today. I would not have attended basic training, the place where I learned more about myself than I could have ever imagined. I would not have had the opportunity to meet some incredible people and mentors or have developed relationships that will last me a lifetime.

While I still struggle with certain decisions pertaining to my future, there is one thing I know will never change. The United States Army is my home. No matter where I am or what situation I am in, I will always have thousands of brothers and sisters to stand beside me. We can plan and prepare all we want, but in the end we all have a purpose and God knows what is best. My faith in Him has grown over these last two years and I have become a better person because of it. "Everything happens for a reason", and I never let myself forget that.