

HEROES

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mean to *us*?



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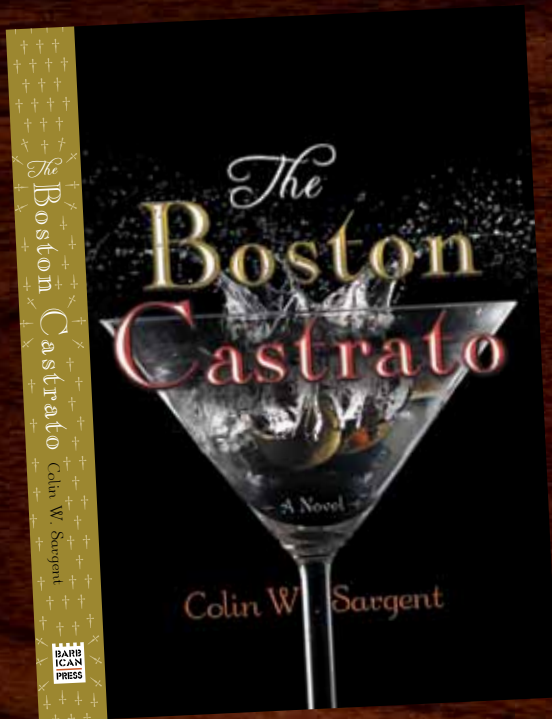


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Meet the home-grown stars of the U.S. **Navy** who, even in uniform, wear Maine on their sleeves.

INTERVIEWS BY OLIVIA GUNN

Makayla Van Blarcom, 18, Cryptology Technician-In-Training

Where are you?
I'm in Pensacola, Florida. I just finished boot camp. I should be hearing where my first deployment will be any day now.

What will your specialty be?

Well, it's actually pretty top secret—but I can say it will involve signals analysis.

Where did you grow up in Maine?

In the Thomaston/St. George area. I went to Oceanside High School in Rockland.

What inspired you to enlist right out of high school?

Well, I grew up listening to my grandfa-

ther's stories about the Navy. He was an EN (Engineman). He talked a lot about traveling. I always wanted to travel while still getting an education. And college is really expensive these days.

What set Maine apart during your childhood?

The nature, ocean, and the region's agriculture. I feel so lucky to have grown up there. Every day I miss being in Maine.

Take us closer.

We spent every summer at a campground in Appleton with my family. The entire summer! We'd go fishing, hiking—we



spent so much of our time on the water. My first job in Maine was actually clamming for my grandfather!

Biggest differences between Florida and Maine?

There's no sea breeze like Maine's.

Commander Paul N. Rumery, 57, Chaplain Corps, USN

Where did you grow up in Maine?

Right here in Portland. I was born in Maine Medical Center. I'm a graduate from Deering High School—go Rams! I'm the oldest of five children and the only one to go into the military.

What inspired you to serve?

My dad was in the Air Force—that really influenced me. I enlisted into the Marine Corps shortly after high school. While in the Reserves, I went to college and on to a seminary school. There was a Navy Chaplain recruiter there, and I knew I still had some military in my blood.



What interested you in the Chaplain's role?

I grew up in a family of faith. We attended Stroudwater Baptist Church on Congress. I was influenced by my mentor, who'd been in the Signal Corps during World War II. I was haunted by the photographs he took in the concentration camps and the devastation that took place across Europe. I remember listening intently to his experiences. As a person of faith, while I was in the Marine Corps I attended chapels and learned that the Navy provided Chaplains to the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. The beautiful thing is that in our First Amendment we protect the right to express our faith.

Take me back to your childhood in Maine, what are the

details you remember?

I think of a very close-knit family and a great quality of life. I loved being right next to the ocean. We'd go down to Casco Bay and ride the ferry. After high school, I traveled on the *Caribe*—the ferry that went from Portland to Nova Scotia—and I remember thinking, "Wow, this is really neat. There's just something about being out at sea."

When you've been away on assignment, what makes you homesick?

The view from Munjoy Hill. Real Maine lobster with warm butter and a drizzle of vinegar. The salt air. The quality of life. I've traveled around the world—I've been down range to Iraq twice and Afghanistan once as well as many other deployments—but when I get on the highway and see that sign *Welcome to Maine: The Way Life Should Be*, it always makes me smile. That's the quality of life I'm referring to.

