

## THE MILITARY AND COLLEGE

## Into The Wild Blue Yonder

By Nikki Houchin

**S**igning the papers, that changed my life forever, I smiled at my parents with pride and assurance. A few months later I was on a plane to San Antonio, Texas. Being only seventeen and on my own was a rush of excitement and fear all at the same time. As I stepped off the plane I went to the waiting area and sat with all of the other trainees. The guy I was sitting next to offered to let me sit in the shaded area he was sitting in, versus the sun filled area that I was sitting in. We talked about where we were from and what we were doing there for about four hours. I didn't think much of it at the time, but little did I know that this guy would be a bigger part of my future than I knew.

After a long and terrifying bus ride to our destination, we exited the bus around one o'clock in the morning and stood in a cattle line waiting for our orders, and later we proceeded to our barracks. About five hours into our much needed sleep, we were rudely awakened by pounding at the door. Not to our surprise, it was our Training Instructor who obviously had woken up on the

wrong side of bed. We immediately dove from our beds, got dressed, made our beds, and ran downstairs to a grueling three hour physical training session. When we were done we went straight to the "Chow Hall" and had our first breakfast – and a very quick one too. After six weeks of this repeating ordeal, I graduated Air Force Basic Military Training a more confident, responsible,



proud, and disciplined female. These are values that I continue to cherish and use every day of my adult life.

One would think that a sigh of relief and a quick plane ride home after that experience would be in order. Wrong. I still had seven weeks of Formal Tech School Training for my military job. It wasn't near as bad as basic, because I only had one roommate instead of sixty, I could eat whenever I wanted for as long as I wanted, and I could call home whenever I was lonely. The only time that I could wear civilian clothing was when I was in my room. Imagine having all of your privileges taken away from you all at once, and slowly earn them back. When everything was said and done I was so grateful

for everything and everyone that I had in my life.

The kindhearted guy in the beginning of my story ended up being my husband. I moved to Montana to be with him at Malmstrom Air Force Base. He was an active duty missile cop and we were married for almost three years. I put my college on hold to focus on working so we could make ends meet. I don't regret getting married and putting my career on hold. I have learned a lot about living in the real world and experiencing what it takes to survive. We are now divorced, with no children, and I have moved back to West Virginia to start my new life. I am still a member of the WV Air National Guard in Charleston, WV and I am attending West Virginia State University to obtain my Bachelor's Degree in Biology. I am currently cross-training to the medical field from my current military career and I hope to use my military training on the civilian side to pursue a job in the medical field.

In the end I have definitely taken the road less traveled and ventured out into "The Wild Blue Yonder." I don't regret any crossroads that I have chosen for myself. A lot of lessons have been learned. There have been a lot of sweat and tears, but these experiences, as well as the influence from my parents, have all shaped me into the person that I am today, and I'm thankful for it all.