

Interview Transcript
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Military Women's Memorial

Crystal Lynn Hudak
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
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U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Coast Guard

00:00:03 Robbie Fee

All right, my name is Robbie Fee, excuse me, and I am interviewing Lieutenant Crystal Hudak, who has served in the U.S. Coast Guard from 2003 to the present. This interview is taking place at the Coast Guard 17th District in Juneau, Alaska on the 16th of December 2011. This interview is being recorded for the Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation's Oral History Program. That's a mouthful. Welcome, Lieutenant Hudak. So, could you please give me your full name, and spell your names for me?

00:00:40 Crystal Hudak

My full name is Crystal Lynn Hudak, spelled C-R-Y-S-T-A-L. My middle name is Lynn, L-Y-N-N, and my last name is Hudak, H-U-D-A-K.

0:00:53 Robbie Fee

Great, and when and where were you born?

00:00:55 Crystal Hudak

I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

00:00:57 Robbie Fee

When's your birthday?

00:00:58 Crystal Hudak

January 5th, 1985.

00:01:02 Robbie Fee

January 5th, so you're about to have a birthday.

00:01:04 Crystal Hudak

That's right, I turn 27, I'm excited! Thank you.

00:01:06 Robbie Fee

Wow, excellent. So, if you were born in Pittsburgh, did you also grow up there? Was that your hometown?

00:01:12 Crystal Hudak

No, my family moved constantly. So from Pennsylvania when I was, I think I was less than two, we moved to New Zealand, and we moved around New Zealand.

00:01:20 Robbie Fee

New Zealand, wow.

00:01:21 Crystal Hudak

Yes, and so when we were 10, we moved back to the United States, and since then I've lived in Pennsylvania, Oregon, Alaska, Connecticut, Missouri, and now I'm back in Alaska.

00:01:32 Robbie Fee

Connecticut, Missouri, and then Alaska, holy cow, wow. So why don't you start by telling me who your parents are? What are their names?

00:01:40 Crystal Hudak

My parents are Bill and Carol Hudak.

00:01:43 Robbie Fee

Okay, and what does your dad do?

00:01:44 Crystal Hudak

My dad's in industry, currently unemployed.

00:01:49 Robbie Fee

And what about mom?

00:01:51 Crystal Hudak

She's an environmental consultant.

00:01:53 Robbie Fee

Wow, I'm not even sure I know what that means.

00:01:56 Crystal Hudak

I don't really know what she does either.

00:01:57 Robbie Fee

And what's mom's name?

00:01:59 Crystal Hudak

Carol, C-A-R-O-L, Hudak.

00:02:01 Robbie Fee

Okay, do you have any siblings?

00:02:04 Crystal Hudak

I do, my sibling is— I have a younger sister, her name is Roxanne Hudak.

00:02:09 Robbie Fee

Roxanne. How much younger?

00:02:10 Crystal Hudak

She's two and a half years.

00:02:15 Robbie Fee

So, wow, I mean it's, with moving around that much, was it because of dad's job that you moved around so much?

00:02:21 Crystal Hudak

That's correct. My parents had a sense of adventure, and so—

00:02:24 Robbie Fee

Sounds like it.

00:02:24 Crystal Hudak

Right, some of it was just applying for random jobs that my dad would get and not expect to get, and next thing you know, the traveling circus would be off somewhere else. And we moved, I think on average, every three to four years. So the Coast Guard, I have far more stability than I ever had. [both laugh] My family— I went to three different high schools.

00:02:42 Robbie Fee

Really? Wow. So where did you graduate from high school?

00:02:45 Crystal Hudak

I graduated from Jackson High School in Jackson, Missouri.

00:02:48 Robbie Fee

Jackson, Missouri. And so when you were in high school, did you, I mean, what were your aspirations? Did you have one particular thing you wanted to be when you grew up?

00:02:58 Crystal Hudak

You know, I wasn't very smart in high school. I was good at school, but I wasn't very good at thinking of things I wanted to do. I was too busy dating, and running track, and doing things that were far more important at the time. My mom, at that time in mid-high school, we lived in Anchorage, and so she was at its environmental consultant, rented out by the state, and they would fly her out via C-130 to all the Aleutian Islands. And through the Aleutian, meeting these guys stationed out in the middle of nowhere Aleutian Islands, she said, "you know, Crystal, you should think about the Coast Guard." At that point, I wanted to be in the Forest Service, but I started looking at colleges and realized I needed five years of college for graduation, and five years, she seemed way too much to an 18-year-old girl.

00:03:37 Robbie Fee

Yeah.

00:03:37 Crystal Hudak

That was a lot of college, so.

00:03:39 Robbie Fee

So you graduated from high school in 2003?

00:03:41 Crystal Hudak

That's correct.

00:03:42 Robbie Fee

Okay, and so did you follow mom's advice and start looking at the Coast Guard?

00:03:46 Crystal Hudak

I did. I went to the AIM—I forget what it stands for, but it was the Coast Guard Academy Summer Camp.

00:03:51 Robbie Fee

Yeah, I'm not sure what AIM is, but I know what you're talking about.

00:03:54 Crystal Hudak

That's right. So I went that my, my junior— my summer going into my senior year of high school, and I had a good time, but I don't think that set it for me, and I ended up applying to a couple colleges in Missouri and the Coast Guard Academy, mostly thinking I wasn't going to get in but it was going to make my parents happy. It was better to be told no by the Coast Guard Academy than tell my parents no. And then one day this, this letter—

00:04:15 Robbie Fee

Very diplomatic kid you were.

00:04:17 Crystal Hudak

That's right [both laugh]. I figured we could find out this letter, my acceptance letter, showed up at my dad's work. And bless his heart, he did not open my letter. He sat there. I felt like he held it to the light. [Robbie laughs] Could he see whether I got it or not? He sat there six hours and brought it home for me. And so I got this letter. It's like, oh no, what do I do? I actually got into the Coast Guard Academy. Didn't expect this one. And so I...

00:04:41 Robbie Fee

So obviously you had the grades.

00:04:42 Crystal Hudak

I had the grades.

00:04:43 Robbie Fee

Even though you...

00:04:44 Crystal Hudak

Moved around a lot. I had the grades. I was active in sports. I did a lot of Girl Scout stuff. So I didn't think I was going to make it, but apparently, apparently they were looking for kids like me. So, yeah, I went out to dinner and came home. I was like, Mom, Dad, I'm going to the Academy. They said, okay.

00:04:59 Robbie Fee

So, they were supportive.

00:05:01 Crystal Hudak

They were. We had a lot of discussions before I got my letter about how great it would be if I got in, I should go there. And then once I got my letter, they didn't speak about it again, left it completely up to me.

00:05:10 Robbie Fee

Wow. Well, that's, I mean, that's a, that's probably a good thing. I mean, to let you, you know, start to be your own person and make your own decision. Had you had any other experience with the military? I mean, did you have any military people in your family?

00:05:28 Crystal Hudak

None. Oh, my grandfather was in the Coast Guard during World War II.

00:05:32 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:05:32 Crystal Hudak

And he went from the Coast Guard to the Navy, and he was a radioman in Coos Bay, Oregon and was on watch when they were— Pearl Harbor was bombed, a message came through: This is not a drill.

00:05:42 Robbie Fee

Wow.

00:05:42 Crystal Hudak

This is not a drill, Pearl Harbor's been bombed. So he— somewhere in our house, we have this message.

00:05:46 Robbie Fee

Wow.

00:05:46 Crystal Hudak

So he traveled through the South Pacific, but didn't talk about it, was very anti-military. And when Vietnam War was happening, my dad, of course, was growing up and reaching his

20s, and that the plan was to ship him to Canada instead of having him serve in that war. So no one in my family, aside from me and now my sister, has served in the military since then.

00:06:05 Robbie Fee

Okay. Wow. So what did you do? I mean, you got your acceptance, finished high school, and then you actually start swab summer, what, in July, right?

00:06:17 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:06:18 Robbie Fee

Yeah. So do you remember reporting day?

00:06:20 Crystal Hudak

Yes. So, I really had no idea what to expect, and I'm going to the Academy's summer camp program, helped. I knew I was going to get yelled at. And everybody else's parents took them to the Academy, and dropped them off, and watched their child walk through the archways. Not my parents. They sent me on a plane in St. Louis and I showed up with a sponsor family. They had already kind of arranged for that, and I stayed with another girl who's going to the Academy, that family.

00:06:44 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:06:44 Crystal Hudak

And after dropping me off, my parents went to the St. Louis Zoo. So all through swab summer, I would get pictures of my family.

00:06:50 Robbie Fee

At the zoo?

00:06:51 Crystal Hudak

At the zoo. [Both laugh] Without me, I have yet to go to St. Louis Zoo.

00:06:55 Robbie Fee

Oh my gosh.

