

Conversation
With
Kathy Gayton

22191 Robert Paine Street
Orange Park, Florida 32073
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Recorded and Transcribed
by
Lyn Corley

TAPE 1 SIDE A

LYN-Today is October 8, 2017 and I am in Orange Park at the home of Kathy Cayton. Kathy is, has devoted her life to military service supporting her family and community, especially those who served at Cecil Field. Thank you, Kathy, for letting us be here today and I want you to begin by telling us about where you are from, who your parents were, and I know you have a really interesting background of growing up.

KATHY-My name is Katherine Cayton and I was raised in a military family. My dad was in the Navy for thirty years and my mom has traced our family background going back to her brothers in World War II then her dad served in World War I and so really back to the Revolutionary War every generation has served in our family.



Kathy's father N.B. Wilkerson (Korea and Vietnam)
Grandfather Robert Vaughn (WWI)
Great grandfather Thomas Marion Vaughn (Civil War)



World War II
Kathy's mother's brothers-W.D., Thomas, Elmo, and Neely Vaughn

LYN-Tell us your Revolutionary War person. Do you know a name?

KATHY-Well, it would be the Duncans. That's on my mom's mother's side of the family. But, they, we are very proud of our military history and I think that every generation should serve even if it's only for a little while because I think it brings out the patriotism in everyone and they really can respect their country. I think we have lost some of that.

LYN-It brings a whole level of discipline to life that we are not seeing in a generation.

KATHY-And teaching, you know they teach them a trade and they go on to be successful in our community. I think it is just a way of life for me. I grew up as a military brat they used to call us, you know. My mom had four children and we just learned to live and every three years we were going to a new duty station which was an adventure. She always made it, you know, an adventure to make new friends "Keep the old, one is silver and the other is gold". So, we just learned that young and scouting and we got involved in every community that we moved to because it was the way that you integrate yourself into a family, a military family.

LYN-So, you were actually born in Tennessee.

KATHY-Yes, born in Tennessee in 1955 in Millington.

LYN-Where we also lived on base in Millington.

KATHY-Then we were there for two years and then we traveled to Maine. My dad got stationed there. We were there for three years.

LYN-What's the name of that base?

KATHY-It was in Brunswick. Then we went to, down to Virginia Beach. Actually, he was stationed in Norfolk the first time and we lived there. My parents bought a home the second year we were there on West Glen Road in Norfolk and they lived there for many, many years and wound out renting it out when we would have to move.

When I was in the fifth and sixth grade we moved back to Rhode Island, back to the north so we went to Rhode Island and we were there for two years then we went back to Virginia and they had rented their house out so we got to go back into our home and then.

LYN-Were you at Norfolk then or Oceana?

KATHY-My dad was at Norfolk. Then in my junior and senior year we got transferred again to, back to Rhode Island. So, I kind of grew up in Norfolk and wanted to graduate like my brothers from you know Norview High School which was the high school to be going to and so then he got orders and we had to move.

I actually met my husband in Navy housing when we were twelve years old. We were, my parents had been when we came back from Rhode Island they had rented their house out and the renters had signed a lease and they wouldn't break the lease and so we had to actually move into housing and we had somebody renting our house.

So, the following year we moved back into our home but my brothers were all teenagers so they met all their girlfriends there. So, they would come back to the neighborhood you know, they drove. They are four, five, and six years older than I am so they drove so I would ride back with them to the neighborhood and see my girlfriends and everything. So, Mike was the new kid on the block and so we met at that point and just started dating and hanging out like you do with kids. Mostly, we went bowling or to the movies, just kind of hung out in the neighborhood. Football games was the big thing you know.

LYN-What did your dad do in the Navy?

KATHY-My dad was an aviation electronic technician so, an AT and he was a senior chief when he retired in 1977.

LYN-Do you remember what planes he worked on during his career?

KATHY-No. All I remember, and I have it all written down but my mother does, but all I remember is the plane that had the big dome on the top.

LYN-E-3.

KATHY-Yes.

LYN-My husband taught the E-3 in a program, early warning.

KATHY-He was, actually started out as a radioman and so he was on the planes for a long time, not just working on them but actually flying in them. My mom always said that was the hardest part. Every time the plane left he had to go with it. But, you know military life for me was a lot easier than it was for my mother.

I think being a Navy wife in the 1950's you know was really, really hard and I think they had, when Mike and I actually met and we wound up getting married in 1974. I graduated in '73, went back to Virginia and got a job, went to work as a secretary in a bank that had gone defunct, Norfolk Savings and Loan. I worked for an attorney and so Mike was in Pensacola so his family retired. His dad was in the Navy and they returned to Pensacola which was their home so we commuted for two years from Norfolk, from Maine, let me get my states right, from Rhode Island where I was in my junior and senior year and he would come at Christmas time and the summer one week.

Then I would fly down there and stay with him. Then in 1974 we got married and Norfolk was his first duty station.

LYN-Tell me what the difficulty for your mom was. I'm still looking for someone to identify with as my part of being a Navy wife. It was a time when salaries were very low.

KATHY-Right.

LYN-So it made it a very hard economic situation with children. I'm not sure about how deployment was and sea duty-shore duty. Can you recall that?

KATHY-Yes, it was I think because they didn't, my mom said they made fifty-six dollars a month, you know, when they first began and twenty-six of that was rent or whatever you know. So, it was really tough times. She, her and my dad both lived in Tennessee, thirty miles apart and met when he was in the Navy. Then he had to get out and take care of his dad who had cancer. Then he went right back into the Navy.

LYN-So, his duty was a volunteer position it was not a drafted and avoiding the Army.

KATHY-Absolutely. He was a farmer and he wanted to get off the farm. (LAUGH)

LYN-I've heard that story before.

KATHY-He wanted to get off the farm so they went to Charleston actually is where my dad had to go to school and my mom didn't come with that sea bag but she didn't know that she didn't so she went right on with him.

LYN-Let's put this on tape. This is a statement the Navy made, "If the Navy wanted you to have a wife they would have issued her with your sea bag." The sea bag is what every piece of belonging you have fits into when you are a sailor and you go into the Navy. They didn't intend for the wives to come along.

KATHY-No, no not at all. So, he had to stay on base and she had to stay in an apartment so, and she had my brother at the time, my oldest brother. So, she had a baby and so she couldn't understand why he couldn't come home you know and stay with her at night and go back to the base. But no, he had to stay on base and so then he got stationed in California but he had to take the ship over from Charleston. She had to fly back to Tennessee and then save enough money to fly to California. So, she worked at one of her brothers had a store, a restaurant and she worked in the restaurant and the shoe store as long as, to save up money to go fly out to California.

By that point she was pregnant again and so she went to California with one suitcase and a baby in her arms and in a belly. That's how she arrived in California.

LYN-Where in California were they?

KATHY-They were in the San Diego area.

LYN-We were there also.

KATHY-They stayed there for five years. They were in different duty stations and my youngest brother was born there as well so she had three boys one year apart each so boom, boom, boom. Life was really hard for her and she didn't, you know my dad was of the mind that "Your job is to stay home and take care of the children and the house." She did and she did it well you know. She got very involved with scouting and had put the boys in the scouts in her community. She learned to do everything that she had to do.

LYN-Tell us her whole name.

KATHY-Juanita Vaughn Wilkerson. So, she was just pretty amazing at learning how to be in your community and a lot of women at that time when their husbands got deployed, and then it

was nine months at the time, that they went home to mom and my mother never did. She said, "Nope, my job is to be here and make sure I have a home when he gets home." That's just the way it went.

Then they left California and moved to Tennessee. I was born then in Tennessee.

LYN-During this career what were the world events that were going on? Do you remember?

KATHY-Well, there was several. My dad was serving during the Korean War and the Cuban conflict, I don't know the exact name of it. But, then Vietnam.

LYN-A lot of world events.

