



My Life MY STORY



ALYCIA



UNITED STATES NAVY

Alycia

I was born in northern Nevada in 1990. I was an only child until I was about ten years old when my brother was born. My mom had been married a few times, so I had a few stepdads. My dad has been married to my stepmom for about twenty years and lives in Bend, Oregon. My mom lives here with my brother. They're all happy, and I'm happy for them.

I grew up in Fernley, Nevada and graduated from Fernley High School in 2008. I left Fernley after a falling out with my mom and stepdad who was very authoritarian. A series of events led me to pack my bedroom into my car one weekend and move to Washington state.

That move was a big step for me. Growing up, I was very timid and kind of sheltered. I wasn't really aware of a lot of real-life experiences. My mom told me I was making the biggest mistake of my life.

I moved in with Brice, my best friend from middle school. I lived in his parents' house. Strangely, his stepdad was very open about how much he disliked me, but Brice's mom was super nice, one of those "denning" mothers who just loved everyone and did everything for everybody. She was a real contrast to his stepdad who was crude.

When I was living there, I was working two jobs from five o'clock at night till four in the morning. I was supporting myself. Brice's stepdad's feelings about me turned around because I was being responsible.

I didn't know what I wanted to do. My mom was in the Army National Guard. She was really trying to get me to join the Air Force, the National Guard or the Army; but I said, "No, I don't want to join the military. I don't like it. No, Never."

I was just a weird little art kid. My hair was a different color every month. I had my nose pierced, and I wanted to get tattoos. My mom was very strict and military, and I didn't want anything to do with it. "No. Never."



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This was 2008; so, crap, “Never say never.” Jobs were impossible to find. The military was the only place hiring. I left Washington, moved in with my dad in Oregon, tried to find a job, but no one was hiring.

I mentioned to my dad one day about the military, and the next thing I know he comes home with a freaking recruiter right behind him. I don’t even remember if there was any discussion about which branch, I would be interested in. This Navy recruiter just walks into our house, “I’m Petty Officer such and so. I’m here to give you your ASVAB.” It was just so bizarre--I guess, I’ll go with it. I ended up talking to the recruiter at the house. I wanted to do something with psychology and that means medical, so I wanted to be a corpsman. He said, “I’m sorry, we’re not taking any female corpsmen.” They were in dire need of corpsmen, just not women.

Okay, my only criteria was I didn’t want to go on a ship. “What do you expect me to do? Why would I join the Navy?” He said, “Okay, we’ll make you an AS which is Aviation Systems Support.”

At the time because there were so many people enlisting in the military, it was supposed to be a year before I could go to boot camp and to AS school. I was talking to my dad and saying, “I just don’t want to go to the Navy or boot camp.” I was terrified of going to boot camp. I was a sensitive soul. I was afraid, legitimately afraid.

That same day the recruiter called me and said, “We had a seat open up for a corpsman. Do you want it? You’ll leave in a week if you take it.” I said, “Sure, ok, yeah.” I had just turned nineteen.

Next thing I know, I’m sitting at the airport with some others waiting to be shuffled into a bus and then onto an airplane to Great Lakes, Illinois.



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I honestly don't remember getting there. I remember sitting on the bus, then not being on the bus. Everyone was lined up facing each other in two rows, and we're all getting yelled at. "You got two minutes to call home and tell them you're okay! When two minutes is up, you hang up the phone!" This was on pay phones. I was in tears when I called. My stepmom answered the phone, (mournful sobs) "I'm okay." She said, "Okay, have fun." It was all a blur.

I hated boot camp, but I accepted it. My cousin who was a corpsman said, "Don't get any attention, skate under the radar, and you will be good." Well, that lasted for about two weeks.

My bangs were over my brow and my Recruit Division Commander said, "You need to go and get your hair cut." I didn't want to spend ten dollars on bangs. So, what did I do? I asked my AROC, this short little mousy girl, if she would trim my bangs for me. She cut my bangs high and straight across. I looked like Friar Tuck.

The next day I hear, "Did you cut your own hair?!" I was terrified. They made me go to the barber anyway and pay the ten dollars to fix my hair. It was already so short there was nothing she could do. The chiefs started calling me Friar Tuck. That's how I stayed under the radar.