00:06:56 Crystal Hudak

So I remember sitting there, I had a sea bag, I had a pair of shorts and a t-shirt on, everybody else was kind of dressed up nice. I was, a pair of running shoes, like I was ready to go.

00:07:04 Robbie Fee

Yeah.

00:07:04 Crystal Hudak

And yeah, it was lots of yelling.

00:07:07 Robbie Fee

Yeah. So what about, um, did they cut your hair?

00:07:12 Crystal Hudak

I think I had my hair cut beforehand.

00:07:14 Robbie Fee

Okay. So they didn't recut it for you?

00:07:16 Crystal Hudak

No, they don't do that anymore. They used to, I guess, sit all the girls down with short haircuts whether you liked it or not. My hair was longer, the only problem was they made a shower like three times a day and it was very humid, so my hair didn't dry out. My hair was so humid that it started to rot and I would take it out and there'd just be this weird smell, and on an eagle port call, I just sat down in a barber's chair and I chopped it all off.

00:07:38 Robbie Fee

Wow.

00:07:38 Crystal Hudak

And I think I was about as short as my ears [both laugh] by the time I was done.

00:07:43 Robbie Fee

Oh my gosh.

00:07:43 Crystal Hudak

My hair is actually the longest it's ever been.

00:07:46 Robbie Fee

Wow.

00:07:46 Crystal Hudak

I kept it short the rest of the academy on the ship.

00:07:49 Robbie Fee

How many, um, how many people reported in your class for swab summer? Do you remember?

00:07:54 Crystal Hudak

I believe it was around 330.

00:07:56 Robbie Fee

Okay. How many of those were women?

00:07:58 Crystal Hudak

We were the highest class, and I think we were at one-third.

00:08:02 Robbie Fee

One-third?

00:08:03 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:08:03 Robbie Fee

Wow.

00:08:04 Crystal Hudak

And I don't know what the stats were upon graduation.

00:08:06 Robbie Fee

Yeah, so approximately one-third, um, reported. So you don't know how many women graduated with you?

00:08:12 Crystal Hudak

I couldn't tell you.

00:08:13 Robbie Fee

Oh, wow. Um, so thinking about swab summer, I mean, any highlights?

00:08:20 Crystal Hudak

Oh, I hated it.

00:08:21 Robbie Fee

You hated it. Why?

00:08:22 Crystal Hudak

Um, I like the physical fitness part. I love to work out, still do, but I don't really respond well to yelling and it seemed really humorous to me that these kids were in fact two years older than me, and they were yelling all about like, "oh, you won't take it in the real Coast Guard." Part of me wanted to say, like, hold on—

00:08:37 Robbie Fee

how do you,

00:08:38 Crystal Hudak

—like, I know in the training program here, I know you've done six weeks in the real Coast Guard painting, and scraping, and doing, and acting like a basic, basic non-rate. It's like, you can't do it in the real Coast Guard. So my attitude got me in trouble a lot.

00:08:50 Robbie Fee

Oh.

00:08:51 Crystal Hudak

Because it was really hard to take seriously, and it was— bootcamp, there's just so many ridiculous moments that I would start laughing. Like, "get down, pushups!" Okay, more pushups for me.

00:09:01 Robbie Fee

Because the people who were in charge of you—

00:09:05 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:09:05 Robbie Fee

—that summer are, um—

00:09:07 Crystal Hudak

Juniors. And so you're a freshman, they're only two years older than you. And so when it was my turn to be a junior and people were talking about, like, the problem swab at bootcamp, you know, "oh, this kid won't get it together and they'll never make a Coast Guard officer," I was the voice of reality. I said, guys, do we really know what it's like to be on the real Coast Guard? I don't think so. We can— we know what it's like to be cadets.

00:09:27 Robbie Fee

Right.

00:09:27 Crystal Hudak

Let's, let's hold the phone before we start thinking about people as officers.

00:09:32 Robbie Fee

So, um, you didn't respond well to the yelling.

00:09:36 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:09:37 Robbie Fee

And so you had that attitude. Did it cause more yelling and more not responding well?

00:09:43 Crystal Hudak

[Laughs] Yes. I would just kind of like, you learn after a while just to sit still, and people will yell at you, and then you just kind of shrug it off.

00:09:50 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:09:50 Crystal Hudak

And it took a while to learn that they're just going to yell, and then you're going to move about your day and they'll yell at you some other time. I think it's a good life lesson to learn that people can yell at you all day long, but you just kind of move on and do your thing afterwards.

00:10:04 Robbie Fee

Very good. Um, anything from swab summer that you found particularly challenging?

00:10:12 Crystal Hudak

Um, it was physically always challenging. It's the first time for a lot of kids they've been away from home for that long period of time. And I'd always been shipped to Girl Scout camp, and so I was used to the idea of being away from my family and writing letters wasn't a big deal to me. But then it sunk in that this wasn't Girl Scout camp. It was six weeks, and the school year was going to start, and then you weren't going to see your family until November. So, starting bootcamp in July and going for that long, that's pretty scary for an 18 year old. And some of these kids had never been away from home before, so it was a big deal to them.

00:10:43 Robbie Fee

And so the, the, we'll call them accommodations. You know, what, what kind of sleeping arrangements did you have? Were you two to a room?

00:10:52 Crystal Hudak

I was in a triple for most of bootcamp, and then I think fully missed my academy experience. And so, there were three girls and they were bunk beds where the lower bunk was made into a desk and the top bunk was where we slept.

00:11:03 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:11:04 Crystal Hudak

And so, to get in and out of our bunks, we'd either use the ladder or hurdle ourselves into our top bunk. Of course, if you have 13 seconds to hit a bulkhead, there was no using the ladder. We were just pulling ourselves out and just hope for the best.

00:11:18 Robbie Fee

Now, you keep calling it bootcamp.

00:11:19 Crystal Hudak

Bootcamp, swab summer.

00:11:20 Robbie Fee

I've never— right. Cause I've never heard an academy person call swab summer bootcamp before.

00:11:24 Crystal Hudak

Yeah, sorry.

00:11:25 Robbie Fee

It's okay.

00:11:26 Crystal Hudak

I refer to swab summer because people have no idea what you're talking about.

00:11:28 Robbie Fee

Yeah. Yeah. It was just, that was odd for me. I just never heard somebody call it bootcamp before. Um, and so, you're two to a room.

00:11:37 Crystal Hudak

We were three to the room.

00:11:38 Robbie Fee

Well, three to a room. Sorry. Yeah. Um, and— but once swab summer was over and you started your year, you— things got mixed up, but you didn't always have the same roommate, correct?

00:11:47 Crystal Hudak

Right. Um, for your freshman year, your fourth class year, you spent it in one company. And then for the rest of your academy experience, you're in a whole different company. So fourth class year, I got moved into what was hotel company, which was the top floor of the building. I remember looking at a sign with my two new roommates, fourth class more top, fourth class tops thinking, I have no idea who these girls are. I hope this works out. Okay. And we had a good time together. Um, our personalities didn't mesh, we didn't really talk to each other after being roommates, but you learn that even if you're not friends, you have to work together. Especially as fourth class and the rest of the academy is staring down at you, and kind of paying attention to what you're doing. You become friends with some pretty unlikely people.

00:12:27 Robbie Fee

Really?

00:12:27 Crystal Hudak

So, my third class in class, second class, first class year was spent in a foxtrot company. And most of the time it was two to a room, I did once three to a room with two girls that we had so much fun that we got in trouble for being too noisy and too messy. And we were constantly threatened with demerits. I think we got one room in general, but it was so much fun. It was worth it.

00:12:48 Robbie Fee

Wow. I mean, because you think of someone going to a military academy, you don't think of fun.

00:12:52 Crystal Hudak

No, no.

00:12:53 Robbie Fee

What is, what is some of the fun that you had?

00:12:56 Crystal Hudak

Well, obviously we couldn't drink and we couldn't do a lot of things that normal kids would do. So as freshmen, we used to do shower parties—and it sounds kind of silly—and shower field trips. And so in hotel company, obviously we had one shower. And so we would put on our flip-flops, and our robes, and grab our towels, and we would march our way to a different company and shower in their showers. And we would plan it, and sometimes we were going from the fourth floor all the way down to the first floor to use their shower based on the accommodations. And of course you would coordinate with your friends. And I don't believe we had instant messenger, but we could instant email each other and you would say, “hey, this company's bathroom this time, let's go.” And so that was fun. And then Friday nights as freshmen, you couldn't go anywhere, and so there was a lot of times that you just get a bunch of fourth class in one room and someone would pull out a guitar, and it'd be incredible musical talent that your classmates would have, and we would just sit around and sing all night.

00:13:47 Robbie Fee

Wow. Very cool. Did you play sports at the Academy?

00:13:52 Crystal Hudak

I did. I did two years of cross country, but I was never able to compete. I got really sick one year and injured in another. And then I did one season of crew and that was fun, but I really got into Sandhurst, which is essentially a military competition held at West Point.