KATHY-Yes, dad did not have to go. He did go, he was in the flight crew bringing people back during those times but he did not have to go in country. So, but he was gone and it, you know it was a really hard time. At that point, all you had was letters you know coming back and forth in the mail and they didn't come very often, three weeks or a month before you would get a letter. Then you had to number them to make sure that if you got three or four at the same time that you opened number one first because if you opened number three then you might have seen something that you didn't understand what was going on so you had to go back to the other letters.

LYN-Nobody told me that system so I was opening them out of sequence many times. I certainly waited on the mail man to come and ran to that mail box every day.

KATHY-And the pay check came in that letter for the wife so they didn't have direct deposit you know. You had to wait until they cashed their check on the ship or wherever they were and then they would send the money home in an envelope.

LYN-There was no email, no cell phone. One thing we did have was, they may have had, was the HAM operator which is a very uncomfortable thing, broadcasting all over the world. But it was really good to hear a voice.

KATHY-Absolutely. Many times, what we would do actually was do tape recordings like this. So, we would record a tape and even when my brothers started having children, the grandchildren, we would get them on tape for my dad so he would hear their voice and hear them sing or say their "ABC's" and just his being away from the grandchildren. Now that I'm a grandmother you know I understand and I can't imagine how hard it was for them you know to always be away you know from the grandkids.

We had a wonderful life. I, you know, military life is all I know so I was raised in it and then married in it and now I volunteer in it. It's just a way of life for us and we're very proud you know to be in the military.

LYN-So, there was a total understanding of patriotism to a nation throughout I assume, even your brothers, your whole family, that was your life.

KATHY-My dad did thirty years and my brothers all did over twenty and then...

LYN-Were they Navy?

KATHY-They were all Navy and my husband twenty-eight years and his dad did twenty years and then he was medically retired. So, really on both sides of the family that's just what we have.

I did tell the story about every generation up until my brother's children and my children decided to go to college and not go into the military. At the time of the war in Iraq we thought, "Well, that's just God's way of protecting our children and so if they want to go to college we're behind them a hundred percent." None of us were ever forced to go in the military. We graduated from high school and went straight in. That's what my brothers did, that's what my husband did, I mean that's what we wanted to do because our dad was, we lived that life. As hard as it was we knew that that was where you would get your military training and have your retirement for the future. That's what they wanted to do.

LYN-Now, did your dad continue to work after his retirement?

KATHY-He did not. My mother said, "You gave the Navy thirty. Now you own me thirty."

LYN-Oh, good for her. (LAUGH)

KATHY-They budgeted so that she did not have to work and my dad did not have to work when he retired. So, they just enjoyed each other's company. They did, they loved to be outside and tinkering in the yard and building things. My mother didn't drive so she did rely on my dad for transportation. So, she was independent but yet not as independent like she would just jump in the car and go like I do. I am constantly running the streets now. Mom did whatever she did at home and then she got a ride with her friends or my dad. But, she drove when she was younger and got lost and swore she would never drive again if God got her home and he did. (LAUGH) It's one of those things. She hung up the keys and said, "I'm done."

LYN-So, you married while your father was in the military, you married a military man. So, tell me about his career and how you began being a military wife.

KATHY-Well, we were in Virginia for the first duty station. My husband's family retired to Pensacola when his dad was sick. He had cancer. So, they medically retired him from the Navy so he moved, they moved back to Pensacola and I was in Norfolk which is where my parents were retiring to. They had bought a home there so we decided he was graduating in the summer of '74 and he was going into boot camp and we were getting married in November of '74 so right out of boot camp we got married.

LYN-Boot camp in Great Lakes?

KATHY-No, he actually went to Orlando. So, he was in Orlando and then he came right to Norfolk from there. We got married November 29th of '74 and his first deployment was in March of that following year.

LYN-Similar to mine. Where was he deployed?

KATHY-He was actually on the Forrestal his first ship and went on a Med cruise.

LYN-My husband was too.

KATHY-So, I worked. As soon as I graduated from high school I went to work and worked in an office environment as clerks and secretaries, whatever position that was available. I worked for savings and loans, banks mostly. So, you just have to keep yourself busy you know. So, we had an apartment in Virginia Beach. He was actually stationed at Oceana which is where he was, he flew out of. His squadron went on the Forrestal.

LYN-Tell me his squadron.

KATHY-He was attached to, his first squadron was, what is that up there? (looking at memory wall hanging depicting the twenty-eight years of Mike's career). The skull and the cross bone. He was in 85.



LYN-VA-85.

KATHY-That's his thirty-year Navy career on that quilt. (referring to quilt or wall hanging). So, we were in Oceana until '77 and then he got stationed in Pensacola.

LYN-So you and I were in that area at the same time. We were there '73-'76 with my husband teaching at Norfolk but he was also teaching some classes at Oceana and going to school at Oceana. We lived in Virginia Beach. So, we were there, remember when the Jaws movie came out? This is my reference point, it must have been '75, and I was so silly to take my four-year old child to the premier. It happened and I'm like "What a horrible mother I am." I covered his eyes. So, that was back then that was a horror movie and it's nothing now. That's my reference point at Princess Anne Theater seeing Jaws.

KATHY-We lived off Laskin Road in Eastwood Village. I mean we paid two hundred dollars a month, all utilities included in our first home right off base. We thought we were living in a townhouse high on the hog.

LYN-We bought a townhouse off Holland Road, Holland Swamp Road and I can't describe even how to get there but it was new and fabulous for us to be able to do that and I also worked. I worked for the Virginia Beach Board of Realtors so we were living kind of the same life during that period of time. Except, I'm going to put on tape, we're talking to a gun-ho Navy wife and I was not the gun-ho Navy wife. (LAUGH) I was just wanting to be a wife of a normal, stable, job which there is not in Navy life.

KATHY-Well, I was lucky enough to have my parents still living in Virginia at the time so I did not have to move away from my parents the first duty station. So, that was really nice to have family support there and a place to go to get groceries when you needed it because your money ran out in-between before the end of the month. (LAUGH)

LYN-Or your glasses broke and you didn't have money. I remember that for me.

KATHY-Just to have family time and so I was very lucky to have my family there so my dad retired in 1977 and in 1978 we moved to Pensacola and we were there on humanitarian orders. Mike's dad was really sick and so they, which is nice that the military will do that, extend you to a duty station that is close to your family in time of need.

So, we lived there for three years. At that time, it was every three years you moved and so we were there during a difficult time in our life losing a family member. We were glad to be there for his mom. Mike's the oldest brother of, you know there were five children and Mike's younger brother was five years old when his dad passed. So, he had to be there for him.

LYN-So, we're moving on, he (going up to the corner of the wall hanging) is in VT-2.

KATHY-Yes, he was in VT-2 and we were stationed in Milton just across the river at Whiting Field, across the river from Pensacola.



LYN-And my husband was in VT-6 in Pensacola.

KATHY-Following each other.

LYN-It was just backwards. He was in Pensacola and then here and then in Norfolk.

KATHY-We were there and at the time that we married, Mike's mom was the Southeast Regional President for Navy Wives Club of America.

LYN-So you did have somebody urging you.

KATHY-But it didn't ring a bell to me about NWCA until I got stationed, we got stationed in Milton and then she lived in Pensacola but she would drive over to get me to take me to a Navy Wives' Meeting. She said, "I need you to come to this meeting, we're having a Navy Wives' Meeting and now that you are a Navy wife". So, then we went from my parents to his parents so I still, we still had family.

LYN-Tell me her whole name.

KATHY-Mary Ann Cayton.

LYN-What was her maiden name?

KATHY-Her maiden name is Yates. So, we, you know were there and we had actually we had our daughter, our oldest daughter, Kimberly, and Mike's mom had her youngest child is only four years older than my daughter so they had when his dad retired they had a baby to celebrate their retirement. (LAUGH)

So, he, we were seventeen when he was born so it was like having a little kid running around all the time but so she and I would take our babies to day care together so you know Paul was five and Kim was one year old and we would go to a Navy Wives' Meeting and then we would take them back. That was fun. You know, it was a fun time and she took Paul with her everywhere, she really did. He was a great comfort to her when Mike's dad passed.