I made it through boot camp. Corps School was just across the street. I was ingrained with boot camp. The first thing I did when I left was buy new underwear. The underwear they issued me went up under my boobs. I had to roll the band down fifteen times before I could get it to my hips. When I went to buy new underwear, I was thinking everything had to be white.



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When I got to corps school, my roommate was wearing bright red, lacy under garments. It wasn't boot camp anymore! I won't be standing in line in my underwear; they won't be able to see my underwear!

Corps school was four months long. I was in Illinois from May to October, roughly. Thankfully, I missed the winter all together.

Corps school was awesome. I knew absolutely nothing about medical. It was like learning a foreign language. I studied so hard. We had to take a number of tests. If you failed two tests, you had to go to counselling, or you changed rates (jobs).



I was so awkward. I didn't have any friends that I was aware of. Everyone would go out on the town on the weekends. I lived on that base. I went to the movie theater just down the road to see movies, to Pizza Hut, and to the library. Otherwise, I was sitting in my room.

It was really eye opening to meet all these different people from different backgrounds. I grew up in Fernley which is one train of thought. In my family, you just did what you were told. Don't ask questions; there's a reason for everything. I realized I didn't have to follow blindly. I could question things. That was cool.

I went from being an awkward teenager in those six months to being a less awkward young adult. I was still weird, but I had gained a little confidence.



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When you first start school, the different instructors for the different pipelines would come and talk to the corpsmen. Corpsmen branch out to different groups. Of course, they were talking mainly to the men. The corpsmen that were Fleet Marine Force (FMF) were talking about going with the Marines. They really played up this job. At the time, I didn't really know what it was, just that you go with the Marines. I love the Marines. I was thinking that was what I wanted to do.

While I was in corps school, I flew back to Reno. My boyfriend and I got married, another traditional boot thing that people do but shouldn't.

Then, I get orders to San Diego. All the guys had to go off to Field Medical Training Battalion whether they wanted to or not. I went to the Naval Medical Center San Diego, and I loved it. That is also where my sons, Logan, and Brody, were born.

I was an "awesome" sailor. I was looking out for everybody else. I was on top of my studying and education. I got early promotion recommendations on my evaluations, and I picked up E4 on my first exam. I was like, "Okay. I got this!"

I worked in pediatrics. Ultimately, I was put in a specialty pediatrics clinic which was good because it was eight hours instead of twelve. I got to see most of my patients and build a familiarity with them. That was my best experience with a blue side command.

I was a go-getter. I liked to do all these extra things, to go the extra mile, to make sure stuff was done right. I loved my job, I loved taking care of my patients, and I loved taking care of other sailors. But when I left, I wanted to rip my hair out. The amount of BS that had to be waded through to do anything in that job was ridiculous.

I ended up getting transferred to a new department. I still worked in the same clinic, but I was under a different chain of command.



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I was working with another E4 who chose not to acknowledge my positional authority and wanted to go off on his own little tangents. The chain of command decided to fix it by putting an E5 in charge of us.

The E5 was a moron. I can't sugar coat it. He was an E5 and had been working in this clinic for years, and he didn't even know how to start an IV (day one of Corps School). He was putting more stress on me by asking me how to do his job. It was easier if I just did it myself. I approached the chain of command with it.

"Do you have documentation?" I thought, "Well, I can't write that up because he's an E5 and I'm an E4." So, I had the nurse in charge start keeping track of things.

A few months later, he was still doing these things. I was getting complaints from the doctors about certain things that he was doing wrong. I had to go to the chain of command with all this proof, all this documentation, and they said, "You're just nitpicking because you don't like him." Long story short—I was done. I just wanted to get my job done and do it well without having to babysit. I was there for four years.

In 2012, I was going through a divorce. I wanted to get out of the Navy and get my life straightened out. HM2 said, "Don't be stupid. If you get out, you won't be able to take care of your kids. You won't have medical, a job or a home." I was really mad at him for saying that, but he was right. I stayed in and did everything I could to be civil and accommodating on behalf of my kids.

I reenlisted in January 2012. My mom was my reenlisting officer which was really cool.



