

Susan Gibbs Treatise on USNA Commissioning Week, taken from her Listserv posting on January 6 2013 with her permission.

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NOTE: This is an addendum to some often asked questions from previous postings
- the original follows this info.

We had gone out over Easter and while at the Mid-store I bought several USNA 2-pocket folios for our friends and family who would be attending GCW (I also used that opportunity to have our firstie personally select the frame she wanted for her diploma and commission - they are somewhat expensive and I wanted her to get what she wanted). Then I hit the tourist booth at City Dock for maps and brochures on Annapolis sites. Also gathered some D.C. info - it was the Cherry Blossom festival so we were in D.C. as well. Using the USNA GCW schedule, I edited that down to activities/events that our guests could attend, printed it out and placed it in each folder. Then they could decide for themselves. Most of them spent a day in D.C. and really enjoyed it. We had mapped out all the Memorials, Archives (Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights), White House, Capitol - and a couple of restaurants. That's about all you can work into one day. I had also suggested the Eastern Shore but did warn about bridge delays. For D.C. we also suggested they drive to the New Carrollton station, park and take the Metro in. Very convenient.

If you are not going to be in Annapolis before GCW perhaps your MID could gather some brochures and maps at the City Dock tourist info booth or call and have them send info to you. Same with D.C. And of course the internet sites are extremely helpful.

First of all we parked early every day at the downtown Annapolis parking ramp. What a time saver!! and so close to walk to and from the Yard versus parking at the Stadium and dealing with buses and standing in line. Gate 3 was also open for the parade, and don't forget everyone, except children, need picture ID's to enter the Yard.

Alexa's sponsors helped organize a great picnic for the Blue Angels performance. After that she gave what I call "the Midshipman's Tour" of USNA, complete with stories of life on the Yard to family and friends. Lots of questions and laughter. In 2009, they were still completing the remodel of the Museum, but I would not do that as part of the mid tour, but rather suggest guests visit that on their own time.

The weather was absolutely spectacular that week so after the last parade (there were 2 that week) we all walked into town and had lunch outside at Middleton's. Over the four years, we tried and liked most all of the downtown restaurants - Pusser's, McGarvey's. But could easily have gone over to Eastport for all the fun places there if we would have had a long wait or take the harbor taxi to the Chart House on the other side of the harbor. Here is the link for restaurants - I used waterside, crabs and seafood and pubs.

<http://www.visitannapolis.org/dine/waterside-dining/index.aspx>

The City Center had just opened, so at Easter I also made reservations at Brio for 2:00 on GC Day. Graduation starts at 1000 and was over promptly at noon. Read below about selecting the "battle" for pictures afterwards and have everyone meet there. Whole process took about an hour, which was when the public announcer told everyone to clear the field. The traffic in the stadium parking lot had cleared out and we went

directly to the restaurant, Ensign changed in the restroom at Brio, and we all enjoyed a leisurely lunch. - outside. What an awesome week.

As for the boat ride. After the parade (she ran into her now empty room in Mother B and changed out of her Parade Dress Uniform into civies I carried in my tote bag) and we all went to lunch that Thursday, the pace had slowed down considerably, and since we were all downtown I suggested the harbor boat ride to relax. I admit that I had a mental list of things to suggest if there was any down time.

<http://www.watermarkcruises.com/cruises40min.htm> the red double decker boat is right at the end of the City Dock. I think it's about an hour cruise. Just perfect. I remember seeing USNA from the vantage point of the water and how spectacular it was in 2005, the afternoon before her USNA journey began on I-Day, and now in 2009, the afternoon before saying farewell. We all thoroughly enjoyed it and our soon to be Ensign reminisced as the door closed on 4 years on the Severn and another opened to the upcoming adventures of the Fleet.