00:14:07 Robbie Fee

Sandhurst?

00:14:08 Crystal Hudak

Sandhurst.

00:14:09 Robbie Fee

What does that mean?

00:14:09 Crystal Hudak

S-A-N-D-H-U-R-S-T.

00:14:13 Robbie Fee

Okay. What does it mean?

00:14:14 Crystal Hudak

It's a military competition held once a year at West Point in New York. And we were trained for this all year long. And we would start out with maybe 30 people and maybe six girls. And you needed—you could compete with a group of, I believe, six people, and one of them had to be female, and you had to have every class year within that group. So it was very competitive to get on the squad, and I was always bumped out by one other girl by the end of that. But I made so many great friends, and we would dress up in camouflage, like the army camouflage.

00:14:46 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:14:46 Crystal Hudak

And we would practice, because again, it's an army competition, so it would be all these army skills that we knew nothing about.

00:14:52 Robbie Fee

Oh, okay.

00:14:52 Crystal Hudak

So we would learn to throw grenades. And we had these blue plastic M16s that we would run with, because you had to run with a rifle throughout this competition.

00:15:00 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:15:01 Crystal Hudak

And we would do some shooting down at our range. We would make one rope bridges and our own climbing harnesses for rappelling. So, I didn't learn anything that was beneficial to being a Coast Guard officer through this, but I learned a lot about being in the Army and it was terrible. And the Coast Guard would always show up to this competition, and we were always very in shape and would do well, but we'd always just be awful. And our goal was always to beat the Naval Academy because they would be equally clueless as we were. And we would do really badly because it was always some small army technicality that we just wouldn't know, and we would not follow army procedure, and we ended up losing a bunch of points. One year, it was about face paint. You had to have your face painted up to participate in this. And we stopped at the Army PX, bought some face paint, continued on our way. Turns out we bought the hunting camouflage face paint, which is different than the army camouflage face paint, therefore disqualifying our team at one of the uniform inspections, and we continued running it, but oh, that was bad news.

00:15:56 Robbie Fee

Oh my gosh.

00:15:58 Crystal Hudak

I don't think the team no longer exists.

00:16:00 Robbie Fee

How many years did you do that?

00:16:01 Crystal Hudak

I did that for three years.

00:16:03 Robbie Fee

Three years.

00:16:04 Crystal Hudak

Yeah, the sport no longer exists. Well, it exists at West Point, but the Coast Guard Academy no longer participates.

00:16:09 Robbie Fee

Why?

00:16:09 Crystal Hudak

Well, their competition always seemed to land during finals week.

00:16:12 Robbie Fee

Oh.

00:16:13 Crystal Hudak

I think the commandant, the cadets, had enough of kids skipping finals for Sandhurst.

00:16:18 Robbie Fee

Yeah, that probably wouldn't be very cool for you academically.

00:16:21 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:16:22 Robbie Fee

Wow. And so you did Sandhurst, you did crew, you did cross country.

00:16:27 Crystal Hudak

Right, and I did a lot of marathoning. I ran two marathons while at the academy.

00:16:32 Robbie Fee

Really? Wow. What marathons did you run?

00:16:35 Crystal Hudak

I ran the Marine Corps twice.

00:16:40 Robbie Fee

Because, as I understand it, there's a requirement for sports.

00:16:45 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:16:46 Robbie Fee

Either the collegiate sports or intramural club sports, what have you. And what kind of a requirement is it to— when you went, that— how many sports did you have to play a year?

00:16:57 Crystal Hudak

I remember you had to do— I think you needed, I think, like five sports credits per semester, and maybe a varsity sport was worth three.

00:17:04 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:17:05 Crystal Hudak

Or an intramural was worth one or two, and so you could do intramural sports and that would count, or you could do clubs, which I was part of the marathon club, and so that was a sports credit.

00:17:14 Robbie Fee

Oh, okay.

00:17:14 Crystal Hudak

I believe Sandhurst was maybe two or three sports credits, and that kept my requirement for the year.

00:17:20 Robbie Fee

Oh, okay, very good. Did you do any other extracurricular activities?

00:17:25 Crystal Hudak

I started the environmental club with my best friend, and they won a recycling competition a few years ago. I was very proud.

00:17:31 Robbie Fee

Oh, and so, you know, you're, you're at a military academy. You're, you know— after swab summer, your primary focus, you're a student.

00:17:39 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:17:39 Robbie Fee

But you're also a military person, so you're learning all those things. Where do you find the time to start a club?

00:17:44 Crystal Hudak

I don't know how we did it [laughs]. It started when I was a junior and everybody else was a senior. When we had a group of people get together, I believe it was someone's house in Massachusetts, and it started with an email of something like, we need to have a discussion about environmental things around the academy, and we all—there's probably about 15 of us that were originally involved in this—and we gave little presentations. I did one about how much water you save when you turn off the water while brushing your teeth, and I compared it to men shaving their faces since they all had to shave their face, and a lot of them left the faucet running, so that was really fascinating. I did some polling with that and made it more into a social survey, and as that kind of retreat ended, that, again, was just put together by cadets saying like, hey, this will be fun, let's meet for the weekend. When that ended, all of those people except for me, one other person graduated, and so then I and then my best friend who was not part of that event, kind of took up the torch and said, let's start an environmental club, and so it's called the Coast Guard Sustainability Club. I hope it still exists.

00:18:43 Robbie Fee

Coast Guard Sustainability, okay.

00:18:46 Crystal Hudak

And then we were talking a lot about getting the corps to recycle, the corps cadets to recycle, which was a massive project, and it was all kinds of headaches getting people to put the right thing in the right container.

00:18:58 Robbie Fee

Really?

00:18:58 Crystal Hudak

Really, and it really came down to what part of the country that you were from.

00:19:02 Robbie Fee

Why?

00:19:02 Crystal Hudak

If you're from the coast, you were used to the idea of recycling.

00:19:05 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:19:05 Crystal Hudak

And so putting paper in the blue bin and the other stuff in the black bin made sense to you and you'd done it your entire life. If you're from the south or midwest, where they didn't recycle as much, it was just incredible getting people to understand that concept. And then, of course, the upperclassmen put their trash out, and getting the freshmen to put the trash, the fourth class, put the paper in the paper bin and get it to the paper dumpster so recycling could take it was a whole other challenge. So if the fourth class didn't sort the trash correctly that people already done, our recycling efforts were for nothing.

00:19:38 Robbie Fee

Right. Wow.

00:19:40 Crystal Hudak

So it was a lot of training and just asking people to participate in that.

00:19:44 Robbie Fee

But that sounds pretty neat. What about academics? What was your major?

00:19:49 Crystal Hudak

I was a marine environmental science major.

00:19:52 Robbie Fee

Well, I'm kind of not surprised. Starting the environmental club.

00:19:55 Crystal Hudak

Yeah, imagine that, right? I like the wild side.

00:19:59 Robbie Fee

So marine environmental science, okay. I mean, were you always good at math and science?

00:20:07 Crystal Hudak

I was good in high school, and I thought I was going to be good, and then I went to the academy and realized I wasn't nearly as good at math or science as I thought. That was a rude awakening, to go from getting A's in high school to hoping for a D or a C.

00:20:19 Robbie Fee

Wow. So how do you deal with that, you know, abrupt change academically?

00:20:23 Crystal Hudak

I called my parents and cried. I'm going to fail chemistry [both laugh]. They're like, well, it happens. If it does, then you just take it again. You're a grown-up.

00:20:33 Robbie Fee

I mean, do you have that option at a service academy that if you fail a course, you get to take it again?

00:20:37 Crystal Hudak

Yes, yes. They have, in some majors, in some cases, they can do that.

00:20:41 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:20:42 Crystal Hudak

And yes, so math and the science, I love science, still do. The idea of taking math, and coming up with a problem and solving that problem, and coming up with a solution to it or saying this is the information that we have since found out. I love that process. And so my math and science classes were just fantastic. And right now, I had to take probability statistics and I hated it, because it was fuzzy math and there was no easy answer to it. It was all about posing the questions. I wouldn't understand the questions on my test, so I'd just draw a picture. My teacher, bless her heart, passed me. But the other— all my oceanography classes were multivariable calculus, and I loved it because it was talking about solving problems and describing something real.

00:21:24 Robbie Fee

What was your most favorite class at the academy?

00:21:28 Crystal Hudak

My most favorite class. Probably my oceanography classes, mostly because the people that were with, in the class, I would normally laugh until I cried about once a week in oceanography class.

00:21:38 Robbie Fee

Really?

00:21:39 Crystal Hudak

Right, and it wasn't easy.

00:21:40 Robbie Fee

It wasn't the material that was funny.

00:21:42 Crystal Hudak

It wasn't the material, it was the group of people. I failed for that. I failed tests like champs, and the whole class would fail tests like champs. And so the teacher had this thing that you could come in and argue points back, and he would give you half of it. So you would get the questions you got wrong, and you'd be like, well, how did this equation go? You would miswrite something. And so you would go to him on a blackboard and say, it goes like this. And you would show him that I have learned the material. That was the greatest way to teach right there.