LYN-Tell me Mike's dad's name.

KATHY-His name was Donald Lewis Cayton and twenty years in the Navy.

LYN-What did he do in the Navy?

KATHY-He was in maintenance as well, an AD, I believe was his rate so his family background, his dad was also in the Navy, Mike's grandfather but not, I think he did less than ten years in the military and then Mike's mom's two brothers were in the Army and they did their four years. They were drafted during that time so they did their four years and got out. So, they didn't make it a career. Mike's dad was the first one in their family to make it a career. My dad was the first one in our family to make it a career.

We went from Pensacola, Mike's mom said, "You need to come for a meeting and we're having elections and you're gonna be the secretary." (LAUGH)

LYN-The beginning of a career.

KATHY-That's right. So, anyway I joined. They did a lot of things in the community that was fun.

LYN-What did they do? Can you remember?

KATHY-Sure. We went to nursing homes and you know brought things to the elderly just to brighten their day and did little craft things with them and sang Christmas carols at Christmas time and you know we did a lot of things on the base as well making baskets for the needy military families. Mike's mom was in the Prevention of Blindness so she not only, she was a lot like me so one volunteer job leads you to another that leads you to another. So, she actually was a district manager for the Prevention of Blindness in Pensacola, Northwest Florida. So, she would, they would go to the schools and do the screening for the children.

LYN-One of my favorite things. I had a vision problem that was not being diagnosed and it was at that school screening that it was alerted. Not that I didn't have a great mother who was taking

care of me, it just was slipping the radar and it was severe. So, I try to do that volunteering in the schools. We still have that in Duval County Schools.

KATHY-She was very involved in it and just, so we would do that as one of our projects so we would set up the screening and have the charts. So, there is actually, I have in our files somewhere is a picture of Mike's little brother Paul on the front of the newspaper doing the Prevention of Blindness screening. He was the poster child for that. So, she was, like I say, at that point in time she was the regional president for the Southeast Region which goes from Norfolk all the way down to Florida so she was very active in Navy Wives.

She said, "If you're gonna be a Navy wife you need to be involved in Navy Wives Clubs of America" which is a volunteer opportunity. Then we moved.

LYN-So, that was your shore duty. That was totally three years on the ground.

KATHY-Yes, then we moved back to Virginia Beach and so while we were in, we had our first daughter when we were stationed in Norfolk, Kimberly, and then when we moved I was pregnant with Jena and so we had our second daughter and our first son Michael in Pensacola. Then when we moved to Virginia Beach we had our fourth child, our youngest son Garrett. So, by the time we got to Virginia Beach, our second tour there, we had four children. It was a busy life and they were you know, Garrett was a baby, an infant, he was born there at Virginia Beach General Hospital. I had him and Michael was two and Jena was four and Kim was six. So, every two years.

LYN-Well, the good news that was by then salaries had increased drastically. It was Nixon I believe who gave us all a big raise.

KATHY-A ten percent raise.

LYN-So, you were surviving a little better than your family had.

KATHY-We were and you know we went from, when we first got to Milton we had to rent a house for four months until Navy housing was available. It was expensive to live on the outside. So, they called us on a week-end and said, "If you can move in you can have a four-bedroom." We had one child and I was pregnant with the second child but we filled up the house before we left.

When we went to Virginia Beach then we lived in Wadsworth Navy Housing at Oceana. He was stationed at Oceana. So, we had you know always lived in housing until we moved here in '88.

LYN-So, you are at Oceana. He was with what squadron?

KATHY-He was with 84, left bottom with skull and cross bones now. (referring to wall hanging again).

LYN-It is 84, Fighting 84-NAS Oceana. '81-'82.



KATHY-That again was sea duty so he had to go back out to sea.

LYN-That was a Med cruise?

KATHY-That was another Med cruise. Actually, two Med cruises.

LYN-On?

KATHY-It's on there.

LYN-We're going to look at the quilt again.

KATHY-It was on the Nimitz.

LYN-On the Nimitz. So, that was an up-grade from the Forrestal. A lot easier living on the carrier.

KATHY-Right. And we were there for three more years and during that time my parents were there so I went from my family to his family back to my family. So, I was one of the lucky Navy wives that had family where I was going in the first early years of our marriage.

LYN-But during that three years are carrier quals, cruise, back and forth on the ship.

KATHY-Yes, it is. So, they go out for six months and they come back and you only get a couple of months without them having to go back out and they start their work-ups for the next cruise. They have to go out two weeks at a time.

LYN-But the Nimitz was stationed in Norfolk I assume so it wasn't like the ship was one place and the squadron another like we have lived that situation.

KATHY-When we moved here the same thing, the squadron at Cecil Field but the ship was in Norfolk. So, we were there. Again, it was a good duty station because it was close to my family and at that point my three, all my three older brothers were all stationed there as well. So, during that time my parents had all four of their children who were in the military stationed at the same place which is very rare.

So, we were there and again I worked outside the home and he had to go off to deployment and get kids to school and day care. Day care at that point was very reasonable. You know, it was expensive to us. We had to pay thirty-five dollars a week for four children, before and after-

school care for some and then the boys were home. That was expensive, almost like you're working to pay day care and it is now very expensive. Now it's two hundred and seventy dollars a week in comparison.

LYN-And churches provided, in Norfolk I know there were churches who had many day cares. We took opportunity of that when we were there.

KATHY-We had actually, ladies that lived in housing that would do in-home day care in housing so that was convenient so they could you know walk across the street and be in their child care home which worked out for us.

Then after that three years we all got stationed away. My oldest brother moved to Seattle, he got his orders to Seattle. My middle brother moved to San Diego and my younger brother moved to Charleston, South Carolina and we moved to Maine. Then my parents went to Tennessee to take care of their parents. So, from being together for three years all together, which the cousins got to grow up together. It was really nice having everybody together. Then, we scattered all over.



Mike Cayton with his wife's brothers
Jim, Phil, and Mike Wilkerson

That was the first time I was away from home without a family to be there with me but that was shore duty so he was home so that made it an easier life. But, we enjoyed our deployment in Maine. He was at AIMD and that was '84 to '88.

LYN-Explain AIMD.

KATHY-Aviation Maintenance Department. I don't know what the "I" is for.

LYN-Intermediate.

KATHY-Intermediate Maintenance. They just worked on the equipment basically that is on the planes.

LYN-That's as close to just having a job where you just go to work and come home as you get in the Navy.

KATHY-Exactly. That was where I got back into Navy Wives. I didn't in Virginia Beach even though they had six different clubs there when I got back to Virginia Beach the second time my mother got me into garden club. So, I learned how to make arrangements and you know she had the green thumb, not necessarily me but I could make some nice arrangements for the house so I didn't join Navy Wives at that point because I was back around my family and doing the things that they enjoyed doing.

So, when I went to Maine we were away from everything and I went to a Bingo game at the base one night and there I met a lady who had a Navy Wives name tag on and ribbon and they were selling the first game of the Bingo was their money-maker. So, they would sell them for five dollars and they had to split it with the winner and so they for every ticket they sold they got two dollars and fifty cents so that was how they made money for their charity. I joined their club.

LYN-So you just struck up a conversation.

KATHY-Yes, we did. I knew from being in Navy Wives in Pensacola, I knew there was, typically there's a club everywhere you have a duty station so that you can transfer with your husband's orders you can transfer your membership into the next club. You kind of, if you go to conventions or if you keep involved in Navy Wives then you meet friends along the way and so you know that these, they are telling you that this is a great duty station or a great place to live if you move there, you know those kind of tips that they would help you with. Plus, you have just friendship so we were there for four years, three and a half years but you know Mike got stationed there in January and so we had lived actually with my parents until June and did not go to Maine until the snow melted. (LAUGH) The kids were in school of course so we waited until they got out of school so that was the only time that I did not go directly with him as soon as he got orders.

