



Surviving Plebe Year at the United States Naval Academy

A Mom's Journal with Tips and Wisdom from our
Family's Plebe Year

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1. My Candidate has the Appointment... Now What?

Not being too familiar with military life, I have to admit that sometimes we were at a loss. My family has a lifetime link to the Naval Academy - my Dad attended the prestigious institution; I was baptized in the Chapel; we met many of his classmates and heard the stories of their sojourn at the Yard, many of which, I still remember and recount to my own children today. We would occasionally visit the campus, following behind our Dad and Mom, not noticing the majesty of the beautiful buildings, but somehow, innately, filled with pride at standing in the midst of Naval history.

Although my Dad is a member of the Class of 1959, one of four international students, he served his term overseas and way before us kids came along. We were very fortunate, however, to have my Dad's input and advice as well as several good friends who walked before us that came to our aid. First, it is helpful to know that candidates are now considered appointees and they are not Plebes until they are sworn in on I-Day. So now that you have the appointment what should you do? If the above question has crossed your mind, here are some things to do and keep in mind:

MAKE HOTEL/HOUSING RESERVATIONS for I-Day **and** Plebe Parent Weekend at the same time and ASAP, if possible. The dates should be in your I-Day packet, which you should receive from the USNA, or you can go to www.USNA.edu/plebesummer.

It is most convenient to select accommodations for I-Day that allows you to walk to the Academy. This alleviates any potential stress that may be caused by traffic, forgetting something, etc. There are several Bed and Breakfast locations very near or within a short walk to Gate 1 that we can recommend. Please note that prices vary and double check on the minimum age allowed for guests if you are traveling with the whole family and have young children. They are:

<i>Academy Bed and Breakfast</i> (443) 949-0874	www.academybedandbreakfast.com
<i>Historic Inns of Annapolis</i> (410) 263-2641	www.historicinnsofannapolis.com
<i>Flag House Inn</i> (410) 280-2721	www.flaghouse.com
<i>The Inn at 30 Maryland</i>	www.30Maryland.com

If you choose to drive in to keep costs down, you can park at Marine Memorial Stadium and take a bus provided by the Academy to the campus as well. Just to make sure, check ahead of time on the times the buses will be running. If a hotel is a better option for you, there are hotels on West Street that are within 10 to 15 minutes' walking distance to the Academy's Gate 1 and are on the trolley route. They are:

<i>The Westin</i> (410) 972-4300	www.starwoodhotels.com/westin/index.html
<i>Loews</i> (410) 263-7777	www.loewshotels.com
<i>O'Callaghan</i> (410) 263-7700	www.ocallaghanhotels-us.com

Other good options within a short driving distance are:

<i>Courtyard by Marriott</i> (410) 266-1555	www.marriott.com/Courtyard
<i>Springhill Suites</i> (443) 321-2500	www.marriott.com/SpringHillSuites
<i>Residence Inn</i> (410) 573-0300	www.residenceinn.marriott.com

You should probably also make your flight and rental car reservations at this time if you need them. You can fly Southwest non-stop into BWI or DCA. Jet Blue into DCA is another nice option, however, with that said, Southwest allows you to be flexible. There is a saying we learned during Plebe year: "*Semper Gumby!*" – always be flexible. In the event that you need to change dates or cancel your flights, Southwest allows you to do just that – be flexible - there is no penalty to change your travel dates, and if other flights in your fare class are available, you don't even have to pay extra... Also, ask about a military discount, although this will not be available until your son or daughter are sworn in since they will have to show their military ID for check-in, and their online fares are typically the lowest fares available.

It is advisable that you arrive a day or two prior to I-Day to take a tour of the campus and know exactly where you need to go the morning of I-Day. You don't need the added stress of being lost or being late. It will also be helpful to get acquainted with Annapolis and the surrounding areas where you will spend the next four years of your life with your incoming Plebe.

When you return from I-Day, let your car insurance company know that your son/daughter is away at college and they will be occasional drivers. Do not drop them from your car insurance but have them as occasional drivers. You should see a significant decrease in your premiums and they will be covered if they do drive when they visit home.

Make sure that you complete and send in the form for the Sponsor family that is included in the I-Day packet. During Plebe Summer your Incoming Plebe will be paired with a Sponsor family. Sponsors are volunteers that love the Naval Academy and volunteer to care for our Midshipmen. They are the ones that will bring sanity to your Plebe's life during Plebe year. With restricted privileges, your Plebe can't readily leave the Yard, but the Sponsors will pick him or her up when they have liberty and enable them to get away from the Yard for awhile. Sponsors will feed your child, let them do their laundry, sometimes even drive them to the airport and/or pick them up. These are bonds that will last a lifetime.

One last thing, if you are planning a trip overseas prior to I-Day, contact your admissions officer or your BGO to make sure that this would be advisable and that the destination will not cause any issues for your son or daughter with the Naval Academy. We were planning an overseas trip and after speaking with several people, we decided that the best course of action would be to cancel. There are certain countries that could pose a difficulty because of diseases that may be common or prevalent in the area where you are planning to travel may be an issue. Additionally, you do not want to risk illness or injury just before I-Day. It is always better to check and be certain!

2. When the Packet Arrives...

- ✓ When you receive the Packet, read through the Packet in its entirety. Much of what you need to know is right there! Separate what needs to be done right now and what can wait, and organize by DUE DATE. Place a post-it on each pile with the date it is due and make sure you allow time for mailing! Allow a generous amount of time for snail mail time, and always use DELIVERY CONFIRMATION or FedEx if you prefer. Make copies of everything you send in just in case...Have a file for yourself that you bring with you to I-Day and a file for your Candidate that they bring with them to I-Day with copies of the required documents.
- ✓ Mail in your letter of commitment as soon as possible with delivery confirmation and keep a copy for your files. You can choose to have a special commitment letter signing ceremony for your Plebe with family, teachers and friends.

- ✓ RSVP for the I-Day picnic early if you plan on attending.
- ✓ Sign up for the ListServe – This is an email service available to parents of the USNA. There is a lot of useful and a lot of not-so-useful information, but as Plebe parents it was helpful for the most part. My friend Anita suggested setting up a separate email address just for the ListServe due to the volume of emails that are generated – you have to think: 1,200 sets of parents! A separate email only for ListServe does not inundate your personal email and allows you to tune in or tune out... There are two ListServe services – one for Plebe Parents and a general one for all Parents. You can go to our website, www.usnafloridaparents.org/4-c-plebes/ for the link and other useful information.
- ✓ Complete the entire packet AS SOON AS POSSIBLE and make sure that you follow directions exactly! When in doubt, contact your USNA admissions counselor, your BGO or the USNA South Florida Parents Club Plebe Parent liaison.
- ✓ Your incoming Plebe should be working out daily, preparing physically, and should be memorizing their rates (memory work, which they will be tested on and are included in the packet, for I-Day). Some people may tell you to have your son or daughter memorize the entire Reef Points in addition to the sheet included in the I-Day packet prior to I-Day. I suggest that you don't do this. It is not necessary and may cause more problems than not. They can look through it and be familiar with what it is, and it is fun to read – at least it was for me! Also, be aware that your Incoming Plebe's Reef Points book will not be out until I-Day typically, and they do change some basic things from year to year... I talk more about this in the "For the Candidate" section.
- ✓ Be careful what you and your candidate/appointee post on Facebook and other social media. Everyone is watching....
- ✓ Enjoy your family time together. You may want to plan a last family vacation prior to I-Day – read the section about traveling overseas (p. 3).
- ✓ Join the USNA South Florida Parents or Club or your local parents club as soon as possible. This group of current and former Academy parents are an invaluable resource and will provide support and much needed information, both as you begin your journey and throughout your four years at the Naval Academy.
- ✓ Find out when the USNA South Florida Parents Club Welcome Aboard picnic is and reserve that date. You will get lots of helpful tips and information from seasoned Naval Academy parents and from current Plebe parents that will prove invaluable. Also, at our USNA South Florida Parents Club Welcome Aboard! Your Candidate will receive weapons training and will get to chat with current Mids. Parents get oriented as to what to expect and get to ask questions from seasoned and current Plebe parents, so it is a MUST to attend.
- ✓ Have your Plebe professionally fitted for running shoes and purchase TWO pairs. They should break them both in about three weeks before I-Day. He or she will wear one pair to I-Day. They will use that pair to run and work out during the first few weeks of Plebe Summer. The other pair you will mail to them about half way through Plebe summer. They will run so much that about four or five weeks in, they will be ready for their new, broken in pair of running shoes, which means no blisters, etc.! Do not worry too much about the color. They will be issued all white sneakers on I-Day. Just make sure that your son or daughter is fitted with the running shoes that are good for them. Color is not a big concern as it once was. They want healthy runners!