Speaking of boat rides, they sometimes bring a ship up from Norfolk for the week for tours. If they do, allow 4 hours at least - by the time you are shuttled out to the ship (maybe even a sub), tour and come back. Wear shorts or pants, closed toe shoes. Ships are not for the unfit – ladder-wells are very steep. Double that for subs, because of extremely close quarters. The tours are not for everyone, but oh so much fun if you are up to it. Our first tour of a guided missile cruiser in Oct. '07, ended up to be quite an adventure complete with an unexpected big storm, lunch in the ward room, and coming down over the side of the ship on a rope ladder into a "rhib" rigid hulled inflatable boat and six foot waves. Who says we're too old for an adventure!!! Also have since enjoyed a great family day cruise on the Pacific.

Firsties are in whites almost all day, every day. Lots of practices too, so don't plan on using their vehicle. Only evening parties are civie clothes for them and the Ball was their Mess Dress. Jeff did take his tux and her sister and I also wore long gowns (great pictures) but there were some in business suits and cocktail length dresses too.

I hope that wasn't too disorganized. But I am glad that I wrote my 2009 graduation experiences when we got back and that it has helped so many families over the past three years. You know it is absolutely amazing how BIG their Navy/Marine Corps family is. They will run into each other all over the world - literally. And USNA is a lifelong link no matter what year they graduate. And as for the parents. . .we really do belong to the "never too old to learn" club. The Fleet and Corps present a whole new vocabulary, with abbreviations, for us to learn after their four years at USNA. And, as officers, their achievements and travels will continue to expand.

This is the second year I have passed along my thoughts on Graduation/Commissioning Week. The fact that I got several thank you's from 2010 parents made me decide to offer this information again. That and a '09 grad who visited us a week after the '09 graduation and while looking at scrapbooks and exchanging GCW stories, said he wished his parents would have honored his wishes. It came down to his mom insisted he be with family all the time, and not with any of his friends, unless all the family was included. The elderly grandparents needed naps, medications, meals at certain times, etc. He wanted his siblings to be seated in the family section at GC, his mother wanted the grandparents. The week became about everyone except him.

In my opinion, GCW is about one person - your graduating midshipman - no one else matters! They have worked and endured - academically, physically, mentally, and emotionally - for the past four years, no doubt wondering some days if they would ever see that light at the end of the tunnel. Now that day is finally here and they are one week (plus basket leave) from stepping on board a ship and assuming leadership of their own

crew in some instances, or heading to TBS or Pensacola or Charleston or BUDS. One week from being literally scattered to the seven seas from those with whom they have forged bonds in the fiery furnace of USNA that turns out Navy and Marine Corps officers. Only God and whoever is in charge of deployments, leaves and duty station assignments - knows when they will meet again. There are lots of events - on the Yard and off. First of all, your mid will need their own car. They have several very early morning rehearsals, there are parties (multiple locations every single night - some of which we were invited to and others not - or just too tired to go to), not to mention receptions, the Ball, concerts, awards ceremonies, etc (look at your schedule). And even though the firsties were booted out of Mother B. - officially checked out of their rooms - they were still required to spend one other night before grad (one of those things that could change depending on the Supe and/or Dant) in their room - so save a blanket and pillow. Select the frame she wanted from the Mid Store for her diploma and commission (these are not inexpensive so I wanted her to pick exactly what she wanted) and discuss GCW. She and I also finalized last minute details on the phone one evening before we arrived reviewing the USNA schedule, crossed off what she didn't want to do, added invitation only events, parties, family lunch one day including a personally guided tour of the Yard. We did not "carve it in stone" but only a few more event had to be penciled in and only one crossed off. Family was actually invited to one of the parties. We actually arrived the Friday before GCW started because that was the date she and her sponsors chose for the party they hosted for her and her friends which turned out perfectly before all the hoopla began.