00:22:06 Robbie Fee

To earn points back.

00:22:07 Crystal Hudak

To earn points back.

00:22:07 Robbie Fee

Wow.

00:22:08 Crystal Hudak

It was just a fantastic idea. So I'm really thankful Captain Millfold [spelled phonetically] passed me. [Both laugh] He probably shouldn't have.

00:22:13 Robbie Fee

And what about the— not that you really— I mean, you're playing sports, you're going to class, you're starting the environmental club. Did you have time to have a social life? Do cadets have time?

00:22:26 Crystal Hudak

You make time. My friend, the one that I started the environmental club, we used to go running together, and we would run to a field, and we would sleep in this field. And we would wake up covered in bug bites. But that was one of the ways that we got through our senior year, was sleeping in the fields together. But we would get together on weekends. And you would plan, maybe by Wednesday your weekend's already figured out. You would live to get to that weekend. And I was lucky, I had a group of guy friends, they're about a year older than me, that I hung out with. And we did backpacking trips, and camping trips, and snowshoeing trips, and anything outside. And I still get together with them, about once a year now, and we still go backpacking, and snowshoeing, and camping, and everything else.

00:23:04 Robbie Fee

So, you were allowed to leave on weekends?

00:23:07 Crystal Hudak

On weekends. After being a— yes, we could leave on weekends. After being a freshman, there was kind of different hours, and then you could graduate in more time as you got higher in rank at the academy.

00:23:17 Robbie Fee

Okay. How about on the military side, where they're teaching you all the military stuff, and you had to march to class, right?

00:23:30 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:23:31 Robbie Fee

You know, did you enjoy that military part? You know, the whole military bearing, and marching, and formation.

00:23:38 Crystal Hudak

I'm not a military person, and I would still say I'm not a military person, but, but, I think this is why people kind of get to military academies. There was something about a really nice day in the spring, when we were all, all thousand rows in our marching uniforms, and doing drills out in the field, and watching a company move, and everyone turns at the same time, they're all facing the same direction. It was incredible to see that. And that's when I would say, sure, okay, maybe I am in the military.

00:24:06 Robbie Fee

Yeah.

00:24:06 Crystal Hudak

And of course, Coast Guard doesn't march anymore after that.

00:24:08 Robbie Fee

Yeah.

00:24:09 Crystal Hudak

But I would get that warm sense of pride then.

00:24:11 Robbie Fee

Yeah. Wow. And friends. So you, you had friends?

00:24:16 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:24:17 Robbie Fee

Well, you can't really, you said you couldn't remember how many people graduated with you.

00:24:22 Crystal Hudak

I feel like we graduated about 280, but I couldn't tell you how many women were in that group.

00:24:26 Robbie Fee

Okay. But you had a mix of friends who were both men and women.

00:24:30 Crystal Hudak

Right, right.

00:24:30 Robbie Fee

You know, and did that help you get through?

00:24:35 Crystal Hudak

Oh, absolutely. They became your family. There was— when you're fourth class year, all you can think about is going home to your friends from high school. And you get together with your friends at high school, realize you didn't have much in common with them as you thought. And next thing you know, at the Academy, over a summer break, you're like, hey, I missed you. It's been six weeks and I haven't talked to you. How are you?

00:24:54 Robbie Fee

Wow. But during the summer, I mean, unlike a regular college where kids get to go home, you know, the academy, it's different. What do you do during the summer?

00:25:02 Crystal Hudak

Well, part of the summer, you go home, I believe for three weeks, and then you're doing Coast Guard training or missions for the rest of your summer.

00:25:10 Robbie Fee

What does that mean?

00:25:11 Crystal Hudak

Well, my...

00:25:11 Robbie Fee

Give me examples of what you did.

00:25:13 Crystal Hudak

So, my fourth class summer, as we talked about, was swab summer. My third class summer, me and actually one of the girls that was my original roommate my fourth class year, Betsy Tufts, we went to the old *Mackinaw* [USCGC *Mackinaw*]. And the old *Mackinaw* no longer exists. And I believe that was the last summer and we were the last cadets of the old *Mackinaw*. We spent six weeks there painting and scraping. And let's see, I rode a canoe off a shipping channel, and just kind of getting into hijinks as we went along.

00:25:39 Robbie Fee

And where was the old *Mackinaw*?

00:25:41 Crystal Hudak

Cheboygan, Michigan.

00:25:42 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:25:42 Crystal Hudak

So small town fun at its finest. We had a blast. Absolutely had a great time there. And then we went to *Eagle* [USCGC *Eagle*] for six weeks and did that again. And my second class summer, we do, like, the drill sergeant cadre thing, did that. It's an offshore sailing, which was by far, far more fun than the drill sergeant part. Then my first class summer, I did 12 weeks on board *Eagle*.

00:26:03 Robbie Fee

So, excuse me. From your first experience on *Eagle*, tell me a little bit about that, and then I want you to compare it to your first class summer where you spent 12 weeks.

00:26:13 Crystal Hudak

So, well, as a fourth class, you did a week on board *Eagle* during swab summer. And you were just so excited to be out of the academy, away from the cadre, and be able to look at your food, that it didn't really matter what was happening on *Eagle*. You were just happy to be away. So the next time you show up for five or six weeks as a third class cadet, it was miserable. I couldn't drink yet, and that may have something to do with it. And I don't remember having a good time, I remember feeling very disorganized. And five weeks isn't quite enough to understand what's happening on board a tall ship. And so it was a lot of just running all over the boat pulling lines, and not fully understanding what was going on. And so my first class summer, when they were struggling to find my classmates that were interested in going aboard *Eagle* again, because most of us had a miserable time. And so they finally put out...

00:27:02 Robbie Fee

And how long do you go as a first class?

00:27:04 Crystal Hudak

That was when I went for 12 weeks.

00:27:05 Robbie Fee

12 weeks, okay.

00:27:06 Crystal Hudak

So they put out a solicitation. They say everyone who's interested in going afloat for that summer—and my name was on that list—come to this office and tell this officer why you don't want to go on the *Eagle*. And so I showed up, and I pleaded my case. I didn't want to go on *Eagle*, I wanted to go on a mechanized cutter, it would be better for leadership, and I just wasn't interested in tall ships. And the woman's like, "Okay, thank you. It's all been noted." And next thing you know, I have orders to *Eagle* for 12 weeks. Oh, this is going to be miserable! Turned out to be the best summer of my Coast Guard career. 12 weeks is enough time, you make a lot of friends and trust with the permanent party crew members. And you go from being some cadet, just pulling on random lines to understanding what was going on. I could drink, so going to Caribbean ports and being able to have a little umbrella drink on the beach made it so much better.

00:27:56 Robbie Fee

So was that your first or one of your first times having contact like that with the permanent party crew?

00:28:06 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:28:07 Robbie Fee

Enlisted folks?

00:28:07 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:28:08 Robbie Fee

Yeah.

00:28:08 Crystal Hudak

There isn't very many enlisted people at the academy, or at least ones where you can have daily contact. I think there was a few corpsmen in the hospital, the clinic, but aside from talking to them for random appointments, you didn't get to know them quite like when you're living in someone's pockets, standing watch for 12 weeks.

00:28:25 Robbie Fee

So how did you, how did you enjoy that experience of getting to know somebody who, you know, was kind of on the opposite side of where you were?

00:28:34 Crystal Hudak

Well, it was so much better, because at that point I was 21 years old and the younger enlisted are all my age too. And there was one moment in a bar, I feel like we're in Puerto Rico, one of the drunk first class petty officers grabs me and says, "Crystal, go talk to all the young petty officers and get all the advice you can, because they won't talk to you once you're an officer, and they'll be honest with you now." And I was like, hmm, interesting. And I did. I hung out with all the enlisted guys and heard all kinds of things. And there'd be moments I think they forgot I was a cadet, and there'd be moments like "when you're an ensign, I want you to remember how these people are treating me," or "how this incident that's occurring, I want you to remember." And so I would try to store that little bit of information away in my head.

00:29:14 Robbie Fee

Did they give you good advice?

00:29:16 Crystal Hudak

They did. I got a lot of great advice from them.

00:29:19 Robbie Fee

So when you, you're at the academy, did you have any women role models?