- ✓ Your incoming Plebe may want to consider getting a shorter haircut prior to I-Day, just enough to get the scalp exposed to the sun before I-Day. You don't want to get scalp sunburn when you get there. We chose to have a haircutting ceremony with friends. A good friend who is an "all gone" style haircut specialist came over with her clippers and her family. Our son got his haircut fairly short – about a #2 or #3 blade, and my husband and his younger brother followed suit with sympathy haircuts as well. They all looked very handsome and we enjoyed a friends and family BBQ afterward. It was a lot of fun and is one of our fondest memories!
- ✓ Help your son or daughter to prepare mentally and emotionally. Speak with them about the rigorous training that they will endure during the seven weeks of Plebe Summer. Most candidates are physically prepared for I-Day, but many are not mentally or emotionally prepared. They are at the top of their class and are used to success and perfection. Please read the section entitled "For the Candidate" together with your incoming Plebe. If you can find someone – a current Mid or parent - to speak with him or her to help him or her prepare, I would highly recommend it.
- ✓ We also used this opportunity to prepare our incoming Plebe for life. We had him meet with a great investment advisor to help him think ahead and set some goals for the future and what he needs to do to get there. We also took a budgeting class as a family – we chose Financial Peace by Dave Ramsey, and it was great going through it together, even for our younger kids. They learned a lot about setting a budget, having an emergency fund, staying away from credit cards and mostly living within your means and spending money wisely. Since Plebes receive a net stipend of about \$100 per month, it is good for them to learn to budget and plan ahead.
- ✓ Something else to keep in mind is that your son or daughter's appointment takes that spot for a period of four years. If they quit, that spot will remain vacant for the remainder of the time they would have been at the Naval Academy, and it represents an opportunity that another young man or woman could have had at the Naval Academy. Be certain that this is the right thing for your Plebe and your family. The bottom line is that it has to be *their choice* to be at the Academy. Make sure it is what *they* will want to do and *they* are ready to make the commitment – no matter what...
- ✓ Lastly, the best advice I can give you as a Mom, if you are a hands-on parent, you need to learn to let go as soon as possible.... and always remember: *Semper Gumbo!*

3. For the Candidate: Important things to Know and Expect...

- ✓ Plebe Summer will be a physical test but will also be mentally and emotionally draining and taxing.
- ✓ The most important thing is to stay calm – do not lose your temper, get flustered or say something that you will regret!
- ✓ Expect to be stressed, ***expect to fail*** and ***be ready to try, try again***.
- ✓ Have a sense of humor.
- ✓ Don't take things personally. Your detailers are not there to like you or hate you. They are there to train you based on proven methodologies and their own training and personal experiences. They will instill in you discipline, obedience and honor. You may not see why things are relevant now, but they will make sense later on - maybe much later!
- ✓ Remember that everyone is in the same boat!

- ✓ Know that one day will be YOUR day – there will be a day that regardless of what you do or don't do, things will NOT go your way. It's OK – it happens to everyone! Expect it; get through it and at the end of the day now that you made it through another day!
- ✓ If you don't know something, don't say you don't know, say you will find out – and please do, reporting back with the answer.
- ✓ I also recommend that you make sure to memorize the rates that came in your I-Day packet. Many people will have their incoming Plebe begin to memorize the Reef Points prior to I-Day. I have inquired of several successful Mids on this, and it is a double-edged sword to do so. You do not want to know too much going in so that you are over confident, have all the answers or seem arrogant. You will end up paying for it in the end! You can also jeopardize your squad if you know too much. Trust the process – everyone else has survived memorizing the Reef Points during Plebe summer for decades! Stay low-key and be a genuine team player.
- ✓ Remember – the most important thing about I-Day is that it's not about you. It's about everyone else. If you have to take it for the team, take it for the team.
- ✓ Every day has an end! Take it one minute/one hour/ one day at a time.
- ✓ Think of Plebe Parent Weekend – the seven weeks will be up before you know it and you will get to see your family again!
- ✓ Be and stay humble. From our experience, both through our Mid and from talking to upperclassmen, one of the things that detailers dislike most is someone who is arrogant and a know-it-all. Stay humble, be helpful to your teammates. Put yourself last and your team first – always! Remember, a good leader knows how to follow...
- ✓ If you tend to be creative and tend to skirt the system, **DON'T**. I can't stress this enough!!! This is building your about character and honor. You do not want to put yourself in a situation where they have to lie. You are training to be Naval Officers and lead enlisted men and women. You MUST be trustworthy – you will hold their lives in your hands one day... Character counts; Honor counts; Integrity counts!! As Thomas Jefferson said, it is not about what you do or don't do when people are looking, it is about what you do or don't do when no one is! Now is the time when you test your metal – can you stand firm on what you know is right and wrong? HONOR, COURAGE, COMMITMENT. These are the core values of the US Navy and the U.S. Naval Academy. Are you ready to be a Midshipman of integrity? You may see others – both Plebes all the way through First Class doing something that is against the rules or improper, like drinking or keeping or wearing civilian clothes while at the Academy during your Plebe year or in your parents hotel room or house when they are visiting. Be strong! Don't be a follower – be a leader and do the right thing every time! Upon your return to the Yard, you may be asked if you drank, if you wore civvies (civilian clothes – technically *you are only allowed to change into a USNA PT t-shirt and PT shorts in your parent's hotel room/house when on liberty*); they may ask if you went beyond the boundary for visits (22 miles and D.C. only). Don't put yourself in a position where you or your squad gets dinged (punished) or your character is compromised. You may get away with it by lying, but in the end, is that the character you want to develop as a leader? Are you setting the right example for others? And if you ever fall short, come clean, admit it and live with the consequences – you would not expect anything less from the men and women you will lead one day. It is a matter of character, honor and integrity, and one day possibly even life and death...
- ✓ Finally, remember that the Detailers can't kill you, hurt you, or stop the sun from rising and setting, they can only test you to your own limits and only **you** can decide what those are!

4. For incoming Plebe Parents...Let them Go!

I had an epiphany toward the end of Plebe year where I realized that the relationship I had with my Plebe had changed and was intrinsically different. My role is no longer as a Mom – giving direction, etc. but my role is now to come alongside and support them in their journey. They have a life to live and their own choices – be they good or bad – to make. That is not to say that if we disagree I don't voice my concerns, but the tone, phrasing and logic is different. I am now talking to a man, not a child, and am glad they still need my input, but I am careful to maintain a balance between Mom and advisor.

The most important thing for a Naval Academy parent to learn was told to me by an amazing admissions counselor at the Academy. It is: *Let go!* If you are a hands-on parent, otherwise known as a helicopter parent, please STOP hovering! Your son or daughter has been accepted into one of the most prestigious institutions in the world, and being a military institution, it requires restraint on the part of the parents. Also, keep in mind that by the time the end of Plebe Summer, and certainly, by the end of Plebe Year, your son or daughter will be a complete adult, capable of making their own choices, not only through maturing throughout Plebe year, but by training.

Additionally, keep in mind that anything that you do or say, if seen in a negative light, may end up affecting and/or reflecting on your Midshipman...Please allow your incoming Plebe to grow up and take over their own preparations and responsibilities. Help them to be diligent and accountable for all that they do. The Academy will develop self-assurance, confidence and self-discipline. The best way to help prepare them and to prepare yourself as well, is to let go. Let them become their own person and do things for themselves. At the Academy they will not have a choice. You will be amazed at the adult man or woman you will meet after Plebe Summer, during Plebe Parent Weekend, and at the end of Plebe year. The change will be unbelievable! Allow them to grow up...

