

Trials and Tribulations of PPW

When my child decided he was indeed going to West Point, there were some decisions I had to make. Was I going to attend “R” Day, “A” Day, “PPW” or a combination? I could not attend all three, but figured I could attend two of the events. I agonized over which two – “R” day was for sure. I went back and forth between “A” Day and “PPW,” changing my mind about as often as it rained. I rationalized for “PPW” as I think this is the one I wanted to attend most (that was until “A” Day approached!). As “A” day was shortly after “R” Day, and “PPW” was in October, I told myself it would mean more to both of us if I went in October. Besides, seeing the Hudson Valley in October – are you kidding, how could I miss that? And my new cadet would have tons of stuff to tell me; Beast, what he did for “A” Day, how the academic year was going, his roommates, etc. I don’t know whose child I was thinking of, but it certainly wasn’t mine! Now maybe some of you have children that communicate very well with you, filling you in on the littlest detail of what they have been doing, but mine was never like that. I don’t know why I thought WP would change him.

I spent months preparing for my trip in October, staying

glued to Plebe Net soaking in all of the advice of parents who had already been in this position. I made note of everything; Oh, we have to have a ferry ride on the Hudson! Oh, there is the Uniform Factory Tour! Oh, we just have to go to the Jewish Chapel and the Organ Recital! Yes, I am now an empty nester and have nothing better to do after work than plan every minute of every day that I am there – spending quality time with my youngest who has now flown from the nest and is floundering trying to make those wings flap and fly without me there to guide him.

Well, you will be happy to know that I did come to my senses and realize how ridiculous I was acting. He had always been a very mature, well adjusted, and intelligent young man who was very capable without me. This was not the first time he was away from home, either. I finally stopped and looked at what I was trying to do while there. Yes, there are a number of things we could do, but really, it was about spending time with him. The ferry ride would be nice but I was pretty sure he wouldn't care to do it. The Jewish Chapel? I am sure it is beautiful, but we aren't even Jewish! Scratch another one off the list. The organ recital? Although a number of people loved it, I knew my cadet would not. I would keep that one on my private list of things to do if he happened to have

some duty and was not available. And the factory tour – oh my gosh, what was I thinking? I have ironed more BDU's than I ever care to remember, and I detest sewing! Scratch that one off. So I finally came up with a list of things that I absolutely had to do. It was non-negotiable as I was the one flying all the way to see him, and I was the mom after all.

First, I am flying in on Thursday evening and would like to have dinner with him. He told me he would already have eaten. I told him tough, he could have dessert then while I ate. Next, I will forgo the optional meal in the Cadet Mess as I will be there for the formal dinner, but I did want to go to; the Cadet Review (he had to be there anyway), the Tac's Orientation and Open House (I was not passing up the opportunity to see his room), the Academic Open House, and of course the dinner and Hop. The rest of the time was up to him how we spent it.

The day finally came for me to leave. Thursday morning dawned and I had spent the night with my oldest son and daughter-in-law as he was taking me to the airport. I had to be at the airport at something like 5 or 6 in the morning. I get up and go to have coffee and they have no milk for my coffee. They had my artificial sweetener as I had brought that

over on a previous trip. But no milk? That should have told me how the trip was going to go. I did drink the coffee black (what choice did I have?) and after the second cup thought this was not TOO bad. (I now drink it black with a little sweetener.) I get to SeaTac and take off with no problems. I have a layover in Denver. I get to Denver and have a few hours to kill. I had already set it up with a couple out of Oklahoma that we would meet at the airport and share a rental car to WP and share the hotel room. When it comes time to board, we are not boarding. Delays due to thunderstorms in New York. I am on the phone to Mike and Michelle, after calling their house (I could have sworn I put their cell phone number in my phone) and talking to grandma who is watching the little one for them, and getting the cell number. They are delayed out of OK also. Texts start flying (the only thing flying on the East coast!) back and forth to my cadet – stuck in Denver due to weather, will let you know when I board. Yes, I can text but it is an excruciating ordeal. I have not learned predictive text yet, and I don't do those cute little short cuts like "c u." So it takes me awhile to text and him even longer to figure out what I mean. Why are those little buttons so little and my fingers so big? Darn, he can figure out "cbbqd" is "board," can't he? They are the same keys and it can't be that hard for him to

decipher, especially given the context of what I am texting about. I am stuck in Denver a few hours and finally board the plane. Yoo-hoo! I am on my way. Mike and Michelle are finally boarding too. Text to cadet, on my way and we may still get dinner, albeit a late one. Then I sit on the tarmac for 3 hours. Numerous phone calls and text messages and I finally realize that I will not see my cadet this night.