That was, we missed the friends that we made there but I do not miss the weather. It was a rough time when you've got your kids are two, four, six, and eight and you've got snow suits and you hats and mittens and gloves you just, they want to go out for ten minutes and then they are freezing and they come back and you have a major production every time they want to go outside.

LYN-Our coldest station was Memphis but Memphis was normal to you. It was cold in the winter time.

KATHY-Sure, they have four seasons.

LYN-I'm a Floridian so that was drastic for me. Fortunately, in Virginia Beach and Norfolk area they had unseasonably warm winters while we were there. When we left, I don't know if you remember, when the Chesapeake Bay froze over. That was '76-'77. We had left. (LAUGH) So, we never saw snow in Norfolk but we did in Millington. But Maine, I wouldn't know how.

KATHY-It was the first time I was away from home so I immersed myself into the Navy housing community and into my Navy Wives Club and you know really enjoyed volunteering in the community and I also worked. I had, I worked in Yarmouth so I had to drive twenty miles to work every day in the snow and, but you know what, they are prepared up there. They have, every pick-up truck has a plow on the front of it. They plow their way wherever they go. So, they are prepared and I got on the interstate and went to work.

I found a little old lady, Grammy, my kids still remember her, it's really funny but she was the day care that I would take them to and just somebody who put an ad in the paper and I went and interviewed her. The kids loved it. She had a lot of land that wasn't community, she was out into a house by herself. She had a little lake with geese and ducks and things and the kids really loved that. As a matter of fact, we still have her Christmas stockings that she made the kids. We hang them every year.

You have to make your family where you live. Because that was the first duty station where I didn't have my parents or his parents then we had to make family and so that was their Grammy. We were very involved in Navy Wives and we had a lot of fun projects that we did while we were there. You know, life-long friends. As a matter of fact, I just went to a baby shower of one of the friends that I had made there, She just became a grandmother and so she had a baby shower for her son and it was all of us who are now grandmothers at the baby shower. You know you just can't ask for better friendships than you make along the way and she was in Navy Wives Clubs with me as well.

LYN-So, you're in Maine and your husband is in and out and you are making a new life and it really gave you great opportunity to begin what would be a great career of volunteering in Navy Wives. So, after Maine.

KATHY-After Maine we came here to Jacksonville.

LYN-To Cecil?

KATHY-To Cecil Field.

LYN-Cecil Field, Otis, Florida.

KATHY-So, that was a continuation and we felt like that being in Florida we would be, Jacksonville would be close enough to Pensacola where his family was and close enough to Virginia where my family was that we could travel. It wasn't like Maine, we were so far away from everybody. You only got home once a year you know during his leave time or sometimes once every two years. My mother, poor thing, she only got home once every three years you know so you can just imagine that you don't get to see your parents for three years at a time.

LYN-So you considered this good orders, Jacksonville Cecil Field?

KATHY-Absolutely because we could drive there.

LYN-At Cecil he is with?

KATHY-He is with VA-46, the Clansmen. Let me just say that that was probably our best squadron that we were stationed with as far as camaraderie goes and just and of course, it was a time of conflict again. That was Desert Storm era and of course they were doing work-ups and the ship was in Norfolk.



LYN-Was the ship the Saratoga? (actually, the Saratoga was only based at Mayport, Florida for its entire time of commission)

KATHY-No, he was on the Kennedy so that was in Norfolk and the squadron was here so any time they had to go they had to go there. If we had to do, when they came home from Desert Storm, if you wanted to meet the ship you had to drive to Norfolk and so you're taking your kids out of school.

LYN-I remember. They come into to port and then you wait on them to fly in.

KATHY-Right. They fly in here at the airport but no we wanted to meet the ship every time. When I was growing up I met the ship with my mom and I wanted my kids to have that experience.

LYN-This is the most emotional thing. Tell me your response to "Anchors Aweigh".

KATHY-Well, I picture "Anchors Aweigh", I picture all of the sailors in uniform aligned the whole ship on the flight deck and you can just see them standing in a row and when that anchor goes, away they go and they are saluting their families.

LYN-I can tell you, we're both breaking up I can't hear it without it bringing that emotional ...to me. It is the hardest part of Navy life.

KATHY-Well, it is because you know that first of all that they can be going into harm's way and they are doing their duty.

LYN-And they did go into harm's way every time they left on a ship.

KATHY-Absolutely, every time. Even if they didn't go into a war zone there is always a chance that something can happen. So, that's in my mind's eye it is our little sailors in their cracker jack uniforms standing, and that's the way they came home.

LYN-Manning the rail.

KATHY-Manning the rail. That's exactly the way they came home and you're looking and they all look alike.



Sailors "Manning the Rails" as ship is deployed

LYN-They all do look alike.

KATHY-Trying to find your face in the sea of uniforms.

LYN-The funny thing for me, I learned when they are getting off the ship I learned how my husband walked. He walked a little differently and I'm like, "There he is I can tell his little gate" and know I'm headed for the right guy.

KATHY-Then that's when we started making signs and holding them up, "Here we are dad." So, "Welcome home" and all of those signs. So, that's but you knew at that point what "Anchors Aweigh" that they were going away for six months or more at a time. Now, when we were at Cecil Field for Desert Storm he had to, he got called on a Friday and said, "Pack your bags,

you're leaving Monday and we don't know how long you will be." Pack for six months, if we're home earlier great."

LYN-Do you remember that year?

KATHY-I think 1990 and it went into '91 and so it was just a really hard time and I had at that point we had teenagers you know so it was to be home alone with four children and working a full-time job taking care of four kids and trying to volunteer in the community and that's where Navy Wives came in handy for me again was that they were just my support system. They were who I called when I needed a shoulder to cry on or who I called when I needed to get busy and get out of the house or who I called to you know watch my kids so I could and do whatever I had to do. So, that was, you know, I am so thankful to have the Navy Wives family there for me.

Not everybody does have that and not everybody gets into clubs but at that point I was very involved with the squadron's wives club and with Navy Wives Clubs of America which is, they are both very different.

The squadron wives club will help you with any information that is coming back about your husband's squadron.

LYN-Which is helpful. I didn't have that.

KATHY-It keeps you awake when you don't get the letters and you know and all you hear is things on the news you get the right information from the squadron from the ombudsmen, that's your contact person and so to have them be there for you and stay involved.

Then you have the over-the-hump parties in the middle of the cruise where you all got together and had picnics, the kids played. You do things.

LYN-I just flew him home at mid-cruise. We saved everything we could and flew him home. I was pregnant and I couldn't fly there so we flew him home.

KATHY-So, we at one point, and this squadron that Mike was attached to, VA-46, we actually got together as a group. There was a lot of ladies. I want to say forty or fifty ladies and sometimes there's only a handful that really stay together and are, make friendships but somebody had the idea of us sending them a pillow from home at mid-deployment. So, we all got a bra and a pair of panties and sewed them together and stuffed them and made a pillow. Then we put them in a pillow case.

LYN-I think I've heard about that from a captain but he didn't tell me exactly what you did but now we know what the deal was.

KATHY-Let me just tell you, we had the best time picking out our bras and panties to stuff to send to them so that they could, you know that part of "Keep the fires burning at home." Actually, my mother and my grandmother were here visiting during that time and so my mother and my grandmother also made pillows for the single sailors that were deployed. I can imagine the sailor that got my grandmother's, you know granny panties. (LAUGH) Most everybody would get the little bikinis. But anyway, it was a fun time. We had a great time together. Then,

they took pictures of the guys getting their pillow cases with their special pillows in it. So, it was just a good time to be together.

That particular squadron did not have a difference between enlisted and officers to the point where you felt comfortable speaking with them and talking to them and really crying on their shoulder. They would have get-togethers and they would invite us. There wasn't that division between officer and enlisted.

LYN-How did that happen? I'm very interested in that.

KATHY-I just think it was the people.