Social Media and the Internet: Be careful what questions you ask and what is posted on your son, daughter's and/or your own Facebook page...I remember reading a parent's post on Facebook last year, and I could not believe it! This parent had spoken to their Plebe during one of the allowed phone calls and were incensed that their child was only getting four or five hours of sleep each night. They posted a question asking whom it would be best to contact to make sure that their child got enough sleep – the Commandant of Midshipmen or the Superintendent! Please remember that the Detailers and Chain of Command do read and check the parent forums and Facebook pages. It is best for parents to be absent from the conversations lest it reflect poorly or cause extra work for your Plebe...As tempting as it may be, restraint is the order of the day. Beware! There is also a lot of wrong information in cyber space. Not all blogs and parents posts are always accurate. Some are outdated. Always count on your Plebe to have the correct, most up-to-date information. Join the ListServe, parent Facebook group for your child's class year and possibly their Company page during Plebe Summer and the AcYear. You can also join USNA Mid Moms (and Dads!) on Facebook. It is an amazing group. Always count on your Blue and Gold officer for accurate information. In any case, when in doubt, ask your Mid!

5. I-Day Minus One

Nerves will begin to arrive about the week prior to traveling. Make sure that your hotel; car and flight reservations are taken care of early on. Many hotels accept reservations without penalty for cancellation, but make sure that you are aware of the terms for your stay BEFORE you book. Many times, a change of date – extending your stay or cutting it short, will affect the rate for your entire stay. Be careful!

Packing - Don't worry about packing much for your Plebe. As a Plebe you are not allowed many privileges and they will not be able to keep most of their personal belongings anyway. The few things they bring will be placed in storage for the duration of Plebe summer. Please MAKE SURE THAT HIS/HER WALLET and CELL ARE IN THEIR PANTS POCKET AND NOT IN THEIR BACKPACK or it will go into storage for the summer, and they do not want to be the Plebe having to ask to get it out of storage! The Detailers will lock their phones and valuables away. In any case, they will be given directions by their Detailers. The civilian clothes they arrive in will be returned to you on Plebe Parent Weekend since they can't wear any civvies while in Annapolis during their Plebe year. You can send extra socks, underwear, toiletries, snacks, favorite toothpaste, toothbrush, shampoo, etc. in care packages during the summer.

Remember to pack your Midstore card, Yard access card (allows you to drive on to the Yard to drop off your Mid – you can't park, but it is nice to be able to drive on, especially when there is a lot to carry, etc. You should have received these with your I-Day packet although they are sometimes mailed separately. We once forgot to pack our Yard Access card, so I now have my Yard Bags – it is a purse and a bag that I have set aside and where I have everything that I need for the Naval Academy. It never gets unpacked, and when we use something from the purse it goes right back in. I am a stickler with that... and when we do travel to the Yard, I just grab it and go, knowing that everything I need is there. When we were on the Yard for I-Day, we purchased a pair of PT shorts and we had the PT t-shirt that we had received in our Parents Club Welcome Aboard packet. They were always packed and ready to go so that our Plebe would have regulation clothing to change into. That way he wouldn't have to worry about laundry or remembering to bring his PT clothes to change into. My Yard Bag has been a lifesaver!

DO buy a personalized Navy blanket from www.chilloutblankets.com for you to use on I-Day. Order with plenty of time to spare! What is so special about this blanket? First, you are helping to support a fellow USNA Parents Club. More importantly, you will need a blanket for your Plebe to sit on when you see him or her at the end of the day on I-Day before they march in. This blanket has a side that is fleece and the other side is waterproof, so if the ground is damp, place the vinyl side down and it will not leak through onto the uniform and form a big grass stain – don't ask – we lived through this! Bring a Tide stick or Tide pads (these work great on the "White Works" – Plebe uniforms) with you just in case anyway, and make sure to send some packs in the first care package. You will definitely use this blanket for years to come and they are well worth the investment!! We have used this blanket for home football games, Army-Navy games and they do keep us warm AND dry!! And don't forget to pack your blanket – put it in your suitcase now!

At the USNA - Your incoming Plebe has been assigned to a Company and Platoon. The smallest unit at the Naval Academy is a squad, which are your closest members within your company – about 8 per squad. The largest unit is the entire Brigade of Midshipmen – 4,400. During Plebe Summer, the Companies have about 140 Mids each and go by letters (A Company, B Company, etc.). There are 30 companies. Additionally, there will be Platoon numbers. Chances are that whatever Platoon number your Plebe is assigned to will be their Company for the remainder of their years at the USNA. For example, if your Plebe is in B Company - 4th Platoon, in the Fall they will most likely be in the Fourth Company. This is good to know, but it is not necessarily guaranteed. Sometimes Plebes are "scrambled", meaning that they have to move all their belongings and to their new room or Company without prior warning and within a given time. Another favorite test is for the Detailers to go into the room, unmake the beds, etc. and the Plebes have a couple of minutes to get everything tidy again. Sometimes this happens in the middle of the night, and it really depends

on their Company. It is a lesson on how to work together. They will need to learn this fast! My Plebe and his roommate got it down to a science by working together, and they could make both beds in under a minute...

Plebes are not allowed to nap or fall asleep and doing so, jeopardizes the Plebes for the entire Squad or Company, which will then be subject to extra duties as deemed necessary. Each Company has its own personality and is definitely different from one another. The key thing is to not lose self-control and to not take it personally. GO with the flow – Semper Gumby!

Your Plebe's address should also be in your packet or in a subsequent mailing. It may be one address during Plebe Summer and will probably change for the Fall. Your Plebe will let you know when the address changes for the Fall, usually just before Plebe Parents Weekend.

If you fly to Annapolis a day or two early, get settled in and walk around town and the Academy. Please make sure that you and your Plebe HYDRATE, HYDRATE, HYDRATE. One of our favorite lines from the book Lone Survivor, which my Plebe took to heart as a swimmer, Mr. Lutrell talks about staying hydrated and eating properly: "If you take care of your body, your body will take care of you", he said. Keeping hydrated will help them deal with the stress better and feel better as they tackle their I-Day experience.

Now is a good time to visit the Midstore and purchase your Navy spirit goodies if you want to, before they run out of stock of some items. You can also pick up a small umbrella for tomorrow – the sun can be brutal and you will welcome the shade. I can literally spend hours in the Midstore! See if they have your Plebe's sneakers, favorite shampoo, etc. It will eliminate a lot of unnecessary shipping if they do.

Banking - Go to Navy Federal and have your Plebe open his bank account if possible. If you open one as well, you will be able to move money into his/her account when they need it. Although they do get a small stipend, they will need to buy printer cartridges, paper, supplies, and toiletries – eventually, during the AC Year. Take advantage of any promotions they are offering for opening a new account – the promotions and incentives are usually quite enticing and are limited to a couple of times per year. You can also open a Yard Card and although Plebes are not allowed in many of the places on the Yard, they can use it in the Midstore for supplies, ink, the Dry Dock for snacks, etc. You can go to <http://www.usnabsd.com/yard-card-account/> to add money to the card for your Plebe. You can set up your Yard Card before I-Day or before PPW. Information is in the packet!

Your Plebe will not need cash for Plebe Summer, except for the baseball game they will typically attend at the end of Plebe Summer, prior to PPW. They can have \$20 or so in their wallet, not much more, to buy a hot dog, drink, fries, or their favorite snack. It will be like heaven eating this food again!

Practice makes Perfect! While you are on the Yard, practice your walk/drive from where you are staying to where you need to be and time it so that you know exactly how long it will take. Also, on I-Day Stribling Walk will be SO crowded after the swearing in ceremony, that we followed our friends Anita and Elaine's advice and during our walk with our incoming Plebe the day before, we found a nice shady spot just off from Stribling Walk on the grass, to meet our Plebe. That is where we waited anxiously for our Plebe after the Swearing In ceremony and had everything ready for him – blanket laid out, cooler with waters and sandwiches, etc. Find a spot that is good for both of you.

