

This Moment

The music begins to play, and I can hear our names being announced. My hand is resting on the arm of my senior cadet son, and I smile up at him with a wink. We've both waited so long- five years to be exact- for this moment and we savor it. The years flash through my mind again, those years and the people who made this moment possible. I owe them all so many thanks.

First, of course, my thanks go to my son Thomas for talking me into letting him go off to Lyman Ward Military Academy those many years ago. He had been to the summer camp, liked it, and wanted to attend school at the Academy to see if he could "do it" there. I was astonished and a bit dismayed, but his determination won me over. The order, discipline, tradition, and sheer roughness of it all appealed to Thomas, and the fact that this was so very different from anything his friends from Mountain Brook were doing, and he flourished in the atmosphere there. Although Thomas was only in the eighth grade, he made friends who were older, even seniors, and they mentored him through the life he had chosen and always encouraged him to strive for the highest rank he could achieve and to always do his best. Through the years, I became convinced that Thomas knew what was best for him, and I was along for the ride of a lifetime and the sheer-pleasure of watching my son become the man he was meant to become.

When Thomas confided at the end of the eighth grade that he wanted to be the Battalion Commander when he was a senior, I filed the wish in the back of my mind and determined myself to watch and wait.

Through the freshman, sophomore, and junior years, Thomas worked hard, stayed diligent to the tasks and rose quickly through the military ranks. Each achievement was a celebration for our entire family. Each invoice I received from the Supply Store reminding me to pay for another rank and the accompanying sewing charge became my own personal certificate of achievement! Thomas studied, marched, polished brass and shoes, made beds, mopped floors, cleaned barracks and latrines, watched over younger cadets, and grew nine inches while I enjoyed the glorious parades, dances, and hugs from all the wonderful young men who attended Lyman Ward with him. His tac officers and commandant never attempted to change Thomas from the person he was. They simply put him in situations to bring out the best in him, situations they had learned from years of working with young men. Their work and faith in Thomas turned him from a youngster to a responsible young man who could look an adult in the eye and not feel insecure or awkward. My respect and thanks go to these men who worked with, watched over, and cared for Thomas during his time at Lyman Ward.

Not to be outdone by the Military Department, the teachers also demanded the full attention of the cadets and Thomas discovered what it meant to be the one who had to get that paper on "Romeo and Juliet" finished and turned in on time, without the benefit of having Mom proofread it for mistakes. Papers were written, books were read, pre-calculus was struggled through (with the help of a caring teacher who tutored Thomas in the evening), and in the end, the full secondary curriculum was mastered. Thomas had wonderful teachers who were always available to me and did their very best to make certain Thomas was prepared for college. One teacher, his history teacher, would always reply to my emails filled with "separation anxiety" and assure me that Thomas was doing fine, looked healthy, and seemed to be enjoying himself.

For all your kindness shown to Thomas and to me, I thank you most sincerely. To his guidance counselor who arranged for Thomas to represent Lyman Ward at the Alabama Boys State Convention: Thomas was very proud to represent you all and he and I thank you for that wonderful experience.

Yes, the music begins to play, the cadet calls the salute, and the swords flash up to a perfect arch. His beloved commandant announces, "Cadet Colonel Thomas Bonatz, Battalion Commander, fifth year cadet, is escorting his mother . . ." Yes, Thomas made it to the position of Battalion Commander, and we begin our lead out through the arched swords. Surely this is a mother's dream come true! I see all of his teachers, military instructors, administration, and

secretaries smiling at us, and they all show they approve of Thomas' accomplishments, but I know in my heart that they all deserve to walk through the swords with us. For without them, this moment would have never happened. Many thanks also to the wonderful cadets and their parents whom I have met along the way. My greatest respect goes to you all because you have walked this path with us. May Lyman Ward Military Academy continue to thrive so other young men and their parents experience the life-changing events that will certainly come their way.

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