LYN-Was it a change of time?

KATHY-It may have been but you know the officers reached out to us and their wives reached out to us. Maybe it was because it was during a time of war.

LYN-Maybe. There was loss from Jacksonville at that time. It was a tender time for Navy wives and the community.

KATHY-We were very thankful to have that camaraderie and we still have those friendships so that helped us get through a really hard time. They were gone eight and a half months that deployment. It was a very long time.

LYN-I will put on tape what we are referring to. There was a period of time, in my husband's time of service, when there was no fraternization at all between enlisted men and officers, or women. We happened to have a friend who was an officer married to an enlisted man which was very, very unusual that could happen. I don't even know how that happened. In my own life it was shocking to me to be segregated from another population and we had a little more money and were able to live in a little nicer places and found ourselves living in a complex where only officers were there. We were the only enlisted. The Navy wives were not allowed to even address me in any way. It was shocking.

Then there was having a baby as an enlisted wife back in 1971. I learned there is a difference in every way you are treated as an enlisted person so by the '90's we are seeing that at least in this squadron, VA-46, there was some relaxation of that and I'm so glad to hear that because it was very hard.

KATHY-It was just as good for the guys as it was for us. You know, even while they were on deployment they were able to relax and have a little bit of down time and you could feel like you could speak to someone on a social level and not be separated because of your rank. We've kept those friendships along the way as well and it's just one of the best squadrons that we had been stationed with.

LYN-Do you remember the skipper?

KATHY-Yes, Skipper Fahy.

LYN-Must have been a great skipper.

KATHY-He was. All of them were just really involved in making sure that we knew exactly what was going on when it was going on so that as much information as they could share. Now, for me, I'm a lot like my mother in the fact that whatever they tell us you know, was supposed to be kept confidential because you don't want to tell the enemy where you're located. Now days, the news knows before the wife knows what's going on and they're broadcasting it on the news and it's just, you're telling the enemy exactly what we're doing it, and where we're doing it, and how we're doing it.

LYN-We've moved to the era of personal computers. Did that help communication? I don't know how that worked with the ships.

KATHY-Yes, we were able to start emailing. I mean now days these wives face time, they text, they can make phone calls if they get a signal, and direct deposit so it's a much different time than that of my mother or even me.

LYN-For me, 1970.

KATHY-I was able to live both, most of that during Mike's twenty-eight-year career where we finally when he got out were able to do a lot better communication. You know, it was still very hard for a military family. But again, when I joined Navy Wives here at Cecil Field and got very involved in the volunteer work that we did here, that formed my connection with the community and I continue, after Mike retired I continued that connection and that what Navy Wives Clubs of America does because it is active duty, retired, and widowed even. We have a ninety-seven-year-old member in the club. That's, you teach generations, you mentor to them and I think it's good for them to have someone who has been there and been through it and can tell them, "It will be OK. You will survive this deployment." Is it going to be easy, "No." Are there going to be really hard days, "Yes. Those are the days you come over and bring the kids and just relax and you know we will talk about it, we'll laugh about it, we'll cry about it." That's how you help them get through it.

LYN-So, after his time with this squadron he stayed here.

KATHY-We were lucky enough for thirteen years to be in Jacksonville. So, we were blessed. We actually purchased this home in 1988, the first and only home we've ever bought.

LYN-In a very military community, Orange Park. It seems Orange Park was just developed for military.

KATHY-Everybody was telling us when I was in Brunswick they said, "If you go, when you go to Jacksonville you need to move to Orange Park. The school system is better." That, you know, that was information that we wanted to hear. We were on the west side of town as opposed to Mayport side of town and so they just, those little tidbits that are so helpful to know when you have people who have lived there and then where is the best place to raise your family.

LYN-Even in '70 people were beginning to, in mass, start buying in Orange Park.

KATHY-It sure has grown. We're so close to the high school and elementary schools and it was just perfect for us you know. Even though I worked across the Buckman Bridge so I had to go thirteen miles to my job but you know it was really...

TAPE 1 SIDE B

KATHY-The kids had to go to school on their own you know. At that point they had, they call them latch key kids today, but my kids could walk to school and walk home.

LYN-Well, here's the shocker. When we lived here there was no Buckman Bridge. There was no I-295. Cecil was the isolated place of this whole community.

KATHY- Well, it was you know I think for working parents to be able to have your school so close to your neighborhood is really, really good so, and it was hard for us too. I had four children, I had to work you know outside of the home and make ends meet and to have the things that we wanted to have. But, again Navy Wives Club just kept me involved in doing all our charity work. We operated the thrift shop out at Cecil Field.

LYN-I didn't know about the thrift shop.

KATHY-It moved four different times during you know the time that it was there at Cecil Field. We were thankful that the base and NWR allowed us to operate the thrift shop because a lot of places NWR operated the thrift shop. So that was their money maker but it was a way for us to make money for our charities so we really had to work hard to be there.

We weren't open every day but we were open Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays. So, you know you had to gather all of the donations and you had to sort through them and you know sometimes you had to wash them if it was something nice and get everything hung. We had home, things for the home so we had to have an area and we were really lucky to be able to move into a separate building which is now Cecil Pines home office, their office. We were in that actual building when we had our thrift shop and we were so lucky to have that huge building.

LYN-We are talking about Cecil Pines. It is now like a retirement community that is, who owns it?

KATHY-The city owns, I believe the city owns it and it is a retirement community and a lot of military have retired there but it is the old Navy housing. So, they turned it into a retirement community called Cecil Pines and it looks very, very nice. We didn't live there because we had bought this house so we, this is the first time that we were stationed somewhere that we didn't live in military housing. You know we thought that at that time when we purchased this house our basic housing allowance was like six hundred dollars and so they would either take that out of your pay if you lived in housing or they would give it to you if you lived out in town and then you had to make ends meet with that. So, if your house mortgage was six hundred then you had to come up with your utilities. In Navy housing the military pays for your utilities, all included. So, you have to, if you do live out in town you have to be aware of your budget in order to make

sure that you have the allowance that they give you will cover your living expenses. It doesn't always do that.

Cecil Pines
Retirement
Community
Former
Navy Housing



LYN-I have met a couple that lives at Cecil Pines. They are members of our church. They actually, today is their sixty-fourth wedding anniversary. We celebrated it at church. So, recently I did drive by and it looks wonderful out there. It's peaceful and full of pine trees which brings me to your, you knew about Jacksonville. Had you ever been to Jacksonville?

KATHY-No.

LYN-You had never been to Jacksonville so your first impression of seeing Cecil Field. Driving up, your first impression.

KATHY-(LAUGH) It was a little bit more isolated, kind of out in the country almost and other than you, you know you have the main gate that you drive through and of course you have to have your sticker on your car and have your ID to get on but it, the drive there was you know pretty isolated on 103rd Street and out of the city a little bit.

In Norfolk and Virginia Beach you are right smack in the middle of the city you know. But it was a lot like, when we came to Jacksonville it was a lot like Norfolk and Virginia Beach area, Tidewater area, in that it was so spread out and you had your forty-five minutes to the beach or you're right in the city. So, it, we were not in culture shock because that's kind of how I grew up being in a bigger city so the actual Cecil Field base was kind of isolated.

LYN-It was, I asked you this earlier and I'm going to ask again on tape, it was not, it was not that impressive. It was not intimidating as a military base. You just didn't see, you didn't see the significance of what was really going on there, as I said, that affected this whole world.

KATHY-Yeah.

LYN-Coming from Cecil Field you drive up by the pine trees, the little guard, an airplane, and you drive in and it looks like, it doesn't look intimidating.