00:29:25 Crystal Hudak

I had a, she was my meteorology teacher. She was a lieutenant at the time. I think she's a lieutenant commander now, but Lieutenant Wurtz [spelled phonetically]. And she was a fantastic Coast Guard officer, good meteorology teacher, but just fun. And she was not the normal, stereotypical Coast Guard role when you see a woman. She wasn't screaming, yelling. She didn't seem angry at the world. She just seemed very excited to have her job and to teach meteorology, and had great stories about the Coast Guard. And once graduation started coming, we started realizing the academy wasn't forever. We would ask her a few other questions and she'd be like, "you know what ladies? It's going to be terrible, there are going to be really bad moments where you hate it." And that dose of reality of, you know, it's not all sunshine and rainbows like we tell cadets here. She had a lot of stories of like, look around and think, even though you're still only one third women, this will be the

most woman you'll ever be around. Enjoy it. And I didn't think she was right. And next thing you know, get out to the real Coast Guard. Like, holy crap, I'm it.

00:30:23 Robbie Fee

Yeah. Wow. So she was it. One of the only role models you can think of, or were there more?

00:30:30 Crystal Hudak

That's all I can think of for females.

00:30:32 Robbie Fee

Yeah. And when in the course of your last year there, your first class year, when do you get your orders? Is it towards the end?

00:30:43 Crystal Hudak

Early March.

00:30:44 Robbie Fee

March. Okay. And how, I mean, how does that happen? Do you fill out a dream sheet like other regular people do? Regular meaning already out in the fleet or out in the Coast Guard.

00:30:55 Crystal Hudak

So I believe in January we submitted our dream sheets. And there's a list of jobs looking for ensigns and you kind of pick and choose and thought about it. We submitted it electronically.

00:31:03 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:31:04 Crystal Hudak

And so then you just pushed the end, and you waited until billet night.

00:31:07 Robbie Fee

Oh. And so tell me about billet night.

00:31:10 Crystal Hudak

Billet night was fun. So I think the officers at the Academy may have had the list out before we did, so as a senior, you're counting down the days to billet night. You're so excited. It's

like Christmas and it takes forever. And your instructors are like, “oh, I know where you're going.” I don't know if they really did.

00:31:25 Robbie Fee

Oh, maybe they were just jerking your chain.

00:31:26 Crystal Hudak

“You might want to pack some sandals.” People are going to Hawaii! I don't think they do. So, billet night starts. I'm the second name that's called. I get up there and I'm all by myself. And they're like, Hudak, you're going to the *Sycamore* [USCGC *Sycamore*] in Cordova, Alaska, and I started crying. Like, the overwhelmed, lots of news, big life change, and excitement crying. And a lot of the cadets were like, “ooh, this is a bad billet. She's going to be miserable.” And my friends were like, “oh, she's so excited to go back to Alaska!” And I was thrilled. And I went on a backpacking trip the next day, because spring break started, with my boyfriend who became my fiancé, became my husband. So excited about this buoy tender. So weeks later—

00:32:08 Robbie Fee

So it's a buoy tender. How big?

00:32:10 Crystal Hudak

I believe it was 225 feet. And so weeks later, my friend, the one I started the environmental club with and slept in fields with, comes up and says, “Crystal, they've changed your billet. I'm going to the *Sycamore* now. I think you're going to a white hull.” I was like, a white hull? What? This is unheard of! And they had warned you that sometimes billets were swapped, but of course, no one knew anyone that billets had gotten swapped or switched around. So I walk over to my company officer and I knock on his door and I'm like, sir, do you have some news? Kind of looks up, and was like, “oh yeah, you're going to the *Munro* [USCGC *Munro*].” I was like, oh, what? What? Tears. The *Munro* is a 378-foot cutter that was at that time stationed in Alameda, California, but was doing a home port switch to Kodiak, Alaska. And so, I—

00:32:55 Robbie Fee

Still Alaska.

00:32:56 Crystal Hudak

Still Alaska, so I got what I wanted. And so part of billet day is you get a special hat that says what cutter you're going to, the unit ball cap. And so I had to give my unit ball cap up to my

friend, and I didn't have one for a while, and I felt so sad. And so there I was sitting in my room, and one of the officers that worked in the detailing department comes up and he found an old *Munro* hat squished under a closet in a bunch of boxes, it was covered in dust. And he was like, here Hudak, here's your hat. I know this isn't what you wanted, but it'll turn out fine.

00:33:27 Robbie Fee

Oh, wow. And so, so wait a second. The *Munro* is, it's a 378?

00:33:35 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:33:36 Robbie Fee

Oh, okay. I guess I didn't realize they had 378s in Kodiak.

00:33:39 Crystal Hudak

Oh, it's new. So that, that did the home port switch in 2007.

00:33:44 Robbie Fee

Oh, okay. So you had to go to the old home port.

00:33:48 Crystal Hudak

Right, I reported when the ship was in dry dock in San Francisco.

00:33:53 Robbie Fee

Oh, okay. But graduation. Do you remember graduation day?

00:33:58 Crystal Hudak

I don't remember much of graduation. It was very fuzzy, very exciting, very hot. The girl next to me fell asleep because it was very long, and President Bush started his speech about Afghanistan. You know, he gave the congratulations for graduation and started on Afghanistan. And one of the girls next to me leans over, I think her name was Abby Hu [spelled phonetically], leans over and says, "Afghanistan is landlocked, right?" I was like, yeah, I think so. And then she fell asleep.

00:34:25 Robbie Fee

Oh my gosh.

00:34:26 Crystal Hudak

So yes, I shook George Bush's hand and it was really scary because, you know, whether or not you're a fan of his presidency, that's still the president.

00:34:36 Robbie Fee

Right.

00:34:37 Crystal Hudak

And getting done with that, and visiting family, and then they pretty much evict you out of Chase Hall, so you have an hour to get all your gear and to leave. And to walk out of a place you spent four years as your home, you know that you're never coming back. That is such a strange, exciting, yet very sad feeling.

00:34:52 Robbie Fee

Yeah. But you met your, who's now your husband, was your boyfriend at the academy?

00:34:59 Crystal Hudak

Yes.

00:35:00 Robbie Fee

Okay. Did you guys, were you in the same class?

00:35:02 Crystal Hudak

No, he was a year below me.

00:35:04 Robbie Fee

Oh, okay. So you guys couldn't get married, you had to—

00:35:06 Crystal Hudak

No, no, story on that. We met on the Sandhurst team, my sports team, and we kind of got to know each other through that. But we started dating my senior year, his junior year. So I feel like we dated for about four months, and he asked me to marry him on a picnic, and he had no money so there was no ring, it was with a blade of grass that he tied into a ring. And it was wonderful. So I went to— so I think we said goodbye in June. I went to Kodiak, we went 212 days apart before we saw each other from me reporting to *Munro* and he came up for Christmas. And the ship pulled in, and we just gotten done with a patrol, and he was on the pier, and I cried seeing him. I was so happy, I'm so like tearing up thinking about it. And he

planned my wedding. I showed up with a dress that some Coast Guard wife made for me for 200 bucks, I think, and he planned the whole thing.

00:35:57 Robbie Fee

Oh my gosh. But let's go back to you reporting to the *Munro*.

00:36:04 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:36:05 Robbie Fee

How many women on board?

00:36:07 Crystal Hudak

I think the ship may have had about 30 women. So maybe 130 people, 30 of them girls.

00:36:15 Robbie Fee

Okay. And what was your job going to be?

00:36:17 Crystal Hudak

I was going to be the communications officer.

00:36:21 Robbie Fee

How many JOs [junior officers]?

00:36:23 Crystal Hudak

I think there was 12 JOs.

00:36:25 Robbie Fee

Okay. So, you know, there's only 12 of you, is there a lot of collateral duties?

00:36:30 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:36:31 Robbie Fee

Yeah.

00:36:32 Crystal Hudak

Collateral duties. And I was kind of the random projects. The XO really liked me. I was good at random projects, and soon I became the Excel spreadsheet girl. And the— Which I didn't like very much. And the captain would come up with some kind of tangible number that he wanted. And one time it was, “find out the amount of sea time that people have prior to reporting to *Munro* that are transferring in this summer. Go.” [Laughs] And I would come up with a spreadsheet and an answer to that within a week.

00:36:58 Robbie Fee

Oh my gosh.

00:36:59 Crystal Hudak

A couple days later, they're like, oh, solve this problem or question for us.

00:37:04 Robbie Fee

Wow. Did you like the work on board the ship?

00:37:07 Crystal Hudak

Up days, down days. I did two years. I'm sorry. I did three years instead of two years on there. If I extended for a year, it put me on the same rotation cycle as my spouse. So, it's a two year tour for a reason, I learned that come the third year I was so burned out. I had transferred off the ship, I was in a school, a star school from my current job. And I got a text from one of my best friends that was on the boat. They were out of underway OODs [Officer of the Deck – Underway]. And maybe I should think about coming back to the ship. I'm miserable, please! And it turned into, okay, can you just show up for four days? Because we're going to take the ship from Kodiak to Seattle for a dry dock. I said, no problem, it gets me back in time for my road trip with my husband through Canada, from Juneau, I was so excited. It turned into a month. And I did three years and a month on board that ship. And they actually flied me up via helicopter from Dutch Harbor to get me, and I missed my road trip. I had, I think, four days in between that job and reporting to this job.