If your Candidate is bringing sports equipment, you may want to ship it before you leave home if you have the mailing address or you can ship it from Annapolis before you leave. The Plebes will have to carry everything they bring to I-Day in addition to their issue pack with all of their issued clothing, shoes, bedding items, etc. that they will be given on I-Day and the pack can weigh anywhere between 60 - 80 Lbs. They will have to run and go up stairs/downstairs several times carrying everything, so "free" hands are essential. We watched so many kids with their big, heavy bag of issue supplies, backpack, bags, golf or hockey equipment and more to carry, and they were so miserable!

As you walk around town, visit the Big Cheese Deli on St. George Street, two blocks from the Academy. They have wonderful sandwiches and you can meet Bob and Judi the owners. Go there with your Plebe and you can place your order for your Plebe's sandwich to pick up on I-Day afternoon before the swearing in or you can go to Subway or any other place that may be a favorite. Avoid mustard or other items that can stain the uniform. Order an extra or two in the event that you run into a Plebe who is alone for I-Day and you can invite him/her to join you. Bring water and maybe some chips. Do not get any colored drinks or anything that can potentially cause a stain. You do not want to cause any additional stress for your Plebe. Have Wisk wipes and a Tide Stick on hand just in case! Sophie's Crepes by the dock is another good choice, just remember to get something that won't be runny or stain.

Remind your Plebe to make sure they have all of the necessary forms and that everything is completed and signed *before* you leave home, but **he/she** should double check the night before I-Day as well. You may as well begin letting go now! They should go through the back pack they will bring and check that they have everything they will need – a file with copies of everything, their ID – make sure to have a copy of their passport on hand, glasses and case if needed (no contacts are allowed during Plebe Summer!), cell phone and charger and any other allowed personal items. They should keep their wallet and cell in their pants pocket or it will go into storage and it will not be fun getting it out... There is a list of items you can follow in the packet the Naval Academy sends you.

Have a care package ready to send *from the Annapolis Post Office* – there are several locations you can look up. Do this *before you leave Annapolis after I-Day* with key things your Plebe will need right away, such as:

- ✓ Tide pens and Tide Pads work really well on the White works
- ✓ Wisk wipes (for Summer Whites at the end of Plebe summer)
- ✓ Medicated foot powder!
- ✓ Band-Aids
- ✓ Mole Skin to place on the inside of their boots wherever they rub to help with blisters
- ✓ Filtered water bottle - try to find one with a charcoal filter and send a replacement in 3 - 4 weeks (check with your Plebe during your first phone call – they may only be allowed to drink out of their canteens for Plebe Summer, but you can buy one during PPW or send one after)
- ✓ Favorite deodorant, toothpaste, baby wipes, chap sticks, mints (3-packs of mini Altoids are great!)
- ✓ Razor and shaving cream – no electric razors or toothbrushes allowed during Plebe summer
- ✓ Shampoo, lotion, soap/shower gel, bath sponge/cloth if desired.
- ✓ Extra white running socks, white underwear (apparently issue skivvies are uncomfortable...)
- ✓ Cleaning supplies – Windex/Pledge wipes, Mr. Clean Magic Eraser.
- ✓ Small American flag w/ stand – we provide one in our Welcome Aboard packets

You can also send second box filled with various favorite snack items in a large plastic shoebox. They will use the box to store snacks in order to keep Bancroft Hall critters out...We found that the "shirt size" Medium Flat rate box fits the smaller plastic shoe box and the Large flat rate box fit the larger plastic shoe box.

Purchase stamps and note cards – pre-address the envelopes to yourself, fill in their return address and place stamps on each envelope so they are ready to go. This is HUGE for them and a big time saver!! Include blank pre-stamped cards and envelopes so they can write to their friends too. – You can fill-in their return address as well. The notes you receive back may be short, but at least you will know they are ok! I designed and had printed my own post cards (vistaprint.com) with checkboxes of things I wanted to know, like "I am not hurt", I am OK, having fun, I am alive, need more snacks, etc., so my Plebe would not have to take time writing and left some blank lines for him to write a note if he needed to or to specify what items he needed. I had the envelopes pre-printed with his return address and our home address to save him time. We also pre-stamped them, and included the pre-stamped blank cards with his return address already written on the envelopes in the first package so that he could write to friends as well.

Make sure that you include the small desk size American flag with a stand our Club gives out for your Plebe to display it on their desk. There is a rule that if there are more Plebes gathered in a room than there are "racks" (beds) it can be considered mutiny, but not if an American flag is present. Make sure to send two or three extra in case there might be another Plebe who needs one.

Don't send vitamins! They are particular as to what your incoming Plebe puts into their body and they can be randomly drug tested. With that said, Packets of Emergency are usually acceptable to send. It is a good idea to flood your incoming Plebe with vitamins and good stuff before they get there. Invariably, they will most likely get sick and contract the "Plebe Hack". You can also send non-medicated cough drops too, just in case they need them. PLEASE DO NOT SEND FLASHLIGHTS, SCISSORS, and other contraband that is not allowed. You will just get your Plebe in trouble!

Shopping - Annapolis has every store you will possibly need – Target, Whole Foods, Fresh Market, etc. You can buy the items for your care package with your Plebe before I-Day so that you know exactly what he/she wants. You can mail the package on I-Day Minus one or the day after I-Day.

Early Report Times - If your Plebe has an early report time - 6 a.m. through 7:30 a.m., make prior arrangements for breakfast. It could be an issue finding a place open for a meal early in the morning. Typically, room service does not begin until 6:30am and restaurants usually open around 6:30 – 7am, which may be too late for you. A good option if you have a car is to bring breakfast in from the Double T Diner, which is open 24 Hrs. (410) 571-9070, 12 Defense Street, Annapolis, MD 21401, near the Annapolis Towne Centre. The Towne Centre also has a Whole Foods and a Target, and there is a Fresh Market down the road as well, but these stores do not open until 8a.m.

If you are at the Residence Inn or Springhill Suites or rented a house, it may not be an issue for you since you will be able to cook at any time. You may want to reach out to others you may know who have early report times and ask them to come over for breakfast, *as long as it does not cause any stress for you or your son or daughter*. Check with your family first.

Charge it up - Leave your camera battery packs, cell phones, iPads, etc. charging the night before. You do not want to miss anything or run out of battery tomorrow. If you can, have extra batteries for your cameras charged as well. Make sure your Plebe has a charger in his/her backpack and that their cell phone is fully charged for I-Day. Charge YOUR batteries - have a good dinner and go to bed fairly early the night before. I-Day will be a long, emotional, stressful day for all.

6. I-Day is FINALLY Here!

It seemed so far away...and then it's here...I-Day! Nerves and excitement will definitely kick in this morning! On I-Day morning, allow your incoming Plebe as much time to sleep as possible, if they can. Have breakfast ready early and make sure that everything is ready to go for when you leave. Plan on leaving at least an hour prior to report time depending on where you are staying, and keep in mind that Gate 1 will be VERY busy, especially for later report times! Better early than late. If you are driving to the Naval Academy, allow plenty of time for parking and traffic. Have a **small** cooler handy to put the sandwiches in later. This is where staying close by becomes invaluable. You won't have to carry everything the whole day! Also, bring some water bottles or there are water bottles in the Midstore for \$1.00. – it will most likely be a very hot day.

Hopefully your incoming Plebe got a good night's rest! Don't be surprised if they are quiet or pensive, or they may be excited and chattering the whole morning.

Make sure the wallet, cell and glasses – if they use them - are in their pants pockets, phone charger, copies of docs, etc. in their backpack. If your Candidate does wear glasses, they should have sent their prescription as a part of the DoD physical, and there will be a pair of issue glasses waiting for them. **NO CONTACTS ALLOWED FOR PLEBE SUMMER**, but by all means, they should bring their glasses!

They can wear their new broken-in sneakers to report. Although they will be issued a pair of sneakers that they will wear initially, they can wear their own when they run during PEP in the mornings.

Be at Alumni Hall about 20 – 30 minutes before report time. Make sure you get a schedule from the admissions tent that will be set up there.

Have your camera ready to take pictures of your son or daughter going in. They will go in a child, and when you see them that afternoon, they will be changed! And just wait until PPW!!