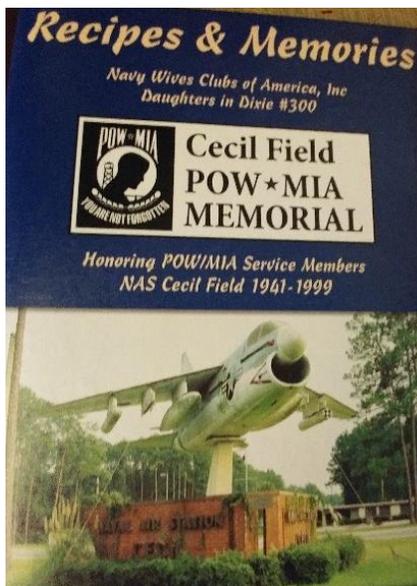
KATHY-A bunch of buildings and then you have an air strip.

LYN-Then endless hangers and what is on the other you don't see the longest air strip of twelve thousand five hundred feet. There was a lot going on there. Little did I understand it. Did you understand the significance of Cecil in world events?

KATHY-I had not. I had not but growing up in a military family and being a Navy wife, I knew the importance of the base and that the training that goes on and all of those things. I grew up into it so maybe I was just, it was natural to me to know what this particular building they are teaching the pilots how to fly the plane or you know this particular building is the maintenance and so how to...

LYN-Right out here they are teaching how to bomb and land on carriers.

KATHY-Exactly. There was a lot behind the scenes that you just don't know what's happening out there but you know we are so thankful that we do have that opportunity for training and Cecil Field was a major training base since World War II. So, I had to do a little history for, we have actually a cook book that we have created, our Wives Club has created in honor of Cecil Field and in memory of the Cecil Field POW/MIA, Vietnam and Desert Storm. Right beside the church, the chapel there on base, they have a memorial area that is in honor and memory of those who were prisoners of war or are still missing in action. We are helping to raise funds for the Cecil Field POW/MIA Memorial group as well as for the Navy Wives Club charity.



Fund-raiser Cook Book by
Daughters in Dixie #300
Navy Wives Club of America
www.morriscookbooks.com
800-445-6621

It's been a real honor to work on that cookbook to you know pick the special pictures that depict you know the planes that were stationed there and the ships that the planes were deployed on and get the history of the POW/MIA flag and just read about Mary Hoff from Orange Park, lived down in Orange Park and her husband was missing in action in Vietnam and she just felt like they needed a symbol for the families that were had loved ones missing in action that they could cling on to. So, she helped design the flag, the POW/MIA flag and just learning about the history of that and that he was from Cecil Field.



LYN-It was a whole process of getting acceptance of that flag and getting that flag flown. I remember even in our own city how that came through the city council. I have found a man who did serve at Cecil during World War II, Korea, and have interviewed him so he just enjoyed flying. He was a flyer and Cecil Field was a great place to fly. He drove to my house, he is an alert older man and it was good hearing his view. It was the same thing, those piney woods. It's just out there in the woods but it is a great place to fly is what the pilots are saying.

So, you didn't live on base at Cecil and you bought your home in Orange Park and the kids were in Orange Park schools which is a different county, an adjacent county. Were your Navy Wives for the most part not on base by that time?

KATHY-Yes. We were by that time I think everybody was buying a home because the BAQ was enough to where you could afford to buy a home and the price of homes, we bought this home for sixty-eight thousand dollars and so you know to have a six hundred dollar a month payment, house payment you just felt like you, you know were using your money wisely.

LYN-And there were VA mortgages which helped us. We didn't have to have a down payment so there were advantages. Now, during that time that your husband was in there was a great GI Bill. Did you all take advantage of GI Bill?

KATHY-We did not. You know, Mike, of course it was offered during the time that he was in service but you know he was busy at that time, master chief you know and had attained the top enlisted position and so he, you know, he felt like he, you know really didn't want to go back to school. He enjoyed school, high school, but he really had gotten the training in the military to where he felt like he was you know educated enough to be a GV-9 you know so he had no desire to go to college. I worked outside the home and I couldn't imagine going to school and working at the same time but let me just tell you my daughter does it and so she is going to be forty years old this year. A lot of people are having to go back to school.

He thought about going to college when he retired but the last three years he was in the Navy he was stationed in Pensacola, back to Pensacola. Our youngest son was a senior in high school playing football on the varsity team.

LYN-Which school.?

KATHY-Orange Park High. So, he did not want to move and I had been in my job for the very first time for more than three years at a time. I had been there eleven years, worked my way up into an office administrator position. I didn't really want to leave my job either you know.

LYN-I've heard that same progression before.

KATHY-So he went to Pensacola and his family is from Pensacola so he said, "Well, I'll just come home every other week-end. It was not that far. It's a five-and-a-half-hour drive and so that was the first time that I did not follow him to his duty station because he at that point in time had twenty-six years in, twenty-five, so that would have been his twenty-sixth and he had plans to retire after twenty-six years and then we had 9-11 and they would not let him retire.

So, the first year he came back and forth. Our son graduated in 2000 and he went off to college in St. Louis and so I was home alone working and Mike was in Pensacola working and I'm thinking, "Why am I here in this big house by myself? I should be there."

So, I finally quit my job which I hated to do but you know it was time to be with him and they wouldn't let him retire. They denied his request for retirement. So, I moved to Pensacola and three months later I got a job with a temp service agency like most military wives have to do and so I worked for an attorney's office as a secretary and three months later my mother fell and broke her leg in Tennessee and she did not drive and she could not walk. They would not let her put any weight on her leg so I went and lived with her for six months. So, I was still away from Mike but I was at my mother's taking care of her and so that was a long time but it was a good bonding time with my mother. Actually, that's when we made his quilts together.

LYN-So you and your mom made the quilts. We'll take another photograph.

KATHY-And my best friend helped me as well. So, I had a vision, you know Mike was going to be retiring and he had put his paper work in to retire the second time, the second year he was there they denied that again and told him he had to do his three years. So, we finally got a retirement date and so I told my mom, "I want to do a wall hanging for him depicting his military service." So, she said, "Well, how are you going to do it?" I said, "I have no idea, I just want little squares and I want it to have his rate and then I want it to have his duty stations and I want to have his awards and his ships and everything." So, she said, "Well, you have no quilting experience so how are we going to do this?" (LAUGH) I said, "I don't know. We're going to start with his khaki shirt which was the chief's uniform and we're gonna make an anchor out of that and that's going to be the center, the focus of it. Then we will just go around from there." She said, "Well, you have to figure out how many squares you need." I said, "I don't know Mom, I want them as big as my hand so we can put a patch and the name under it." That's kind of how we created it. So, I wrote it down on a piece of paper and I said, "I want his whites and I want his dress blues and I want his khakis and I want his dungarees in it."

LYN-And his buttons are on there.

KATHY-And a lot of those actually are my father's buttons as well from his uniforms. My mom gave me some of his. So, she decided that, and to put something on every square would have been way too busy so we did every other square and then we put buttons on the squares that were plain, the shirts and the pants that they had, the cracker jacks had thirteen buttons. So, but the jacket buttons were bigger and the shirt buttons are smaller. But we just, I had this vision and that's what I wanted to honor his military service.

LYN-We have a portion of a flag.

KATHY-That they give you when you retire. Anyway, it is our military service and it was going to be a quilt but then with everything that I had to put into it which is his many medals and all of the buttons and all of that, I said, "This has to be a wall hanging." So, we're very proud of our military heritage and of the accomplishments that he made in the military going in enlisted and going through the years and achieving E-9, the highest enlisted rank.

LYN-And you said, and you meant it, "It is our military career" because it was indeed your military career also. I think wives invest in their husband's jobs and whatever but in the military, it is your career.

"Retirement"
Wall Hanging
Representing the
Career of Mike
Cayton



KATHY-Our Navy Wives motto is "They also serve who stay and wait." I hold that true to my heart because we do. We have to stay home and keep things going while they are deployed and while they are at home and just adapt to military life and it's not always easy and it's not the highest paid positions and so you do have to learn to budget.

LYN-I want to put into perspective that word “wait” in scripture says, “Wait on the Lord” and a lot of people think you sit patiently and wait for His return. What it really means it would be like a service, like a lady-in-waiting who is serving someone and that’s what you were doing. You were serving the military and making sure that that family was taken care of so that service member was doing his best. Thank you for being a really good Navy wife.