00:38:10 Robbie Fee

So when did— what's your husband's name?

00:38:12 Crystal Hudak

His name is James.

00:38:13 Robbie Fee

James.

00:38:14 Crystal Hudak

James Dooley. My last name is actually Dooley, but I go by Hudak in uniform.

00:38:18 Robbie Fee

Okay, Dooley, spelled?

00:08:19 Crystal Hudak

D-O-O-L-E-Y.

00:38:21 Robbie Fee

Okay. How do you do that though? Does your driver's license say Dooley or Hudak?

00:38:27 Crystal Hudak

Dooley. All my driver's license.

00:38:29 Robbie Fee

But you just never change your name in the Coast Guard?

00:38:30 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:38:31 Robbie Fee

Gotcha. So when did you and James get married?

00:38:35 Crystal Hudak

We got married May 28th, 2008.

00:38:37 Robbie Fee

Okay. And so you were already on the *Munro*?

00:38:42 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:38:42 Robbie Fee

Okay. And he planned your whole wedding, I can't believe that.

00:38:47 Crystal Hudak

It was wonderful.

00:38:48 Robbie Fee

That's sweet.

00:38:48 Crystal Hudak

He would get bridal magazines and kind of, so that he could look at pictures and articles and then hide them under all of his stuff. He had a sister who was working as a wedding planner in a department store.

00:38:57 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:38:58 Crystal Hudak

He went home, maybe Christmas break or something, or Thanksgiving, and they looked at wedding stuff. And he felt so overwhelmed and stressed that he was, he was looking at that and saying, I'm— we're not having matching colors. We're not having fancy dishware. We're going to have paper plates. I said, perfect.

00:39:14 Robbie Fee

Okay. So, the date of your wedding, that would have been when he graduated.

00:39:17 Crystal Hudak

Right. He was a year below me.

00:39:19 Robbie Fee

Okay. So, he was planning your wedding while he's finishing his first class year at the academy.

00:39:24 Crystal Hudak

Right. As a marine environmental student with a— and he was really into chemistry, so he had no free time either.

00:39:31 Robbie Fee

Wow. Um, okay. So, uh, you get married, you're on the *Munro*. He of course had to get orders. Where'd he go?

00:39:39 Crystal Hudak

He went to the *Spar* [USCGC *Spar*], which is the buoy tender.

00:39:42 Robbie Fee

And where's the *Spar*?

00:39:43 Crystal Hudak

Kodiak.

00:39:43 Robbie Fee

Kodiak, okay. So you're both in Kodiak at least. Okay. So, so you're, you guys are essentially a dual service couple.

00:39:54 Crystal Hudak

That's right.

00:39:54 Robbie Fee

And you're both underway on two different boats.

00:39:57 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:39:57 Robbie Fee

Because they would never put you on the same boat, not as ensigns, right?

00:40:01 Crystal Hudak

Well, as married people, we couldn't be on the same boat.

00:40:03 Robbie Fee

At all.

00:40:03 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:40:04 Robbie Fee

Okay. Um, wow. So, three years on the *Munro*. So, you say good days and bad days.

00:40:13 Crystal Hudak

Good days, bad days.

00:40:14 Robbie Fee

What was a good day?

00:40:14 Crystal Hudak

Good day. I really enjoyed those days where we had so much operations going on that you were just exhausted by the end. And whenever we go from driving the ship, to landing the helicopter, back to driving the ship, to doing some paperwork, to covering a watch. I love driving that ship, I would do it all day long if they let me. And you would get in bed and be like, yeah, we helped people today. Like, doing a good search and rescue case. Our boat, all 160 of us, helped somebody. And then days you're just kind of floating around in the ocean, you don't see any boats. You get a lot of drama with 160 people in 378 feet space. And of course none of them picked each other to be there. So, there was a lot of fighting and conflicts, and people were sleep deprived and homesick. And that was my least favorite part was just dealing with silly drama.

00:41:01 Robbie Fee

Wow. Um, did you have any issues on your boat with the whole, you're a woman, you know, you're a JO, so you're giving people orders, people working for you. Was that ever a problem being a woman?

00:41:16 Crystal Hudak

There were a few people that would come forward and be like, I don't believe women should be in the military. And they would say that, and I actually had a girl that would say that. And I know I was just looking at her like, what? Do you not like your paycheck? And it's this guy that would say that, like, I don't believe women should be in the military. But like, all right, well, if I stop standing watch now, who's going to curb my watch? If I decide to just leave my rack because you don't like women in the military, there's a lot more work for everybody else here. And I would say, okay, so maybe I can't reach the ship's windshield wipers and I have to ask somebody to turn them on. Maybe the binoculars that are mounted outside are too high for me to look through. But what part of my job has anything to do with my gender?

00:41:53 Robbie Fee

And what would they say to you?

00:41:54 Crystal Hudak

Oh, it was usually just the dumb look [laughs].

00:41:57 Robbie Fee

Very good. I mean, I'm sure you've heard the stories about what it was like for, say, the first class of women to go through the academy. Do you think the academy has come a long way?

00:42:07 Crystal Hudak

Oh, I'm sure it has. I can't imagine. I remember hearing stories that they didn't have shoes in women's sizes, so they were given the boots that would fit them the best they could. And that's— And women's heads, I guess, didn't exist at the time.

00:42:19 Robbie Fee

Yes.

00:42:20 Crystal Hudak

So thank goodness things have changed.

00:42:24 Robbie Fee

How do you think you would have done had you been born earlier and been in that first class?

00:42:29 Crystal Hudak

I wonder if that would have even appealed to me, because those girls would have been so tough to sit there, to pick that lifestyle when I'm sure— I mean, even still women don't join the military. That would have been such a different lifestyle to pick. I don't know if it would appeal to me, but I would like to think I would do okay. But I'm just not sure.

00:42:47 Robbie Fee

Have you ever met any of them?

00:42:48 Crystal Hudak

I have. They're really neat ladies.

00:42:50 Crystal Hudak

Yeah. And they're actually not that old.

00:42:52 Crystal Hudak

Right. That's what's scary, that this wasn't that long ago.

00:42:55 Robbie Fee

Right. Right. Exactly. And so you do your three years on the *Munro*.

00:42:59 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:43:00 Robbie Fee

Willingly in order to kind of get that alignment in terms of assignments with your husband. And so you land the job here.

00:43:07 Crystal Hudak

Well, our dream sheet was all these high-speed law enforcement jobs that my husband wanted. And I put in for jobs I never heard of, just so I could be with him. And put in our detail sheet, I think our first choice was Miami, and our second choice was San Diego. I think we had, you know, like number 32 on the list. I really don't know why we wrote it, why we gave them so many options, in hindsight. And I got really excited, waiting for billets. And I was underway at the time. And I kind of told the detailer, any detailing stuff, go through my husband since he's in port. And so they sent out an email—James emails all the day—If Crystal's on watch, tell her, relieve her watch and tell her that she's going to Juneau. And somebody comes down like, “you’re going to Juneau!” I was like, oh, I'm staying in Alaska! I was like, Juneau? We're doing Juneau? And so next thing I get orders, that said command center. I had no idea—

00:43:58 Robbie Fee

What that meant.

00:43:58 Crystal Hudak

—about the command center, and I went to some of my other fellow JOs who had no clue what that meant. And I went to the XO and he said, “Crystal, you just got the best job in the Coast Guard.” He was a prior command center. And my exit speech, he talked about, “when I'm running search and rescue, I want to know that Crystal is running my cases.” And it was so wonderful to get so much praise from him, I started to cry. And XO starts his speech with, “if she's not crying now, watch this.” The whole ship knew. So it's been wonderful. I love my job up here.

00:44:29 Robbie Fee

So tell me, you're about— are you working today?

00:44:33 Crystal Hudak

No, I'm off today.

00:44:34 Robbie Fee

Okay, you're off today. You go to work, to work in the command center. What's a day like for you?

00:44:40 Crystal Hudak

A day, when I have a day shift, it means waking up at 4:30 in the morning to be in the command center at 5:30, because that's when we do our relief. And some days of the week, we do a morning brief at 8 o'clock. And I have one report that gets sent out around 2:30, and then it's just chaos during the rest of the day. During the workday, it's a lot of phone calls from people wanting to be routed to random Coast Guard offices, and there can be a search and rescue case at any time, and so if there's not a search and rescue case, we're usually working on admin or fielding these silly questions. The night watches start from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. And that's when we put together the morning brief that the day watch presents, and that's when we do a lot of admin, we have another report. But if we're not running cases, we're basically twiddling our thumbs.

00:45:23 Robbie Fee

Have you had any real exciting cases since you started this job?

00:45:28 Crystal Hudak

Yes, yes.

00:45:29 Robbie Fee

Can you tell me about one?

