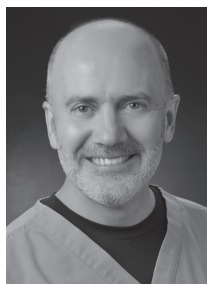


## THIS GUY, HE'S GOT STORIES!"

AUTHOR James Patrick Murphy, MD



**M**y teenage son Kellen, a bit startled by this stranger's enthusiasm, returned a look, with equal parts joy and disbelief. We were at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. Before us in one-hundredth scale glory was an eleven-foot exact replica of the aircraft carrier *USS Enterprise*. She had been my ship during my stint in the Navy. And, as we soon learned, she had been the friendly stranger's ship as well.

"A flight surgeon! Oh, man!" He said, placing his hand on my shoulder like an old friend and locking his eyes on Kellen like a laser-guided missile. "Do you know how cool that is? Has he told you any sea stories?"

Subsequent to that prompt, the rest of our weekend was indeed rife with a sea story or two or three. It was late summer 2015, just before Kellen's junior year of high school, on the cusp of beginning his serious college search. The underlying reason for this father-son road trip to Washington, DC was so that Kellen could visit and tour the US Naval Academy.

Flashback to the summer of 1988: the *USS Enterprise* was returning from her six-month deployment to the Persian Gulf. For the final three days of the cruise, ship's company were allowed to bring on board a male guest, e.g. father, son or brother, for the last leg of the journey from Seattle to our homeport in Oakland. At that time, women were not allowed to serve on combatant vessels, so it was just us guys. It was called the *Tiger Cruise*, and my tiger was my dad.

Back in his Navy days, circa 1954, my dad served as an Electrician's Mate aboard a heavy cruiser, the *USS Des Moines*. Now 34 years later, he was the honored guest of his son, the "Attack Doc" Flight Surgeon on history's most powerful seafaring vessel, the *USS Enterprise*. I was so proud to watch my dad walk those hazy-gray steel corridors, dine in the Officers' Mess, and rub shoulders with my shipmates. It was as happy as I had ever seen him. He has since his passed on, and that Tiger Cruise remains one of my most cherished memories.

It's been 30 years since I left active duty military service to enter civilian private practice. I'm now a pain medicine specialist and often see patients who are contemporaries of my parents. Not so long ago, I was meeting a new patient who I noticed was born the same year

as my dad, and, wouldn't you know, was wearing a *USS Des Moines* hat. Come to find out, this man was on the ship during the same time as my dad, however he couldn't recall meeting my dad. But that didn't matter. My patient and I immediately felt connected to each other on a deeper level than before.

Like most physicians, I have hung on my wall a collection of diplomas and citations meant to give my patients a better understanding of their doctor's credentials. Without a doubt, my certificate of graduation from flight surgeon training gets the most scrutiny and comments. When I chose to hang that document in my hallway, I had no idea that it would stand out in such singular fashion and mean so much to so many of my veteran patients. For them, knowing that I have worn the uniform in service to our country makes me, in a way, part of their extended family. They are more apt to open up to me, to trust me, to allow me to help.

I could write a thousand pages and still not adequately describe all of the ways in which serving in the United States Navy has been positive for me. The common experience of military service that I share with service men and women has given me another family that I can claim as my own.

As for Kellen, he never applied for the Naval Academy, and that's perfectly fine with me. He is his own person and must choose his own path. However, I will tell you that he is pre-med at college - another topic for another time. And, while I hesitate to write this, lest he feel any perceived pressure of my expectations, I'll have to admit, it warmed my heart to see what he wrote in his bio for his job as a university tutor:

*"I hail from the faraway land of Louisville, Kentucky which is kind of Midwest and kind of Southern, so I think I'm both...If you're interested, I am pre-med, and I'd like to be a flight surgeon in the Navy like my old man."*

Yes, I have stories. 🌸

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