KATHY-It was not always easy. I will just add that it was not always easy and it is a roller coaster ride at times and you just have to hang on for the ride. That’s all. You can’t give up, you can’t give in. You just hang on and you’re going to have great days and great deployments and you’re gonna have bad days and bad deployments and it’s just life. You know when we got married in 1974, before we got married he was trying to make a decision of what he was going to be doing and I told him, “My father was in the Navy, my three older brothers were in the Navy.” I said, “Well, I’m gonna marry a sailor so I don’t know what you’re gonna do.” He quickly enlisted you know so that we could be together.



I said, “Well, I’m gonna marry a sailor so I don’t know what you’re gonna do.”

Kathy Cayton with her sailor

He is just a wonderful Navy man, a wonderful Navy husband and wonderful father for our children and grandfather to our grandkids. We have six grandchildren now,

LYN-Are they all here?

KATHY-They are not. We have two that are in St. Louis. My youngest son moved to St. Louis and went to college and found a career there. We go, now that Mike is retired and consequently I told him, “Well, if you can retire so can I.” So, I retired from working outside the home and I became a care giver in the last years for Comfort Keepers which when Mike retired I went, I did go to work for them part-time and then when my mother became ill she came to live with us in 2009 and so we took care of her until she passed. In October will be two years, next week as a matter of fact since she passed. We were lucky to have the opportunity to care for her in her later years.

LYN-So, you are now involved in a chapter of Navy Wives that is a little unusual. It is women from Cecil Field?

KATHY-Well, no. This is the same Navy Wives Clubs of America that I transferred my membership to several clubs and so we are made up of Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard wives active duty, retired, and widowed and also, we extend the membership to wives who are not affiliated with the military but they want to do community service with us. So, those are our associate members.

Our club is made up actually almost half of military wives and half associate wives so we have met so many people in the community that like what we are doing and want to join us. We are very thankful to have them as well. That's us blending with our community, our military community, and we have you know varied members from in their twenties to our oldest member is ninety-seven years old.

LYN-What is its name? What is its designation?

KATHY-We are Daughters in Dixie Number 300.

LYN-Of Dixie or in Dixie?

KATHY-In, we're in the south.

LYN-It was begun where?

KATHY-Well, actually there were two clubs in the Jacksonville area, Mayport and NAS JAX and Cecil Field was, did have Navy Wives Club of America #121 years ago back in the '50's and in the '60's, '70's there was another club. Well, in 1986 prior to that the clubs had disbanded. You know sometimes when you have a club of ladies and most of them are active duty all of a sudden it seems like everybody is getting orders at the same time and so then you only have a few people left to hold the club together until you get newer members in.

Well, the club had disbanded so there were several ladies at NAS JAX and Mayport's Navy Wives Clubs that were getting, moving to the westside of town so they got together. There was about ten of them that got together and they decided that they would start a club out at Cecil Field so that was Daughters in Dixie #300. So, that was in 1985 actually when number 300 started but prior to that Number 121 was out there.

We had Navy Wives Club of America at Cecil Field for forty years, on and off for forty years so during World War II era, during the Vietnam era, and Desert Storm era so we, it really helped give the wives something to do while their husbands were deployed and they were worried about what they are doing.

Sometimes it's just easier for you to get involved in your community to take your mind off of your worries and to know that there's always somebody else who has it harder than you have it. So, you just put your heart and your mind into doing community service work. Navy Wives Clubs does that through various opportunities and we work with a lot of military charities and that's one thing leads to the next but when I first came here I was involved with the Children's

Home Society. I was a labor coach for their home for unwed mothers, So, that's how I kind of started getting involved in the community service work and so I have helped to birth seventy-five babies.

LYN-Now where is this home? I know the San Diego [Road] campus. Is it there?

KATHY-Yes.

LYN-They are my neighbors. I didn't even know there was an unwed mother's home.

KATHY-So, that was kind of the first opportunity I had and I found out about it at a Navy Wives Club meeting and there was another lady who had just gotten stationed here as well and she had already looked into the community to see where she could volunteer. She said, "Would you like to go to one of the meetings with me over there and be a labor coach?" I said, "Well, I had just, my girlfriend had her baby at home. I was there for her so I had some experience with her and another friend who had had a baby and so it was something that I was very interested in in helping with. So, that was one of my other opportunities through Navy Wives Club to reach out into a community. So, I was very active with them for many years.

LYN-Again, our paths were very close. We are for the last almost thirty years patrons of Spring Park Elementary School which is next door to Children's Home Society and the children who live at that campus attend Spring Park School. So, we have been next door to each other during volunteer work. Again, I just was not birthing babies. (LAUGH)

KATHY-You know it was really hard because when I was with my girlfriend it was, you focus on the baby and all about that. With the Children's Home Society, a lot of these girls are giving their children up for adoption. So, you have to focus on the mother and not so much on the baby because it is a traumatic experience for them to give their child up for adoption. But, thank goodness that they make those decisions for themselves and for the community who can't have children or who want to have additional children to help take care of. You know, that was a very emotional time.

LYN-To choose to birth them rather than abort them. That's wonderful. Thank you again. That's amazing. So, we are now walking a path, a little bit in support of a project at Cecil again. Do you want to talk about how you are seeing this project and what your efforts are for it?

KATHY-Well, you know one volunteer job leads to the next and I just met a variety of people in the community through a lot of my volunteer work with the Northeast Veterans Council, with Community Hospice Veterans partnership, and through that the Jacksonville Ladies out at the Jacksonville National Cemetery. I also serve out there as a Jacksonville Lady making sure no veteran is buried alone.

Through those ties in the community I was at a Jacksonville National Cemetery Support Committee Meeting when Mike Cassata came and spoke to us about this project. So, I immediately gave him my card and told him that my husband was stationed at Cecil Field and that our Wives Club was formerly of Cecil Field and that we would love to get involved in this project.

LYN-Mike and a group of people formed the POW/MIA Memorial, Inc. in a project to bring attention to those who served and those who are still missing.

KATHY-And to renovate the chapel area. They have plans to have an aviation museum in the old theater building and to have a national memorial behind the chapel that will bring awareness about the missing in action and the previous prisoners of war.

There's just so many opportunities to work in the community and then when he told us about this project it was you know just very near and dear to my heart and we have the chapel actually we had attended retirements. We've attended weddings there. We've attended unfortunately funerals there so we are very close to that chapel.

Our actual Wives Club Thrift Shop was right down the street from the chapel so we had our installations of new officers there. We had a lot of events in the chapel and when he said, you know "It's in disrepair. It needs to be renovated." We went out for a tour, our Wives Club did, and once I gave him my card he called me we said, "We'd like to have your support. Can you meet us out there?" We saw the condition that unfortunately when the city takes over things get put aside and so it was just one of those places where they could store things and you know when you have office buildings in those Sunday School classes now they have to spread out. So, I understand how that came about but it just over the years has deteriorated. So, I think it's just a wonderful project to bring that for this remembrance back to life for Cecil Field and to continue to honor those that just, not those sixteen that have memorials out there but all of the eighty-eight thousand missing in action and prisoners of war.

LYN-The goal of the chapel also is to make it available for use for military weddings, for funerals, memorials services or whatever.

KATHY-Retirement.

LYN-Which I think will also help fund more of the memorial. We are looking for grants and we are looking for help in making that happen.

KATHY-We are. They have committees now that are working on getting corporate sponsorship and our Wives Club is doing the little things that we can do to help which is creating the cook book which we have and half of the proceeds go to the memorial from the sale of this cook book, twenty-five-dollar cook book. It has a lot of military wives' recipes in it and we put a lot of history of Cecil Field in it and we also are having spirit nights at area restaurants and so proceeds from that are going.