00:45:30 Crystal Hudak

Let me see, oh, what's a good case. So a very exciting case, and this happened in early September, we had a person fall 300 feet off a cliff outside Kodiak, and they put him in his father's boat. So the father called the Coast Guard and essentially watched his son die. And the Coast Guard showed up, hoisted the body, took it back, but even though not a happy ending, it was real. It was one of those really scary moments of like, okay, we have a lot of happy endings, but this is the big case where we don't have a happy ending, and it's

kind of messing with me just a little bit. We're doing a case study on it right now to kind of learn, like, how can the Coast Guard improve?

00:46:08 Robbie Fee

But, you know, when you say you're in the command center, I mean, what is your job? Like, say you get a search and rescue case that starts. What are you doing? Can you describe that?

00:46:18 Crystal Hudak

So my part, the District 17 Command Center, we're not actually running the case, we're managing one of the sectors. And so we're like the puppet masters, is the easiest way. So if somebody makes a mayday call over the radio, it's the puppet masters, either at the sector or the District Command Center, that figure out, okay, I need to send a helicopter. I need to send a small boat. It's going to take this long to get there. Once they get there, what are they going to do? Once they pick up the person, where are they going to take them? What are my other options? How else can I conduct this search? If your searches that are taking longer, like, say somebody falls off a boat, it takes days for us to complete that search. Where are my next assets coming from?

00:46:55 Robbie Fee

So you're like a coordinator.

00:46:56 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:46:56 Robbie Fee

And you're always thinking ahead of what's going on.

00:46:59 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:47:01 Robbie Fee

You like this work?

00:47:02 Crystal Hudak

I do. I really enjoy it. It's problem solving. Up days, down days, just like every other job.

00:47:06 Robbie Fee

Was your XO right when he said you got the best job in the Coast Guard?

00:47:09 Crystal Hudak

He was, I emailed him and told him that.

00:47:11 Robbie Fee

Yeah, yeah. We have a little bit of time left. What do you see for the future?

00:47:21 Crystal Hudak

I don't know.

00:47:22 Robbie Fee

Do you want to have a family?

00:47:23 Crystal Hudak

I do. I do want to have a family. My husband and I have a lot of discussions of who, if one of us gets out, which one— do we both stay in, do we both get out? Because it's difficult doing the family and the dual Coast Guard thing. It's difficult managing two Coast Guard careers going from there.

00:47:39 Robbie Fee

I mean, so far you've been able to stay together.

00:47:41 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:47:41 Robbie Fee

There can be issues with the dual service, just geographic location.

00:47:45 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:47:48 Robbie Fee

So you think one or the two of you might get out if you make the move to have a family.

00:47:55 Crystal Hudak

I don't know. It'll be interesting to cross that bridge when we come to it.

00:47:59 Robbie Fee

Yeah. So no immediate plans to have a family.

00:48:01 Crystal Hudak

No immediate plans. No. Yeah.

00:48:02 Robbie Fee

You guys are having way too much fun here.

00:48:03 Crystal Hudak

That's right.

00:48:04 Robbie Fee

But when you got sent to Juneau, where is he?

00:48:06 Crystal Hudak

He is in Juneau too. He works at Sector Juneau.

00:48:09 Robbie Fee

Oh, okay.

00:48:09 Crystal Hudak

So he does the law enforcement for all of Southeast Alaska, and then also runs search and rescue cases on the Sector side. So we run search and rescue cases from our bed sometimes, depending on when he's on call.

00:48:20 Robbie Fee

Okay. And do you guys ever work the same case?

00:48:24 Crystal Hudak

Yes, sometimes. And sometimes we even work the same shift. For holidays, we'll put in for shifts together.

00:48:28 Robbie Fee

Oh, okay.

00:48:29 Crystal Hudak

So we get to spend that time together, and those people that have kids can be home with their families.

00:48:33 Robbie Fee

Oh, that's really sweet. And it sounds like, you know, you've loved Alaska for a long time. And you're outdoors people.

00:48:39 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:48:39 Robbie Fee

So this area really works for you.

00:48:41 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:48:42 Robbie Fee

When you first got your appointment to the Academy, how long did you think you were going to stay in?

00:48:48 Crystal Hudak

Oh, I think my plan was six weeks. [Laughs] But if I made it through bootcamp, I would call it a success. And my parents were smart. Like, do a full year so you can see all four seasons. Because maybe the spring is incredible, or the winter is incredible, and you'll find things you like about each season.

00:49:03 Robbie Fee

Yeah.

00:49:03 Crystal Hudak

Because I would call home and cry.

00:49:05 Robbie Fee

Oh, of course. Yeah. And then when you graduate, is it a five-year commitment?

00:49:11 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:49:11 Robbie Fee

So you haven't hit that yet, right?

00:49:13 Crystal Hudak

No. And I'm using the Coast Guard to get my master's degree. So thanks to tuition assistance, my commitment will end October 30th of next year.

00:49:22 Robbie Fee

Oh, okay. So, what do you think? Are you going to stay?

00:49:27 Crystal Hudak

I don't know. I don't know.

00:49:27 Robbie Fee

Don't know?

00:49:28 Crystal Hudak

I don't know. A lot of it depends on what my husband wants to do. And, you know, how it kind of will come down to Coast Guard versus Alaska. And they pay lieutenants a lot of money, and 30 days vacation, you can't argue with that. And all the veterans benefits are great. But yeah, it'll be interesting.

00:49:45 Robbie Fee

What are you going to school for?

00:49:46 Crystal Hudak

More marine environmental stuff. This is for environmental policy management.

00:49:50 Robbie Fee

Oh, okay. Wow. You've been a cadet. You've been an officer in the U.S. Coast Guard. If you had a young person come up to you today and say, hey, thinking about going to a military academy, what would you tell them?

00:50:06 Crystal Hudak

I'd say it's a great place to be from. Not a great place to be at, but a great place to be from. I heard that expression when I was there. Every day, I thank my lucky stars I went there.

00:50:16 Robbie Fee

That's a good one.

00:50:17 Crystal Hudak

And I hated it for four years. But now when I get out, it's going to say U.S. Coast Guard Academy, my resume. And the friends I made are incredible. And the husband I picked up is so wonderful.

00:50:28 Robbie Fee

And the experiences.

00:50:30 Crystal Hudak

And the experiences were great. No, it wasn't regular college. But you know, I think I'm okay with not getting drunk at 21 at some frat house. I think I survived without that experience.

00:50:42 Robbie Fee

You, you said that you weren't really into that whole military side of things. But yet, you are wearing the uniform of one of our nation's armed services. What have you learned about yourself through your military service? Not just your cadet years, but the time you've been on active duty.

00:51:02 Crystal Hudak

It's definitely changed me. I was a lot more free-flowing, and free-thinking, and creative before I got through the military. And now with eight years in, chaos kind of scares me. I like things that are very structured. I like direction. Disorganization freaks me out. And my days off are normally planned for every hour that I can.

00:51:24 Robbie Fee

And you weren't like that before?

00:51:25 Crystal Hudak

No, not at all. Sporadic-ness kind of scares me sometimes now. And I'm more in that part of me that has disappeared.

00:51:35 Robbie Fee

What does it mean to you to be able to serve your country?

00:51:40 Crystal Hudak

It's a big question.

00:51:41 Robbie Fee

It is a big question.

00:51:44 Crystal Hudak

The times I feel it most has been some stranger that you have no idea. You're sitting there in a Coast Guard t-shirt or some kind of Coast Guard paraphernalia comes up to you as you're eating your sandwich in a coffee shop. They say, thank you for serving your country. And you start thinking about all the great things that we have here. And our country's not perfect. And we have a long way to go to get rid of racism and sexism and things like that. But the fact that as a woman, I can sit here in a military uniform and be treated just the same as some guy, and be paid the same as some guy. Like, how many countries have that? That's incredible. And there's other countries out there that are watching us, and watching us develop through those roles. And when I think of the fact that I have these job opportunities, I'm so thankful. And I would really like to reach out to the other women in the world and say, you know, whatever you're dealing with right now, maybe someday your country will get to this level too.

00:52:35 Robbie Fee

Wow. That's pretty incredible. Um, is— even though you've had, you know, just eight years so far, um, if you had to do it over again, would you? Don't know?

00:52:50 Crystal Hudak

Don't know, deep own. My husband is wonderful. Yeah. And so I wouldn't trade the opportunity of meeting him for anything in the world. But four more years of school, and three more years of ships, and a year and a half more of a command center just to have James, I would do it again.

00:53:05 Robbie Fee

Oh, that's real— I'm sure he feels the same way. So is there anything that you would like to say or talk about that we haven't covered?

00:53:14 Crystal Hudak

Comes up— It doesn't come up much in these type of projects, but someday it'd be nice to talk about the dual spouse thing. Because it's— I deal with wife roles and gender roles, and I cook dinner and do chores and everything else, just like a normal household, but because

I'm military, we have different— our life is a little bit different than if I were a stereotypical civilian wife.