After reading posts on the list for 3 years, rather than rent a home, we had 2 suites on the same floor of the Hampton Inn - one for us and one for our mid and her sister. As much as I love to cook, I wanted to enjoy the week and not spend it cooking, so we decided maid service and prepared breakfast were the way to go. And that extra suite was full (3 in the king bed, 2 in the queen sleeper sofa, and at least one on the floor) on the first two nights because firsties were officially checked out of Mother B even though their families had not yet arrived, and some sponsors were not available to house them. There were 3 or 4 every night after that as mid's friends from home arrived for graduation. I prepared a folio of information for our visiting family members/friends that included the USNA schedule of events as well as sightseeing/restaurant suggestions, complete with maps, for Annapolis, Washington D.C. and the Eastern shore. Her awesome sponsor family was included in everything - because they were her family for four whole years in our book. In fact, the three of them sat with us (mid's sister, dad and me) in the family section and our relatives and friends sat in the upper level - which turned out to be a great idea, having

great pictures from both levels. Because 09 was the President's year in the speaker rotation, we arrived at the Stadium by 7:30 when the firsties had to report. We immediately got in line to go through security point run by the Secret Service. You know the routine from Army/Navy football, or anytime POTUS or Vice-POTUS, and a list of others have been present. In other words just take the basics - sunscreen, sunglasses, hats, umbrellas and ponchos (if needed). Beverages and snacks can be purchased at the concession stand. I was entrusted with both her officer's cover (in a plastic case tucked safely in my tote bag which never left my side) and silver dollar, her midshipman cover that she tossed had a \$1 bill tucked inside).

We actually determined after the processional, once grads were seated before the President arrived (via our cell phones) where to meet on the field after the hat toss. Very easy - use all those great battles listed inside the stadium and meet on the field under one of them. She forwarded location info to her roommates, their senior enlisted (returned on leave from his next duty station to render first salute) and a couple of others, who passed it on to their families. The roughly one hour afterwards is a perfect amount of time to do all the new officer, family, friend, first salute pix's while the parking lot clears out. I had made restaurant reservations the month before for 2:00 at the newly opened City Centre. We arrived at 1:30, had drinks and appetizers (ensign changed clothes in restroom) and enjoyed a wonderful leisurely celebration with family, friends and sponsors. Then more hugs. A perfect end to a perfect week. Our ensign thanked us often, she got to do everything she wanted, great parties, great memories, no pressures. Mission accomplished! We hosted a huge party at home the next weekend for all the friends and family who couldn't make it. However, we did have a nice display of scrapbooks (worked like crazy that week putting them together), lots of pictures of graduation, awards, and other memorabilia, plus a cd a family member had made that ran continuously. What a great time!

One thing I suggested and she agreed that our friends and family would enjoy - the day before she reported to USNA in June 2005, she, her dad, sister and I had taken the boat tour around Annapolis and USNA with nervous anticipation about I-Day, Plebe summer and four years to come. We repeated that boat cruise the afternoon before graduation But now it was a cruise down memory lane reminiscing about those four years spent looking out on the Severn, reflecting on friends made, challenges accepted and achieved, honors earned, knowing she had made it, now seen looking from the Severn back in.

A couple of events that we all enjoyed –

- The Baccalaureate Service where the MIDS dedicate their commission to God by signing "The Book" at the end of the service - she, her roommates and friends went up together - definitely a kodak moment (plus the pix of them standing together under the Midshipman stained glass window). We have always attended services when visiting, but singing "Eternal Father" this time had even more meaning.
- The Supe's Garden party - a great opportunity to meet all their chain of command and take pix. (This is a dressy event, but do not suggest high heels on grass)
- If you are invited to the AD's Varsity Letter Reception that is a great time to get a pix of your mid with the Supe and Dant before the Supe's Reception because that is an extremely long line.
- Glee Club concerts were a nice relaxing break and great entertainment. Blue and Gold still leaves goose-bumps.
- Blue Angels - practice and performance . . . AWESOME!!
- Grad Ball was a wonderful black tie/formal event. Captain (now Admiral) Klunder, the Dant, was definitely the star of the evening - the guy is a dynamo of energy!
- Graduation!!! I was glad to hear friends and family said it was the most impressive event they have ever attended. Take sunscreen, maybe a hat (didn't need umbrellas).

When our mid talks about GCW, she still refers to it as the best week ever. We had the time of our lives and enjoyed every unforgettable moment! Hope anything mentioned here helps you're mid and your family do the same.

Navy Blue and Gold Forever!

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