We have worked a couple games for the Axmen Games, rugby games, and got a little bit of money from donations from working that. Plus, they gave us money for helping to sell tickets for the next game. So, there is a lot of little things that our club is trying to do. We actually have a lady who is making a quilt that is for the MIA/POW flag and she is incorporating that into this quilt so we will be selling tickets for the quilt. So, just those kinds of things that we can do to help raise funds to make this a wonderful memorial to Cecil Field and the men and women who served there.

LYN-Well, thank you. Let me ask you about your club. Do you have active duty members' wives now?

KATHY-We do. Not as many as we should have. Unfortunately, we get the word out and we think we have the word out about Navy Wives Clubs of America but the military wife today is also working and also involved in making their home life, so not, you don't see as many in, come out into the clubs because we have our meetings at night and a lot of people when they get home and they have dinner they just can't get back out at night especially when they have younger children. So, we do have baby-sitting service available for them if they like to do that but yes, we have actually several active duty wives and one is, her husband is a member of the Navy band and he sings for the Navy band. She was previous military as well.

LYN-We are fortunate here to have a Navy band still. In our churches we have had several of the instrumentalists who served in the Navy band. That is at NAS JAX.

KATHY-Yes, and we have several whose husbands have just retired recently so they are new to retirement life so they are learning the struggles of that and one in particular whose husband has been deployed many times to Iraq and Afghanistan and they are struggling with the PTSD and retirement and learning to get back into civilian life and still have that military connection and how to make ends meet so that everything they learned while active duty is helping them to reincorporate into civilian life as well. We are glad that we can there for support for them.

LYN-So, you have had a long military life. Your entire life has been military. Let me go ahead and say the purpose of these recordings and transcriptions is to support the information of what went on at Cecil and what life was which will be used for preservation of that but will also probably accompany grants that we seek for this memorial. So, once again you have given this time and hopefully this will be part of that supporting information for grants to support this memorial. So, you just keep giving and I want to thank you Kathy.

KATHY-Thank you so much. It is a pleasure to have met you through Mike Cassata so like I say, "God puts you in a place for a reason and for a purpose and puts people in your life for that reason." I'm just thankful to have the connections that I have and to have the resources that I have and to have the volunteer spirit that my mother instilled in me and my mother-in-law instilled in me to volunteer in the community and to work on projects like this that are so worthy of community support.

LYN-So, we will keep going, won't we?

KATHY-You bet.

LYN-Thank you.

Addendum to our tape, tell us about what your position with Navy Wives is at this point.

KATHY-Well, I have started out as secretary in 1977 to a local club and just been a dedicated member for a long time. It did take me twenty-five years to get into a chairmanship position on the national level because this is a national organization. So, I became the pen chairman was my first chairmanship and we have pens that designate our volunteer service just like the men have

their ribbons. Navy Wives Club of America also has a ribbon of volunteer pens and so I was responsible for purchasing those pens for the ladies to earn with the volunteer hours.

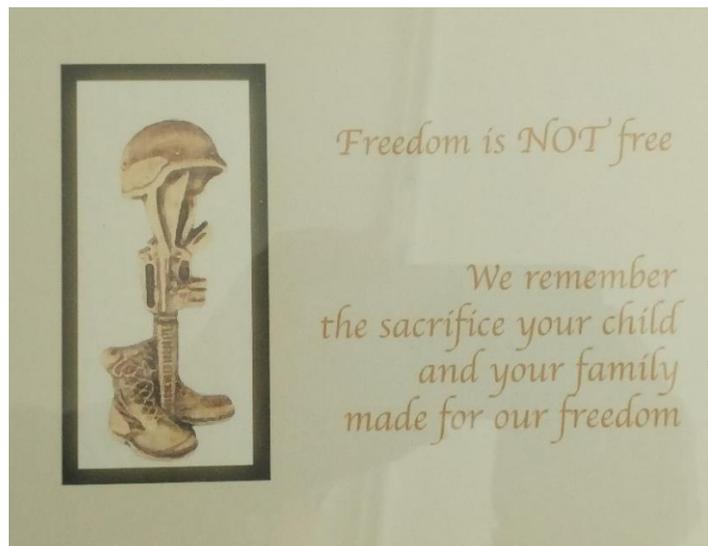
From there I went to be membership chairman and then I was regional president for the Eastern Region and then I went on to be national president from 2009 until 2011. I continue to serve on a local level now and have been president of our club, Daughters in Dixie 300, many, many times and now I serve as their treasurer.



LYN-We have a “lifer” Daughters in Dixie. So, thank you for your service. We are going through the cook book and we will put information in this project about the cook book.

Another addendum, we are again at a very emotional time.

KATHY-We had another thing to go through military families is sacrifice of their loved ones and around them have died for their country. I got very involved with the Florida Fallen Heroes in 2005-2006. I met Dave Seamans of the Florida Fallen Heroes. His son died in Iraq in 2005 and so he had a purpose and a mission to honor the fallen, not just his son but all of the fallen and he formed the Florida Fallen Heroes and they put monuments at area high schools to honor the fallen.



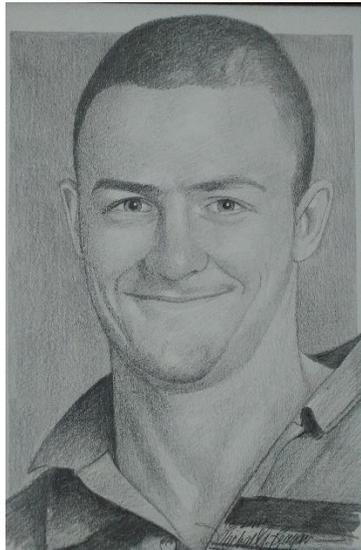
FLORIDA FALLEN HEROES

The Timothy J. Seamans Memorial Foundation will dedicate a fallen hero's monument at each home town high school for all of the fallen heroes of the Iraq / Afghanistan conflict; also we will commemorate in red brick the name of each fallen alumni from past wars and conflicts. It is our purpose to gain funds through the foundation to offset the cost of this monumental task. We strive to make certain that every fallen hero is not forgotten.

The Timothy J. Seamans Memorial Foundation is based in the beautiful city of Jacksonville, Florida and was founded by the family of Jacksonville fallen soldier, Timothy J. Seamans, in August 2006. The purpose and mission of this foundation is to create, establish, and help maintain the Fallen Soldier Monument at each hometown high school of a Florida graduates who have lost their lives defending the United States of America in our war against terrorism.

Well, I've been very involved with them in getting that done and thought that God placed me in this world to comfort others. Well, in July, July 20th of 2011 we lost our son in an accident he had with his vehicle as a result of that accident. But, it's still the loss of a child.

Artist Rendering of
Kathy's son
Michael Cayton



So, of course one of the first people I called was Dave and told him about Michael and they were the first ones to come to my aid and comfort, Mike and I in the loss of our son, because they had had that. They had experienced that and they knew the pain that comes from losing your child whether they served in the military or whether they served in the community, worked in the community. So, I just am so thankful for them being with me and for my Navy Wives who are you know were the first ones here to comfort me and to get us through that.

He was thirty-one years old. He had a freak accident with his truck and a part of a fence flew up from him hitting a fence and lodged in the back of his head. That is how he lived for three hours until we could get there, thank goodness. So, my Navy Wives were my rock at that point. I was national president at that point so it was very hard for me to do my job as national president and grieve as a mother. But, thank goodness, I had them and I had my community, my neighbors you know were all there for us as well.

LYN-What a wonderful testimony.

KATHY-It was very trying time for us because my mother was living with us as I was caring for her and so it's been difficult. It's still painful but we are so thankful that we have his daughter. She will be fifteen next month. We are very close to them and so we just know that God puts people in your life for a reason at the time. I told Dave this, I said, "Here all these years I thought I was here for you and it turns out that Dave, because of my involvement with Florida Fallen Heroes, that family was able to be here for me when I needed them."

LYN-Another wonderful testimony. Thank you, Kathy.