Mike and Michelle got in about an hour before me and graciously waited for me to arrive. I didn't land till about 11:30 that night and we finally left the rental lot about midnight. I had emailed directions from the airport to WP, as I drove that route when I was there for "R" Day. No tolls on the way, and it was a long drive but not much traffic and beautiful. But we weren't going that way. They decided to print different directions and they had never been to NY. Oh my gosh, can you not drive faster than 50 miles an hour? Yes, that cab is honking at you! No, they don't observe traffic laws here, and they really do make their own lanes! I am tired and a very "A" type person. I have a difficult time giving over control. Well, at least I can call my cadet. He must be as disappointed that he didn't get to see me as I was. But when we talk, he is happy, upbeat, and laughing. And what is all that noise? I realize yes he would like to see me, but

tomorrow will be fine for him. All the upperclassmen have left the post and it is just the plebes there. They have not felt this much freedom since they got there on “R” Day and they are enjoying themselves and having fun without having to watch what they say, do, or look.

We finally get to the hotel at about 2 in the morning and off for a couple of hours sleep. We are meeting the kids in the morning after the briefing. I get up about 5 to shower so I can have breakfast and leave the room to Mike and Michelle. I am tired and cranky and want to get to WP. I have to wait for them to get ready and they have the car keys. No, I really wouldn't have left them there at the hotel...! We finally leave and have to wait in that huge, long line to get onto post.

The time comes that I finally get to see my cadet! Mike and Michelle and I split up to see our children as they have things planned for us too. We are walking around and I ask him to start spouting all that knowledge that he has learned, and that I heard from Plebe Net that they would do. Nope, not going to happen. Well tell me about Beast. Nope, nothing worth telling. Okay. Just go with the flow, is what I tell myself. It doesn't matter I have only had about 6 hours sleep in the last 48 hours. I am happy to be here and to see him.

Smile.

We have lunch with some of his Beast buddies and their families. I learn more about Beast from them and how my Cadet was, then I have ever learned from said wonderful son. I also heard from the one mom who he spent "A" Day with, that yes his ankle was really broken in Beast and he SHOULD have had it looked at and been in a cast. He shouldn't have been doing the 10 and 15 mile marches. That surely relieved my anxiety!

They take me to a car rental lot as it is good idea for me to have a car for us for this visit. Now, my cadet can drive AS LONG AS I AM IN THE CAR WITH HIM. So, he gets behind the wheel and turns on rap music. Hey mom lets go back to the room and I will nap and can you do my laundry? Well sure honey, one washer and one dryer in a hotel, you bet. I came thousands of miles to do his laundry while he slept on the bed. Ah, this is just like being home! That is probably my fondest memory of PPW. It was normalcy, or what I saw as normalcy. Something that will never be the same again.

We have a wonderful time the whole weekend as I scratch off the things on my list. The Academic Open House where he

was in a skit (yes recorded on my digital camera), meeting some of his instructors and seeing his classrooms. Embarrassing him talking to people who weren't his instructors, taking tons of photos which he hates – even if he isn't in them. Seeing the Cadet Review, which of course I cried at. Seeing his room and the day room. There were a few cadet that had to drop us parents off in the day room and go attend to their skit practice, so I got to talk to a few other parents. It was funny watching the Plebes approach the day room. The Plebes were not allowed in there and they were all very uncomfortable being inside. They could not get out fast enough. I met his sponsor and his family. And of course the dinner and hop. I did change in the gym and my cadet stored the rest of my clothes in his room for me. The dinner was amazing. It was unbelievable to see him take a bite and set his utensil down in between bites. It was kind of nice getting served by him too! The hop was crowded but the perfect ending to the evening. He even asked his mom to dance! I don't know if he was prodded to or if he did it all on his own, it doesn't really matter to me. I got to dance one dance (and only one) with him. It was wonderful watching him interact with his friends and classmates. I realized at that point that he would be okay. And so would I.

Over the weekend we also did things he wanted to do too. He slept while I watched. We got off Post every possible chance. He drove and listened to his music. We ate off post and had real food. We went to the PX. We went to the movies. Most importantly, he relaxed and was able to let go.

Sunday morning came all too soon. Michelle, Mike, and I picked up both of our boys and had breakfast together before we left. It was bitter sweet. I may have not learned a lot about WP, or his classes, or how he spends his time, but I did learn that he was where he felt he needed to be. Yes, he survived Beast and almost half of his Plebe year and that he was going to be just fine. There were still glimpses of the young man I had dropped off but he was already changing and growing. Growing into the wonderful leader that I know he will be.

The trip home was just as eventful but somehow seemed to be anti-climatic. We got lost driving back to the airport (my fault this time-never listen to my directions) but we finally made it. I had a transfer in D.C. and the plane broke and I got stuck there over night. The cab driver didn't speak English very well and didn't know where the hotel was that the airline was putting me up in. I ended up some place 45 minutes away, in a bad part of town, with bars on the

windows! It took hours to get a new flight booked and to the right hotel. Then I had to walk to get dinner at about 8:00 in the evening. I finally made it home and settled into being an empty nester, while he settled into WP.

Was it all worth it? Of course it was – this is the stuff memories are made of. One thing I was so looking forward to was all the beautiful autumn colors on the Hudson. That didn't happen. It hadn't been cold enough to make all those vibrant colors come out and pop yet. You would think that after all Mother Nature put me through getting there, she could have cooperated just a little bit on this one tiny thing. Oh well, I will just have to plan another trip to WP some autumn, and with any luck it will go just like this one!