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In June 2013, I received a Navy Achievement Medal in recognition of my four years of providing quality health care to 20,000 beneficiaries annually.

I got orders to green side, the logistics group. I was so excited because I was going to be with the Marines. HM2 ended up becoming my mentor. He said, “All you’re going to do is inventory, counting pills, and counting Band-Aids.” I was a little disappointed, but I didn’t care. I was going to the Marines. I was going to Field Med School in North Carolina. I had to wait for ten months to fill my orders. There were a limited number of seats for females.



I went to Camp Johnson, North Carolina. After Field Med School, I got orders to Camp Pendleton, First Med Battalion. When I got there, I was initially stationed with Charlie Company and later transferred to Bravo Company. Bravo was the med ready unit, the ones doing all the exercises all the time. They were on seventy-two-hour notice.



When I was in Bravo Company, which was the largest battalion at the time, we had about a hundred people in the platoon less than ten of us were women. It’s an experience to get used to for sure. I struggled at med battalion because I didn’t know anybody.



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In San Diego, I had made a few friends at the hospital; so, if I needed someone to help with babysitting or for an emergency or childcare, I had people that could help me. At Pendleton, I had nobody. I never made any female Marine friends. There just weren't many women Marines. The only female friend I made was another corpsman.

Bravo put me on field exercises when my kids were with their dad. We had three-month custody rotations. That was a huge relief because being in the field gave me something to do. When the boys were away, I was miserable. I ended up getting a dog for company.

The field exercises sucked at the time, but now I look back and realize they were kind of fun. Med battalion didn't count pills; we did casualty exercises. It was first used in combat in 2010. Essentially, we set up a mobile ER. Within sixty minutes after arriving at the location, we would be up and running and ready to receive casualties. We practiced a lot. "You train like you fight" was the meat and potatoes of every field exercise we did. It was very redundant.



We would go out to 29 Palms for about two weeks in the summer. It was so hot! We had to wear flak jacket, Kevlar and carry rifles everywhere. They had porta-potties, thankfully; but as a woman in a flak jacket, a rifle, and everything, it took about fifteen minutes to go to the bathroom. It never failed, if they called a casualty drill, I would have to go to the bathroom. We would do mass casualty drills every day, all day.

I also studied for my FMF (Fleet Marine Force) pin. Getting my FMF pin was the goal I had set for myself, and I was legitimately proud of myself when I got it.



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The FMF pin is only given to corpsmen and RPs that serve with a Marine Corps unit. It's a huge deal! It is what separates the corpsmen within the community. It is a lot of training and testing. The pin you get is based on the group you are with. Mine was related to all the information that I had to know for the logistics group, the different shops, supplies and the missions. It took three months.

The shield is medal you get after you graduate field med school. You can only wear the shield when you are with a Marine Corps unit. The family I made with the Marine Logistics Group was the best group of people.

I ended up being stationed at the Naval Hospital, Camp Pendleton. I messed up my hip on a battalion hike. I was there for my last year in the military. The blue side aspect of it was horrible. I hated it. Everyone was in it for themselves. That's how the Navy is in general. The green side commands (when you are with your Marines or other green side corpsmen) is not about advancing yourself but helping your family. You get advanced as a repercussion of that.



I received my second Navy Achievement Medal in March 2017 for exceptional leadership and support to the First Marine Logistics Group, First Marine Division.

I got medically separated because of my hip. That was bittersweet. At the time, I convinced myself that it was time to get out. I needed to move on with my life.

Just before I separated from the Navy, I started dating my mentor, HM2. He knew everything I had been through. He really helped me with making decisions and getting out of the Navy.



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I am a mom to my two boys and a full-time student right now at TMCC working on my Associates in Art with an emphasis in psychology. Once I finish that, I want to transfer to UNR and get my bachelor's in psychology. My ultimate goal is to go back to be the weird art kid and doing art therapy.

It is interesting to go into a VA clinic and see how they do things. I have a medical background, but I never tell anyone that. It is interesting to see how I am treated with the assumption I don't know what is going on. I have had scenarios where I think, "That doesn't make sense." It is frustrating because I feel like I know what I'm talking about to a degree but sometimes, I'm treated like I don't.