After your Candidate reports you can take advantage of the many activities that are available to parents. You can go to the Midstore, go on a walking tour of the campus, visit the gift shop, ride on a YP boat, socialize, and don't forget the picnic!

We chose to forego all of the festivities and went to hang out behind Bancroft Hall by the entrance to the Midstore – after your Plebe is processed and issued all of their gear at Alumni Hall, their hair is buzzed off, they are issued their clothing, shoes, equipment, etc. They are shown how to label their things, given

preliminary training on how to salute, etc. and they will all begin the arduous task of memorizing 300+ pages of Reef Points. You can watch the Class of 2017 Plebe Summer video on our Parents Club website: www.usnafloridaparents.org on the Home page.

When they are ready, they will board the bus at Alumni Hall and head to Bancroft Hall to recite their rates, begin getting used to getting yelled at, find their assigned room, meet roommates and begin Plebe Summer. If you wait patiently on the stairs that lead down to the Midstore from the sidewalk leading from Tecumseh Court, you may get a glimpse of your Plebe getting off the bus, being thrown his/her pack and running up the stairs...It is a moment and an experience that neither you nor your Plebe will ever forget. It may take your son or daughter no time to get processed, or it may take some time. As parents get a glimpse of their son or daughter, you begin to get an idea of report times that have made it through. It took ours three hours...long story...

While we waited we made new friends and took pictures for other parents, which we subsequently shared on Facebook. We also had the opportunity to watch the Detailers in action. They seemed impatient, rearing to go! I heard one detailer shout out "Fresh Meat!", as one of the buses pulled up. Another detailer greeted the incoming Plebes as they were getting off the bus by yelling at the top of his lungs, "WELCOME TO SUMMER CAMP! WE HAVE ARTS AND CRAFTS PLANND FOR YOU TODAY – AND YOU ARE ALREADY LATE!!! MOVE, MOVE, MOVE!!!" I felt sorry for all of the Plebes! I also remembered that about three years ago these Detailers were walking in the Plebes' shoes, they had survived and were now the Firsties doing the training – WOW! What a transformation! You may be also able to get a glimpse of your Plebe – if you can find them because they all look the same - from a different vantage point, lining up on the terrace, reciting their rates etc. before they go into MotherB.

If you go to the picnic, it is a great opportunity to mingle and meet other parents, to meet the Parents Club coordinators in your area, to collect information and to have some good BBQ. Remember to stay hydrated. Check your schedule – there is a lot to do!

In the afternoon, remember to pick up your sandwiches and place them in your cooler with water and chips or your son or daughter's favorite cookies or snack. About 90 or so minutes before the Oath of Office ceremony, you will go to Alumni Hall for the parent brief (informational meeting). You will hear from the Superintendent, the Commandant of Midshipmen, probably a USNA graduate, Midshipmen Commander, etc. They will give you dates and information that will be very important. We did not have a pencil to write these down, so we took a picture of the screen. As soon as this is over, run back to Tecumseh Court and find a good seat for the swearing in ceremony. You can leave your special spot ready with the blanket, cooler, etc.

For the Oath of Office Ceremony itself, you may not know what side your Plebe will be on. If you know their Company, usually the First Regiment sits on the left looking at Bancroft Hall (Made up of the first 15 companies; Battalions 1,2, and 3, and the Second Regiment will sit on the right – again, looking at Bancroft Hall (Made up of Companies 16-30 and Battalions 4, 5 and 6). The Incoming Plebes will enter the courtyard

from their respective sides of the building, so keep an eye out because they will all look the same. You will want to video this moment when your Plebe's class takes the Oath. It is amazing! (Technically, they are considered appointees or candidates until the swearing in when they are officially Plebes.)

After the Swearing in, go to your designated spot that you decided upon the day before and enjoy your time together. They will probably tell you all about their day – or not, in which case make sure to ask questions. They may devour the food or they may not. Enjoy this time and have them sit down on the blanket and rest. It has been a tense and exhausting day. This will be the last time in awhile that they will get to rest and relax! You may notice that they start getting antsy and may want to be back early for the final formation before they go in. They will not want to be late. Say your farewells, get your camera ready and find a good spot. This was the hardest part for me – I had promised myself that I would hold it together until the end when the doors closed, and I almost lost it at this point.

After your now sworn-in Plebe goes to his/her designated spot for formation and you have said your farewells, find a spot on the same side as your Plebe along Stribling or Tecumseh Court yard so that you can take pictures and video the Brigade going in. The final moment is very impactful, when the Marines close the heavy doors after the last person is in, and the slam of the heavy doors rings through the courtyard. I finally lost it then!

What now? You can stay and chat with people you may know or make new friends. Go out to dinner and relax – your Plebe is in good hands. The first two or three days they will take their validation tests, get into a routine and get lots of “briefs” about what to do or not do, how to fold clothes the Navy way, etc.

That evening you may want to get some rest and if you want to go to PEP the next morning, go to bed early. Please know that they are in safe hands and you will have to trust the Naval Academy with your child. They know what they are doing and your Plebe will be well taken care of! They will be tested to their limits, but they will be victorious in the end – I know that personally. As a Mom, I fell on my knees and prayed **a lot** and I have seen ALL of my prayers answered with positive results...Our children are stronger than we give them credit for. It will be a difficult time for you and for your Plebe, but it will pass. Take it one day at a time...Be thankful for the honor and the tremendous opportunity that they have been given.

7. The Day After I-Day

The day after I-Day, if you get up early enough – 5am, you can watch PEP if they have it in the morning but DO NOT call to your Plebe, and please stay in the assigned visitor's area. Bring your camera if you would like, but please make sure you are not a distraction for the Plebes. You can also watch the Colors being raised at 8:00 a.m. at Bancroft and by the Visitor's Center. It is very cool! Today, you can also mail the care package you have prepared to your Plebe's mailing address before you leave Annapolis.

When you get home, remember to call your car insurance company if you have not done so. DO send lots of letters, pictures, cards of encouragement from family and friends! However, DO NOT send post cards, especially from

significant others, as they WILL be read out loud in front of the entire squad or even the company, and can cause a lot of grief and ribbing from company mates. You can send lots of care packages, but again – no hearts or cutesy decorations on the outside. Remember that the detailers may go through the care boxes during Plebe Summer. Beware that you don't make your Plebe out to be too obvious by sending a care package every day. About two to three per week is a good number. Too many packages will make your Plebe stand out, and that is usually not a good thing. Storage can also be an issue, so plan accordingly.

Ask your Plebe's friends to write or send cards and let them know what is going on. In our Plebe's company there was a competition to see who would get the most letters in the mail, but it all depends on the company. About three to four weeks into Plebe summer you can probably mail the other pair of running shoes to your Plebe.

Now is the time to think ahead to Plebe Parent Weekend – Locals have homes you can rent, and this is the ideal time. Plebes are required to be in their uniforms at all times while in town, at the Yard and even in a hotel hallway, so it is a great relief to be able to hang out in their PT shorts and shirts around the house instead. (Please see the section "For the Candidate" about having to wear PT gear when not in uniform in the hotel room or rented house, etc.). They will probably want to hop on the internet, watch TV or just eat and sleep. Each Plebe is different. Ours never wanted to sleep but wanted to enjoy every moment. As a Mom or Dad, a house also allows you to cook to your heart's content and have his friends over for a home cooked meal. These arrangements need to be made in advance!

Being home, you can now begin the arduous task of finding pictures on the various websites. Join the USNA Class of - _____ page (whatever your Plebe's graduating class year will be) if you have not yet. You will find out a lot of information and will be able to see pictures that are posted. You may also find your Plebe's company parents have started their own page and this will become your second home for the summer.

You may spend your days looking for your own Waldo. You can go to PlebeSummer.com from Thornton Studios - a photographer that takes pictures during Plebe Summer, and can search to get a glimpse of your Plebe in action. You can also find pictures in the Alumni Association and the Lucky Bag Facebook pages, as well as the parent Facebook pages. There are many selfless parents who stalk the Plebes so parents don't have to, and they post their pictures for free on different sites.