Family Business

Meet the Wonder Women of the Miller Family.

NAVY WEEK IS OLD HOME week for the Miller family of Clifton, Maine, 16 miles east of Bangor. Mom and Dad fell in love while in uniform, and both daughters have served with distinction as Naval Officers.

Mom is Carolyn L. Miller, a Maine native who convinced her husband Dennis to retire here after both completed careers in the Navy. "I'm from Sherman, Maine," she says. "Grew up here.

"We were electronics technicians," she says of herself and Dennis—experts in their field. "We met in Guam, and then served tours together in Japan and Florida" before coming back here. "I retired as a senior chief, and Dennis retired as a master chief."

The allure of the sea, the excitement of world travel, and the honor of protecting our country was a frequent subject at dinner across the decades. Carolyn and Dennis could tell their daughters Sara and Denise listened carefully. But could anyone have guessed that both their daughters would become Naval Officers?

"You could never know anything like that," Carolyn says. "They just always liked the lifestyle we had. Always took an interest in it."

THE TWO SISTERS LAUNCH

First it was Sara who was nominated by Sen. Susan Collins for an appointment to the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. "We enlisted," Carolyn says, so she and Dennis were fascinated to see Sara's career take off.

"Sara majored in English at the Academy," Carolyn says. "She's a fabulous writer." After she graduated in 2008 and earned her commission as an Ensign, Sara became a Surface Warfare Officer and a Navy Lieu-

Kirsten Conner, 20, Navy Aircrewman, USN

Take us home. I grew up in Wales, Maine, surrounded by family. We spent a lot of time camping with my grandparents at Bottle Lake. My aunt owns Fish Bones in Lewiston, and I worked there in high school.



How's that plan going now?
I'm serving my first enlistment with the Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron 15 (HM-15), which lasts six years, and then I plan to go to college to study Mortuary Science.

What attracted you to the Navy?
Growing up in Maine, I was never far from the water. My father had been in the Army, and when I didn't have a plan for after high school and the Navy called one day, I went down to learn more.

Will you come back to Maine?
Yes. My husband is there. My family is there. Looking back, I was so lucky to grow up in Maine. It wasn't until I moved away that I really started to miss it. I grew up just wanting to leave.

tenant, serving in combatants like those made at Bath Iron Works on the shores of the Kennebec River—a dream that was a natural as it was extraordinary. "Her husband, a fellow Naval Academy grad, is a Marine Corps helicopter pilot," Carolyn says. "They're currently stationed in North Carolina. He flies the CH-53," the massive helicopter that's the largest in the Fleet. Talk about good vibrations.

DENISE'S SENSE OF SNOW

Now it was Denise's turn. "My sister's last ship was the aircraft carrier *USS Ronald Reagan*," Denise says. "I majored in Mechanical Engineering at Boston University." When she felt a need for speed after ROTC

"My parents' stories and love for the Navy had an impact on my decision to apply for a ROTC scholarship, but that career path was certainly never pushed onto me."

—LT Denise Miller



The Miller family from left. Master Chief Dennis Miller; Lieutenant Sara Everett; Lieutenant Denise Miller; and Senior Chief Carolyn Miller.

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What made you reconsider us?

The overall dynamic of the place. And the people—they are so hard working. Living in the South has been a big eye-opener. There's a lot more crime and poverty. Growing up in New England, I always felt so safe.

When do you get to come back next?

I'm getting ready for my first deployment in 2018, I'll be headed to Bahrain for six months, so I'm trying to take leave in September.

What is your favorite food in Maine?

Well, I hate lobster! Yes, really. I prefer the food here in the South. But I do miss Fish Bones American Grill.

graduation, she entered Navy Flight School in Pensacola, Florida.

Her alma mater was impressed. "Denise is soaring," wrote *Bostonia* magazine when she won her wings of gold, "and on her way to joining the elite ranks of Naval aviators." After multi-engine training, she became a Navy P-3 Orion pilot. The P-3 is exactly the same Navy aircraft that served legendary tours of duty at Brunswick Naval Air Station. Did these old friends visible everywhere in Maine's skies exert a powerful influence on Denise's childhood? Or was it just fate?