00:53:34 Robbie Fee

Are there— I mean, it sounds like, I mean, obviously you're in love with your husband. So, I mean, that's a no brainer. But, you know, there are a distinct set of challenges that go with being dual military.

00:53:45 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:53:46 Robbie Fee

You know, besides the whole, oh, you're lucky enough to both have landed in Juneau and Kodiak. You know, what kind of challenges do you guys face as a young married couple?

00:53:54 Crystal Hudak

Our jobs take a good section of our lives, and we have to very consciously think about not talking about work at home. And I love it because when a case goes bad, or I want to bounce something off him about work, I have somebody to go that understands that, and that is so wonderful. And there's so many stereotypes for like, oh, you shouldn't date within your service, or you shouldn't marry a military. But I like the fact that he respects me for being a military officer and decision maker, just as much as I respect him. And at this point, I outrank him, and I make more money than him, and so I know that's very different from most households. But the way that we approach decisions is different. I think the way that we treat and respect each other. And it's not one person being dragged across the other country who feels that she or he has no control. We both have no control of this matter.

00:54:41 Robbie Fee

Right.

00:54:42 Crystal Hudak

And so, there's a lot of fighting about billets sometimes. But there's also this deep understanding that we have that where you go, I'm going too. And the most important thing is to always be together.

00:54:51 Robbie Fee

Right. And what do you think you guys will do? You know, what if the day comes where the needs of the Coast Guard come first? And they're going to send one of you here and one of you there, and you're going to be geo-batching.

00:55:02 Crystal Hudak

We've dealt with a lot of separation already. Again, I did a year of engagement before we got married, where I was in Kodiak and he was in Connecticut, and we saw each other a total of three weeks between engagement and marriage. And it was basically an arranged marriage when it all came down to it, I was terrified, so scared. I tried to cancel my wedding, and my husband was like, no, I love you. Everything will be fine. And I've already booked the florist, we're going through with this.

00:55:27 Robbie Fee

Sounds like a good guy, though.

00:55:28 Crystal Hudak

He is wonderful. And so that, and we were on different ships with different schedules. So there were times I would see his radar dot just pass by mine, or I would pull in port and he would be leaving. And so—

00:55:40 Robbie Fee

How hard is that on your heart?

00:55:42 Crystal Hudak

Oh, it would be tough. I would have to go into a back corner and be like, don't cry! And of course, the guys would know. It's like, it's okay, Ms. Hudak. They're wonderful. And even here now, I have a land job, and he has a land job, but he travels all the time.

00:55:57 Robbie Fee

Does he?

00:55:59 Crystal Hudak

Right. And I stand weird shifts. And so my time off and his time off aren't the same. So we have to really kind of plan and make that time special for each other, and sometimes it's lunch dates on the cafeterias. We warm up our Tupperwares and have a little date there.

00:56:12 Robbie Fee

Yeah. I mean, if you had to, could you pick, like, the worst thing about being married to another coastie?

00:56:18 Crystal Hudak

Maybe competition about jobs, billets, because we're the same rank, essentially. And so, you know, what he wants to do, what I want to do, sometimes they're not the same.

00:56:27 Robbie Fee

But even though he graduated a year after you, you're the same rank. At least for a little while.

00:56:32 Crystal Hudak

He's one year below me, but we're competing for similar jobs.

00:56:35 Robbie Fee

Similar jobs, okay.

00:56:36 Crystal Hudak

Like, we compete for lieutenant jobs.

00:56:37 Robbie Fee

Okay.

00:56:38 Crystal Hudak

And so the places and jobs that he's interested in may not have places or jobs that I'm interested in. And so coordinating that, which I think every couple does.

00:56:47 Robbie Fee

Sure.

00:56:47 Crystal Hudak

But every couple may not have to say like, okay, her career needs to go forward just as much as my career.

00:56:52 Robbie Fee

Right.

00:56:53 Crystal Hudak

Working on that big Coast Guard chess game is very stressful.

00:56:57 Robbie Fee

So if that's the hardest part, or the worst part of being dual service, what's the best part?

00:57:04 Crystal Hudak

Having someone that gets it. When I say, hey, it's been a long watch. I just need to decompress. Or this person died on watch today and it's messing with me. Having him get that. Or hey, I don't know what to do right now. What do you suggest? We do a lot of that back and forth.

00:57:19 Robbie Fee

Yeah. Um, yeah, I mean, and there are a lot more issues than just, oh, gee, can we get to the same place at the same time?

00:57:30 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:57:30 Robbie Fee

Um, and, uh, and, you know, and people need to talk about those.

00:57:35 Crystal Hudak

It isn't discussed. Not within the Coast Guard, not in projects like this when people do interviews. And I know everyone says, "oh, this is interesting, they're dual Coast Guard married to each other." But I hang out with Coast Guard wives sometimes. And civilians, wonderful women, but it's not the same for me, that I can relate to some of the things going on.

00:57:53 Robbie Fee

Because you, you're not exclusively an officer's wife.

00:57:58 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:57:58 Robbie Fee

You're not exclusively an officer.

00:58:01 Crystal Hudak

Right, so—

00:58:02 Robbie Fee

Because you are, you know, you are someone's wife. You have a husband, but that husband is not a civilian. I mean, there's, there's a lot of nuances to where you sit.

00:58:13 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:58:13 Robbie Fee

That other people don't have.

00:58:15 Crystal Hudak

That's true. It used to bother me when *Spar* would have the military wives get together, and I was never invited. And it was silly and petty, and James was like, “well, if you want to go, I'll just tell somebody you can go and they're not going to push you.” I was like, I'm not one of them.

00:58:29 Robbie Fee

And it's like, and it makes you wonder, where do I fit?

00:58:31 Crystal Hudak

Right. That actually is interesting. It's the first time I've thought of this.

00:58:34 Robbie Fee

Yeah. Where do I fit in?

00:58:35 Crystal Hudak

And James, also being a military spouse, there's not very many male military spouses out there.

00:58:39 Robbie Fee

Right.

00:58:40 Crystal Hudak

And so...

00:58:40 Robbie Fee

Although they did change their name. They're no longer the Wives Club, as I understand it. Years ago, everything was called the Wives Club. But like at the Academy, the Wives, the Officers Wives Club, the Spouses Club wasn't always called that. And I know the person who they changed it for.

00:58:56 Crystal Hudak

That's good.

00:58:56 Robbie Fee

Because he was a male spouse.

00:58:59 Crystal Hudak

Oh, James hated it when the women of *Munro*, like the wives of *Munro* would get together. And we'd have four month deployments, and he would, of course, want to spend time with people. And they would have some very girly activity. He was like, "I'm not going to arts and crafts parties. This is— I'm not interested."

00:59:13 Robbie Fee

Yeah. But that raises a whole other question, is that if you guys continue in this career, each of you, and one of you is assigned to be underway and you deploy for six months, what kind of a support system does that other person have if you don't quite know where you fit? You don't fit in with those spouses. Do you know what I mean?

00:59:37 Crystal Hudak

Right.

00:59:37 Robbie Fee

I mean, that's an interesting question is, what kind of support can the service give you guys?

00:59:43 Crystal Hudak

And there isn't any. The service doesn't talk about it, there's no books. Or it seems like they don't even want to address it. And obviously people know which one my spouse is. But when, if James is gone for long periods of time, there isn't kind of support. Luckily him and I are both good at making new friends, and we've learned to stay active. And four months can zip if you're keeping active. I play in a band, play rhythm guitar in a band, and my

bandmates, they are wonderful. And one's military, the rest of them are all civilian, and they're all guys, I'm the only girl.

01:00:14 Robbie Fee

I mean, and you haven't been in that long, but you are an officer, and you're obviously not the only person to go through this. You know, maybe using your experiences that you and your husband have as being kind of in this middle gray area as a spouse, um, you know, use that to help other people who perhaps don't have the wherewithal or those resources to make their own support system. And it is, it's a very interesting topic, and I would encourage you to keep talking about it to other people, not just things like this that will get deposited somewhere, hopefully somebody along the way will do research on that. But if it's an issue and it's important to you, I mean, you've started things before.

01:00:58 Crystal Hudak

Right. The statistic is that our divorce rates are supposed to be through the roof, and the military divorce rate is just awful to being with. I think there are some questions to be asked of how do we decrease that divorce rate? Not necessarily do we need everyone married, but if some person is going through divorce, that's traumatic, and their mind is probably not 100 percent on the job, so it's best for the Coast Guard if we'd stop all getting divorced. And our dual marriage, dual service rate is disastrous.

01:01:25 Robbie Fee

Yep. Well, I have enjoyed our time together Crystal, and I appreciate the fact that you're willing to sit down and do this interview with me, so on behalf of the Women's Memorial, I thank you for your continued service in the U.S. Coast Guard, I wish you well in all the years you and your husband have ahead of you, and thanks for participating in the oral history program.

01:01:46 Crystal Hudak

Thanks!