Please remember, be careful of what you post on Facebook and be aware that detailers and your Plebe's chain of command do look through these. You do not want your plebe to stand out, and you definitely do not want to post complaints that will be read by the detailers later. Whatever happens – e.g. lack of sleep, no rest, etc., it is a part of the process and every class has survived it – so will your Plebe! Also, if your Plebe tells you something in confidence, keep it to yourself. ***What is said on a phone call stays with the phone call.*** Please do not go posting it on Facebook or telling other parents. You are the only one they can trust to vent with. Otherwise, you could make life even more difficult for your Plebe...

When I arrived back home, I chose to wake up every morning at the same time my Plebe would wake up and I would pray for him diligently. It made me feel better and I know that he could see the fruit of that prayer throughout his day. Keep a journal of your prayers so that you can see how they were answered, and invariably, they will be! I can't tell you how many times I would pray for something specific, and when we spoke to our Plebe weeks later, that is exactly what had happened - or not!

You can show support for your Plebe by wearing Navy spirit wear and you can get a MidPin from our USNA South Florida Parents Club www.usnafloridaparents.org - MidPins page, to help you and others remember to pray or write to your Plebe. These pins are very fashionable and a great conversation starter. I wear mine every day and it helps me feel like my now Third Class is right there with me.

DO send care packages, cards and letters, pictures, magazine articles and other allowed items that may interest your Plebe. One of the hardest things is that they are disconnected from the world; so let them know what is going on in your family, their favorite music groups, the neighborhood, in the news, etc. Remember to include current pictures of family and friends. They may not have too much time to read letters, but they do appreciate them and they will feel like they are being included and know what is going on.

You will get to speak with your Plebe and the dates should have been given to you on I-Day or before. Make sure that you are available on that day and at that time. Give some leeway with times as they may not be exact. In our case, they were late calling one time because they were busy so they called 30 minutes late, but they will call. Be prepared for the worst, just in case.

Listen and don't give advice! You will be allowed between two to three calls with your Plebe during Plebe Summer. When you have your call, let your Plebe get their frustrations and concerns out of their system with YOU. They will not be able to do so otherwise. We were given a lot of advice about just listening and being encouraging, and although our experience with our Plebe's calls was positive, we knew other parents that were not as fortunate, but their Plebe survived the summer and went on to have a successful Plebe Ac Year.

THIS IS PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT THING I CAN TELL YOU - When you finally do communicate with your Plebe, *be encouraging and let them vent*. Be ready to **LISTEN** – they may complain, they may want to come home or quit or not. You need to be ready for anything but most of all, just listen. If you believe in God, pray with them and remind them that God is their strength in difficult times and that nothing is impossible for Him. Encourage them to take it a day at a time. If you are tempted to problem solve – DON'T! Just let them do the talking and LISTEN! Watch the "It's not about the Nail" video on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4EDhdAHrOg), to get an idea of what I mean. You are the only way they can vent and they will feel better after they do. If they are having a bad day or week, by the next call they will probably be fine. Encourage them and just listen. Now is a good time to ask if they need anything in particular to be sent in the next care package and how they are doing with snacks, etc., get updates on what is going on, Plebe Parents Weekend, etc. Remind your Plebe that there may be a day that *will* be "*their*" day. No matter what they do, it will just be a bad day. During our second call, our Plebe told us, "Remember when you told me that one day would be MY day? Well, that day came and it was a tough, bad, slow day, but I did make it through".

If you get the call... You may get a call during the summer that your son or daughter wants to quit. I would encourage you to tell them to wait one more day or one more week, or to give it until the next phone call. Chances are that they will be fine by the time that comes around. The Naval Academy wants your child to succeed, and they will do everything in their power to help them do so, but it will also take your encouragement and wisdom. Things may look bad right now, but they will pass. Every day has an end and before you know it, it will be over. Trust me! Looking back, Plebe Summer and Plebe year seemed to fly by!

If your Plebe wants to leave, encourage them to stay just one more day, one more week or two more weeks until your next call – by then they will have probably forgotten this call. Encourage them that it will get better soon. Remind them to focus on one hour / one day at a time. Each hour and each day is a victory. Remind them how many days they have already conquered! They can do it! Let them do the talking and you can ask some questions when they are done. If your Plebe is truly having trouble adjusting, the Naval Academy will be very supportive and offer a variety of solutions to help your child if they need it. Be patient and don't jump on the bandwagon being negative. Always be encouraging. You and your Plebe do not want to regret making a rash decision that they WILL regret the rest of their life. I have not met a single person who dropped out of the Naval Academy, who does not regret it to this day in their life! I have a friend whose daughter hated every day of Plebe Summer. She would cry every day and wanted to come home. The Mom told her to hang on from week to week, until finally, Plebe Summer was over and she had made it! She felt stronger, not only physically, but also mentally and spiritually as well. This young lady can't picture herself anywhere else now, and she is a blossoming Second Class. She is so glad that she stuck it out – thanks to her Mom and Dad who encouraged her, listened and did not let her quit...

There is another young lady I know of, that had a boyfriend when she came to the Academy. About halfway through Plebe Summer, the boyfriend decided that he could not deal with her being away from him. She was so stressed as was her family, and she ended up quitting and leaving the Academy to be with him. She and her boyfriend broke up about three weeks after she quit...It takes a very special type of person to be willing to put themselves aside for the good of their significant other and be willing to adhere to the strict schedules, limited free time, and time away from each other. The Naval Academy is N*OT College. You just can't pick up and go home for the weekend. There are strict rules that are in place for a purpose. They get easier as the Mids progress through their years at the Academy, but only 2% of the Mids that arrive at the Academy with a significant other are still together by the time Commissioning comes around. This is known as the Two-Percent Club. That may give you an idea of the difficulty and stress that can be placed on a relationship. It may be a good idea to have a talk and be prepared.

During Plebe Summer, our family decided to keep our Plebe informed, so during the summer calls each of us had chosen an area of specialty that was of particular interest to our Plebe. Our youngest son was the music reporter and he would follow our Plebe's favorite music groups, followed new trends, up and coming bands, etc. and he would give a two minute report during the call. Our daughter became the media, book and movie specialist, and my husband and I became the current events experts. We each gave a brief report and I think it helped our Plebe to stay current and feel connected. I also would clip different news articles I thought would be of interest and included the articles in letters.

If you joined your local USNA parents club, you can always turn to the parents at the club for help and advice. I could not have survived if we would not have had their support and shared their experiences with us. The Parents Club also has activities planned for Plebe parents over the summer. Our club is hosting a Plebe-to-Plebe Mom Coffee and there is always the Plebe Summer Survival party to look forward to. Continue looking for pictures and preparing for Plebe Parents Weekend as well.

8. What...Plebe Summer is Finally Over?

Prior to Plebe Parent Weekend, during your last call for the summer, ask your Plebe what **they** want to do for Plebe Parent Weekend and what **they** would like you to bring – contacts will be allowed, iPods, etc. may be items that are

now allowed in their company. Also remember to ask your Plebe before you send anything that takes up room as storage is VERY limited. Plebes are not allowed civvies (civilian clothes) until the end of Plebe year.

Before you know it, Plebe Parent Weekend will be here! Make sure that your reservations have been made well in advance, most likely when you make your I-Day reservations. The saying that we learned during Plebe Summer – *Semper Gumbly*, always flexible, will be extremely important now! This is the first time you will see your Plebe in their Summer Whites and wait until you see them! You will find they have matured and will look so grown up; they are no longer kids, they are responsible adults! You will have your Plebe on Friday night, typically until 22:00, on Saturday until Midnight, and Sunday until 18:00. However, your Plebe will be the best and most accurate source of information. You can also check the USNA schedule on the Plebe Summer page.

You may want to contact your Plebe's Sponsors – they will be the ones that are your Plebe's home away from home, and arrange to meet them sometime during the weekend. It will be worthwhile to make the time to do this!

If you arrive early for Plebe Parent Weekend, make sure that you go to the Navy Federal and open an account if you did not do it before I-Day. Go with your Plebe and make sure that his/her account is in order. Ask about any promotions. You may want to go early on with your Plebe and make sure his account is squared away. Now is also the time to open a Yard Card at the Midstore if you did not during I-Day. The Yard Card office is next to the Navy Federal behind Bancroft Hall.