"I was aware of Naval Air Station Brunswick growing up," but she never saw Orion in her future—though it's the long-range aircraft she's flying right now. As for craving a home-field advantage, she says, "I've never landed at Brunswick before, but I have landed at Bangor Airport. We were coming home from deployment in 2014, and I was able to get word to my parents. They stood at the fence and saw me land. I was able to spend the night with them, too, and that was fun."

Today, "Denise is stationed at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland, right now," Carolyn says, "though she was just out in Colorado, flying in something interesting. It was called Operation SnowEx."

The operation involved NASA forestry scientists; "more than 100 scientists from universities and agencies across the United States, Europe, and Canada; and the Naval Research Laboratories; Denise

COURTESY PHOTOS

Heirloom Consignment

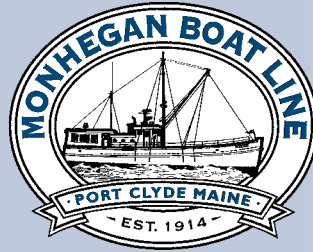
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and her fellow pilots in the Navy's Scientific Development Squadron One (VXS-1) flew over the Rocky Mountains, conducting surveys with sophisticated sensors to get a 21st century sense of snowfall, water runoff, and packed snow and its effects on drinking water.

“SnowEx was one of my favorite career moments,” Denise says. “NASA has their own P-3s, but they weren't available for this project, so the squadron that I am currently in (VXS-1) was able to install NASA's sensors onto our aircraft, and we flew with their scientists and engineers on board. It was a rare oppor-

“Growing up, I always enjoyed listening to my parents' stories about all the places they'd traveled.”



tunity for a pilot in the Navy. And the mission itself was fascinating. We tested different instruments and their ability to measure snow depth over various types of terrain.”

This was critically important research for humanity, not just the military. “Snow is critical to society,” Dr. Edward Kim, NASA's SnowEx project scientist, has told the Naval Research Laboratory about the study. The Laboratory's online publication, which features Denise as one of the pilots,

Brian Carpenter, 38, Leading Chief Petty Officer of Electrical Division

Where did you grow up in Maine? I was the youngest of six kids in Lewiston. My father was the Commander of the Lewiston Police Department. I lettered and was all-state in both hockey and football. My favorite sport was hockey, and I loved the Lewiston/St. Dom's rivalry.

Maine is the perfect garden to plant the seeds of adventure. What was your childhood like?

I was always outside. Always. It was only 'when the street lights come on' that we were supposed to go home. Other than that, get out of the house! I was always in the woods.

What year did you join, and what inspired you?

In 1999, I was at Plymouth State University to play hockey, but I wasn't quite prepared for the academic side. I knew I needed to do something else. Both my brother and brother-in-law were in the Navy, so I enlisted.

What is your rating?

I am the Leading Chief Petty Officer of Electrical Division on DDG-1000, the USS *Zumwalt*, the most technologically sophisticated war ship in the world. I'm responsible for the upkeep of electrical components and power management of 78 megawatts of power. I was made an Honor Recruit by my peers and was then selected to move onto the Ceremonial Guard (Presidential Honor Guard).

What do you miss most about Maine?

Oh, lobster, for sure! When I was stationed



in Maine for the *Zumwalt*, I was always teaching the guys how to crack lobsters and doing fish bakes at my house. That was pretty neat.

What's been your favorite port outside of Maine so far?

There are unique things to see everywhere you go. Italy is my favorite place. I love Italy. But the biggest culture shock was in the Middle East. I liked experiencing the place, but it was different. Maine is like its own little world, and you don't always experience different cultures. In the Navy, I've met so many different people of different races, backgrounds, creeds. I wish people could see how we act and treat each other in the military and bring that out to the local community. ■

points out: “More than one-sixth of the world's population relies on seasonal snow and glaciers for water. As much as three quarters of the water used in the western United States comes from snow.”

Just as snow melt transforms water supply, does a family's love for serving its country create a legacy of 'doing their bit'? Does one person (let alone two parents!) in uniform deepen the commitment of future generations?

One of the inflight technicians in Denise Miller's P-3 squadron may have the answer. He serves proudly as an enlisted electronics expert (so he could certainly talk shop with Denise's parents). He weighed in on SnowEx to the Naval Research Lab: “It's incredible working with NASA on a large, scientific project,” said Naval Air Crewman (Avionics) 1st Class Rodney Hynes.... “I'm going to go home and tell my kids all about it.”

—Colin W. Sargent



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