

THE MOM'S GUIDE TO
SURVIVING
WEST POINT

Lisa Browne Joiner *and* **Deborah L. W. Roszel**

Copyright © 2012 by
Lisa Browne Joiner and Deborah L. W. Roszel

Lisa Browne Joiner and Deborah L. W. Roszel
www.momsguidetosurviving.com
Printed in the United States of America
Published by Light Messages Publishing
Durham, North Carolina
ISBN: 978-1-61153-030-8

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 International Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

DISCLAIMER: This book was privately produced and is not the product of an official of the United States Army. The contents of this book, including words, images, and opinions, are unofficial and not to be considered as the official views of the United States Military Academy, United States Army, or Department of Defense. Neither this book nor its content are endorsed by the United States Military Academy, United States Army, or Department of Defense.



CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

i

Foreword

iv

Introduction

vii

Chapter 1

Today I Walked a 10K
(an analogy for the journey so far)

1

Chapter 2

People Say the Darnedest Things
(a collection of ridiculous comments)

10

Chapter 3

Helicopters
(letting go)

17

Chapter 4

Now What?
(from appointment to the Point)

20

Chapter 5

A Reception in Your Honor
(R-Day)

29

Chapter 6

Slaying the Beast—as a Mom
(surviving Beast summer)

43

Chapter 7

The Call
(when cadets want to quit)

51

Chapter 8

Accepted at Last
(A-Day)

63

Chapter 9

The Longest Year
(Fourth Class citizenship, or Plebe year)

68

Chapter 10

A Plebe No More
(Yearling—second year)

80

Chapter 11

'Til the Cows Come Home
(Second Class, third year)

84

Chapter 12

Top of the Food Chain
(Firstie year)

88

Chapter 13

"Oh, You *Have* to..."
(what everyone says you must do, see, buy)

93

Chapter 14

What Not to Wear
(dressing for West Point events)

95

Chapter 15

Academic Survival
(maintaining grades)

100

Chapter 16

Separation
(leaving USMA at the request of the Academy)

105

Chapter 17

Authos
(being excused from required activities)

113

Chapter 18

The Time of His Life
(opportunities available through West Point)

116

Chapter 19

Getting the Heck Out of Dodge
(leave and passes)

119

Chapter 20

You've Got Mail!
(writing to your cadet)

123

Chapter 21

Boodle
(sending care packages)

132

Chapter 22

Whiter Whites? Not So Much
(cadet laundry)

138

Chapter 23

No Atheists in Foxholes
(opportunities for religious expression)

140

Chapter 24

Funny Money
(cadet accounts)

144

Chapter 25

Ouchies and Boo-Boos
(managing mild illness)

146

Chapter 26

More than a Boo-Boo
(when cadets need more than sick call)

149

Chapter 27

The Other Woman
(getting along with girlfriends)

152

Chapter 28

Missing and Missed
(adjusting to yet another part of Army life)

160

Chapter 29

A Home Away from Home
(sponsors)

163

Chapter 30

Adopt-a-Cadet
(taking care of cadets in tight places)

165

Chapter 31

Bragging Right
(avoiding resentment)

168

Chapter 32

Get Involved
(opportunities to be active with other parents)

170

Chapter 33
Support Your Local Academy
(fundraising for USMA)

174

Chapter 34
The Chain
(understanding the Chain of Command)

177

Chapter 35
Life Lessons
(what West Point Moms have learned in 47 months or less)

180

Lingo
(a glossary of acronyms and terms common to West Point)

187



CHAPTER 3

Helicopters *(Letting go)*

When I took my firstborn (not my cadet) to the premier educational institution in our home state of Georgia, orientation was as much for the parents as for the students. I sat in the semi-darkness awaiting the presentation. Suddenly, I thought we were under attack! The sound of dozens of helicopters filled the air! The orientation session was titled "How to Avoid Being a Helicopter Parent." This was a new term for me.

I learned there are two types of helicopter parents: 1) Those who hover constantly, ready to help, fix, navigate, negotiate and basically save; and 2) Those who rapidly sweep in for the rescue. That's my job, right? I've done several versions of "mommy-fix-it" since becoming a mom. Apparently this college thought 18-year-olds were capable (ha!) of dealing with the situations life could throw at them.

They were right. If we back off, our kids will figure things out. They have to.

West Point is a "no-fly zone" for helicopter parents. It's not that our kids don't need or even want our advice—they

The Mom's Guide to Surviving West Point

might. It's that they are adults and members of the United States Army. They may not look or act like grownups to us, but they are. We do them a terrible disservice when we do not allow them to figure out problems for themselves.

Sure, there are times we do need to "mom." If my cadet were injured and in the hospital, you better believe I would either be calling the doctor or flying up there—or both. Plebe year, as a Southern born and raised boy, my son was freezing his keister off in October. He called and implored me to send long underwear ASAP. I could've sent him websites to order online, or directed him to the PX; however, I sent the underwear.

When he asked how to get an absentee ballot, I wanted to fill out the paperwork and have it sent to him. Instead, I sent a link to the county website and told him he could read about it and figure it out. I was so pleased when I learned he had actually done it and had voted! You have to decide how much you're willing to do.

For almost any West Point-related issue, however, there is already a protocol. It's called "the Chain of Command." Cadets learn about the importance of "the Chain" on R-Day. Those who don't follow it end up with issues. For example, a New Cadet with some blistered feet needs to tell the Chain. If the Chain doesn't know what's going on, they cannot help cadets with whatever the problem is.

With the technology resources we have, cadets are frequently asking moms what to do instead of asking the Chain. Perhaps they don't want to be viewed as ignorant. They are in this position, though, to learn to depend on the Chain of Command. One day, their subordinates will learn to trust them as well, as they become part of the Chain.

Chapter 3: Helicopters

Here are some examples of things that can go wrong at West Point and what to do:

- Your cadet loses his wallet: Contact Chain.
- Your cadet loses uniform pieces: Contact Chain.
- Your cadet's flight is going to be late: Contact Chain.
- Your cadet misses the train: Contact Chain.
- Your cadet doesn't know where sick call is: Contact Chain.
- Your cadet needs Oreo Balls: Contact Mom.