Just before Plebe Parent Weekend, your Plebe will get their issued electronics (Lap top, printer, etc.). They may ask you to bring their iPod, iPad and other goodies that they will now be allowed to have – this depends on the company - so you may also want to stop by the USAA office and have your Plebe fill out the forms for Renter's insurance. It is something they have to do personally (I tried unsuccessfully I might add!). They are now adults so they need to be present and sign the papers themselves. You will probably pay ;-) that much does not change! It is a minimal cost and well worth it. The USAA office is on the way to City Dock from Gate 1 just off of St. George Street.

I can't stress this enough - ***Please DO NOT make plans for your Plebe during Plebe Parent Weekend!*** Leave your schedule open and allow your Plebe to decide what to do. Remember, *Semper Gumbly*!! They may want to sleep or they may be up for a day trip to D.C. – it is up to them to decide. Definitely *do not* make dinner plans in King's Hall unless your Plebe requests it...most Plebes want to get as far away from the Academy as possible. They will have to stay within Annapolis township but are allowed to go to D.C. – you can read about it in your packet or email that you receive. Meeting the sponsors should be fine and you can ask your Plebe during the last phone call so advance plans can be made. We stopped by the Sponsors home and had a fairly quick visit and we were so glad that we did!

When the day comes that you can pick up your Plebe, usually Friday, you will have the chance to go to their room. Take your cues from your Plebe – if they don't want you talking to their detailers, please don't. A polite hello will do. If they do encourage you to talk to their detailers, please don't tell baby stories, just thank them for their hard work over Plebe Summer. You will get to see the room and probably meet their roommate. It is a great opportunity to see where they have been spending their time, where they have been "chopping", "squaring corners", etc.

Once you leave the Yard, please make sure that you follow the guidelines. The Naval Academy has an honor code, and you don't want to help your Plebe break the honor code by doing something they are not supposed to. As much as

you may be tempted to do so, do not break the rules...they are supposed to be trustworthy and follow the guidelines and rules, especially when no one is looking! For example, Plebes are supposed to be in Navy gear at all times unless they are on leave. Liberty is on Saturdays when they have free time but they are still on duty. Leave is when they are not on duty and are not bound by the same rules – e.g. Thanksgiving or Holiday breaks. While on leave, they can drive, but they not while on Liberty. Whenever a Plebe is not in his/her uniform, they should be in their PT gear while in Annapolis. Make sure you have a blue rim t-shirt and a pair of Navy shorts for your Plebe for if they want to take off their uniform, or they can bring a set as well. They are not allowed to drive or ride in vehicles other than the parents or sponsors – please stick to that. It is for their safety!

If you do go out to eat or to a movie, you may want to bring a small towel to put down on the chair – you will notice that they are very concerned about getting their uniforms dirty, and you should probably have some Wisk wipes on hand and for him/her to have. Going to a movie, walking around the Mall, anything that gives them a sense of normalcy or that they want to do, is perfect! You can also go shopping and get whatever they need.

I can't emphasize this enough...please do not plan for them, let them tell you what they want to do! This is the last time they will see you until they go home for Thanksgiving unless you visit in between, so let them relax and enjoy their time with you. You may be able to meet their fellow company mates, or not. Chances are, they will be with their families too. You may also have "met" fellow company parents on Facebook, but please don't make lunch or dinner plans. You may be good friends on Facebook, but that does not necessarily translate to your Plebes...

Saying good-bye will be bittersweet, but you will be so proud! You may want to get them there an hour or so early – they will avoid long lines at Gate 1 and it will give them enough time to get settled in their room, get uniforms ready, etc. Again, let your Plebe decide.

You may notice that when it gets close to going back, your Plebe may get quiet and their demeanor may start to change. They may get introspective and more serious - we call it "shut down" or getting the "game face on", and that is very normal. Our Plebe's best friend is at the Air Force Academy, and both he and she were shutting down before it was time to go back, so it is a part of their survival mode and is to be expected if it happens at all. They are preparing themselves to go back to their detailers and the Yard. They have to get in a "zone" and be ready. It will be difficult to go back to the strict routines, vast amount of memorization, work, tests, PT (Physical Training), etc. but now add the rest of the brigade and academics too...Let them do what they have to do, and be prepared. It is nothing against you, it is what they need to do to survive mentally and emotionally...

When your Plebe returns to the Academy from Plebe Parent Weekend, it may be difficult for them to say good-bye. Try to be strong for them. The beginning of the Fall semester is when the Brigade reforms and the Upper Classmen return. This is a BIG change. Where they have been solely under the watchful eye and care of their detailers and are getting used to the routines, when the Brigade reforms, things will change drastically. During Plebe Summer, the ratio of Plebes to detailers is about 10 Plebes to every Detailer. When the brigade reforms, they have a three or four to one Upper Classmen to Plebe ratio, and it can be overwhelming.

The Upperclassmen will be "anxious" to meet the new crop of Plebes and the Plebes may be a little anxious too, not knowing what to expect. As long as they have been doing their work during Plebe Summer, they will be fine, but the stress level may be increased. Talk to your Plebe over the weekend and help them to get mentally prepared. Remind

them not to take things personally and to do their best. They have survived Plebe Summer, They WILL survive Plebe Year! There is a saying that your years at the Naval Academy are divided into thirds: Plebe Summer is one third, Plebe Year is the second third, and the last three years are the last third. They have already conquered the first third!

Your Plebe may be welcomed back to Bancroft with Christmas music, reminding the Plebes that the next time they will see their families will be for the holidays. They will have to be mentally and emotionally strong as the newly arrived Upperclassmen remind them that they are *only* Plebes. But this too shall pass!

9. The AC Year

The Academic Year, or AC Year for short, will add a new level of stress to your Plebe's routine. Not only do they have their Professional Training, Physical training, athletic responsibilities, watch and duties, but the rigorous academic load and classes at the Naval Academy will add to the challenge as well, to say the least. Your Plebe may have validated some classes during Plebe Summer but if they did not, do not worry. Because these classes are foundational, they will want to learn the subject matter the right way. Either way, whether they validate or not, they will have a lot on their plate, and they will be expected to fail now and again. They just have to dust themselves off and try again. They should always accept responsibility and be ready and willing to fix things or do better next time.

It is a tough pill to take, for a group of kids that are used to getting straight A's and being top 5 or 10 in their class, but you can help them by reminding them that they *are* set up to fail. They are given too much by design and they are expected to prioritize and choose what is most important, which is what they will have to do when they are leading their men in the fleet.

Try to help them keep everything in perspective. For example, when our Plebe was unhappy with their grades, I reminded my Plebe about this: Every Mid was most likely top ten in their class. If you figure that every incoming Plebe was top ten in their class, it's a good bet that your incoming Plebe will rank around his high school class rank by the end of the First Semester. For example, if they were say, #6 in high school and they are ranked 625/1100, that is about right. It just so happens that every one around you is top ten and it can be pretty hard to deal with, but is very normal.

Also remind them that the classes at the Naval Academy are exceptionally challenging and rigorous. The USNA is an engineering school per se, so any of the math and science classes in particular, are going to be tough. Also, since attaining excellence is one of the objectives of the Naval Academy for each Midshipman, the expectation is that the classes will demand your highest effort. If your Plebe is being challenged by the curriculum, remind them that it is nothing to be ashamed of to ask for help. There are many help groups, tutors, and study groups within each company and for the Brigade. Even the professors themselves will help the students, but they need to ask for help themselves. The Academy does not want them to fail out and they will do and provide everything your son or daughter will need to succeed, but it is up to them to take advantage of the help and opportunities that are available.

10. Making Memories with your Plebe and More

In order to fully support our Plebe, our family made a financial and personal commitment to visit our Plebe once every month. This was a HUGE commitment for us to have kept but are so glad that we did! I truly believe this helped greatly. We were also careful with our words, always encouraging and trying to find the silver lining, letting them vent and reminding them of key things. Do whatever is best for your family and your Plebe – you know them best! And of

course, do try to go to at least one Home football game and at least one Army-Navy game over the four years. It is a must see and an experience that you will never forget! There is nothing like seeing your Mid in formation on that field... You can purchase your Plebe's tickets to come home for Thanksgiving and Christmas as soon as you have the dates of the last exams. Any flight on the last day after 6p.m. should work. Southwest gives military discounts and makes it easy to change the ticket if you need to, assuming there is availability. I also love Southwest because they allow service members to board early. Also if you sign up for the Rewards program, you can transfer miles between accounts for a nominal fee. This has made it easier for all four of us to fly up for our monthly visits. If you are not flying SW, make sure you ask your airline of choice if they offer discounts for active duty military. It can be a substantial savings...

Other savings as you shop around Annapolis with your Mid, also ask in the stores you happen to visit if they offer Military Discounts. Your Mid may have to show their ID, but typically, the stores in town offer a 10% discount to Mids and military personnel.

Labor Day, Columbus Day, and President's Day are great times to visit again if you can – usually they are long weekends with liberty either on or off campus, on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. If your Plebe requests an overnight, they will get to stay with you Saturday and maybe Sunday night, returning to the Yard on Monday before 5 or 6 p.m. Sometimes they are given until 8 p.m. Check with your Plebe first – don't make plans on your own! Your Plebe will know. Just enjoy the experience - It goes by too fast!

Another time you MUST visit is during the Herndon Monument Climb. This takes place after Sea Trials, on the Monday of Commissioning Week. It is the last big hurdle of the Plebe class and the culmination of Plebe Year. The Plebes must climb the monument, which has been greased with about 200 Lbs. of grease by the First Class. The climb is easier said than done. I always looked at the Herndon monument and thought what is the big deal? It doesn't look that big! Well, it is tall enough, especially when Plebes are trying to lock arms and climb on each other's shoulders and they are all slippery from all of the grease. It is a definite MUST attend event if you can. Neither you nor your Plebe will ever forget it, and it is worth the pictures and the video. Get there early so that you can get a good spot, and buy a chair or two at the Midstore – you can check them with your luggage. We were not as smart and ended up standing the whole time...When the lucky Plebe who makes the climb to the top of the pile finally replaces the Dixie Cup the Firsties have taped to the top of the monument with a Midshipman cover, the celebration and elation is incomparable!! All you hear is the entire Plebe class chanting "Plebes no more!" It is an amazing moment and you finally know that Plebe Year is over!

There are also other events during this time that you can attend, as it is Commissioning Week. The Blue Angels always put on a show and fly over the Academy. It is also a week when they get much needed liberty here and there, and free time to visit. It is also VERY busy, especially toward Thursday and through the weekend, because of Commissioning, so plan accordingly and make your reservations in time! After Commissioning, they will be able to change their shoulder boards from Plebe (no stripes), to the Youngster shoulder Boards (one diagonal stripe). Although they are now officially 3rd Class, they are not by tradition officially Youngsters, until they see the top of the Chapel dome when returning from their first cruise...

By this time, your Plebe will know what their blocks will be. There are three Summer Training blocks, and assuming your Plebe does not choose to have to take summer classes, they will be able to come home for one of the blocks. They will do their military/naval training during the other two blocks. There is also Zero Block, the time between finals

and Sea Trials. Depending on when their last final ends, they may be able to come home for a few days before Sea Trials and the final events and duties of the year.

Another good reason to go visit during Herndon is to help your Plebe move out of his or her room for the summer. They will have to pack up everything in their room and either store things at their Sponsor's home if they are willing, or put it in a rented storage space for the summer. They will need your car and your arms to move the boxes. I never thought so much could fit in such a small space! We were lucky and very thankful that our Plebe's Sponsor family was willing to keep most of the boxes, and local friends kept the rest. They have to be out of their room before the end of the day on Friday of Commissioning and check into their new rooms after that.

After Commissioning, your Plebe will usually have liberty for the weekend be able to relax before their first block. They are now Officially 3rd Class! They made it through Plebe Summer, Plebe Year – and so did you! Congratulations! Well Done!

Personal Notes

Give yourself enough time to explore the campus. There are so many nooks and crannies, gift shops – like the Museum Gift Shop that have unique items, and places to just sit and to learn not only about the Academy, but about our Nation's history. Try to make a point of visiting a different place every time. The Museum may take two or three visits to go through it in-depth. It is a wonderful place!

Also, give yourself plenty of time to explore the Midshipmen's Store. There are so many things to see and the prices can't be beat! We sometimes joke that seeing our Mid is the icing on the cake...we are really there to shop at the Midstore! He takes in in stride, but I think sometimes he may truly wonder if this is true!

Additionally, I suggest that you join the USNA Alumni Association, The Navy League and the USNA Foundation. They are all worthy of our support as USNA parents, and they help to provide additional funding for outside activities that may not necessarily be a part of the USNA curriculum. The Navy League is very active in supporting our Mids once they are Commissioned and join the Fleet, and of course, please find your local USNA Parents Club and become a member – and GET INVOLVED! The Parents Clubs are a great source of support, information, camaraderie and friendship! Some of my best friends I met at our Parents Club. We have met parents from other parents clubs and have committed to help this next Fall during the tailgate after the game for the Mids. The NJ, WV, MD and other parents clubs come together and cook for 800Mids after every home game. People are what make it all worthwhile!

The bottom line is that no one else will fully understand what your Midshipman, you or your family are and will be going through. Attending the United States Naval Academy is not the run of the mill college experience, including any Ivy college, as you will begin to appreciate soon if you haven't already. Our Mid met one of their now best friends at Summer Seminar. Ours is at the USNA, his friend ended up going to the Air Force Academy. Our families are very close and we cling to each other, because we understand what our children and what we as parents are going through. Our kids are the best of friends because they understand their journeys and encourage each other in a way that no other friend can. Sponsor families are a great source of advice and encouragement as well. Make friendships – they

will last a lifetime! Just note that just because you are friends with other Mids' parents doesn't automatically make the kids friends as well. That is OK, just be know which friendships you can share and which friendships are just for you...

I also encourage you strongly to join the Naval Club. It is the "O" Club, where officers can go to eat with their families. It is on campus, so if you ever visit and your Mid can't leave the premises, which happens often during Plebe year, you can ask your Plebe or Mid to get permission to dine with you – on campus! The food is good, they will be happy to see you, get away from King's Hall, and change their atmosphere for a bit. We often invite their roommates and friends to eat with us and it is a lot of fun. We have celebrated birthdays, anniversaries and holidays at the Naval club. It is a great place and the staff is wonderful!

Lastly, having had my Dad attend the USNA, it has been an honor and a privilege for our son to be appointed to serve our Nation beginning with the Naval Academy, and it has been so worth it! For us, the knowledge that our Mid is serving our nation gave us the motivation and initiative to take up the call of service and serve in our own way through different organizations that support the USNA!

I hope that all of this information will be helpful, but if you have any questions, please ask your Plebe, Parents Club or BGO (Blue and Gold Officer). If you can't get an answer, please email me at MidPins@gmail.com. I also hope to see you wearing a MidPin of YOUR Plebe or Mid...See you on the Yard and enjoy the ride!

Special thanks go to the following family and friends who were instrumental in helping us survive Plebe Year, as mentors, prayer warriors, and as a source of encouragement:

First, to GOD for answering ALL of our prayers that began as Plebe Summer ended; for His bountiful Blessings; for all of the trials and the strength and wisdom He gave us all to surpass them, and for equipping our Plebe for victory...

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Mr. and Mrs. Sam Kastensmidt

Dr. and Mrs. Warren Gage

Norma Smoker

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*...and countless others to whom I apologize for not listing your name here, but know that you have our never ending thanks and that all of you are always in our hearts and in our prayers!
To my Mid and our younger children who are my heroes - You are amazing!
Last but definitely not least, a big thank you to my husband Jeff for his love, support prayers, guidance and patience.*

To readers of this small journal, thank you for taking the time to read this, I hope that our journey is as blessed as ours and that our experiences will help you in your journey!

Finally, if there are any additional tips or wisdom I may be missing, please let me know and I will be glad to add them on a separate page and give credit to whom credit is due. Just email me!

midpins@gmail.com

Stay tuned for our Youngster year journal.