



BJ HALL: FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY WEST POINT

THE INSPIRATIONAL JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE, TRANSFORMATION, AND UNWAVERING SERVICE

From Tough Love to Strong Leadership: How Parental Discipline Shaped a Community Leader

Some stories start with privilege, where individuals are born into wealth and opportunities. However, other stories begin in an urban neighborhood of Birmingham, Alabama, where eight childhood friends had big dreams despite their disadvantaged backgrounds. These stories often highlight the stark contrast between those who are born with privilege and those who have to fight for every opportunity. In this particular story, three of the childhood friends managed to graduate high school, two were able to attend college, but only one was able to graduate from West Point while the other ended up in prison.

BJ Hall's story is one of transformation, where he overcame his childhood struggles and rose to become a leader in his community. He didn't let his disadvantaged background define him and instead used it as **motivation to work hard and create a better future for himself**. His journey is a testament to the power of resilience and determination in the face of adversity. BJ's story serves as an inspiration to others who may be facing similar challenges, showing them that with hard work and perseverance, anything is possible.

Foundations built at home are the basis of a strong and sturdy house. These foundations are not just physical structures, but also the values, beliefs, and traditions that are instilled in a family. They provide a sense of security, stability, and a strong sense of identity for each family member.

"My foundation didn't begin with the military" BJ reflects. "It started with my upbringing." Despite

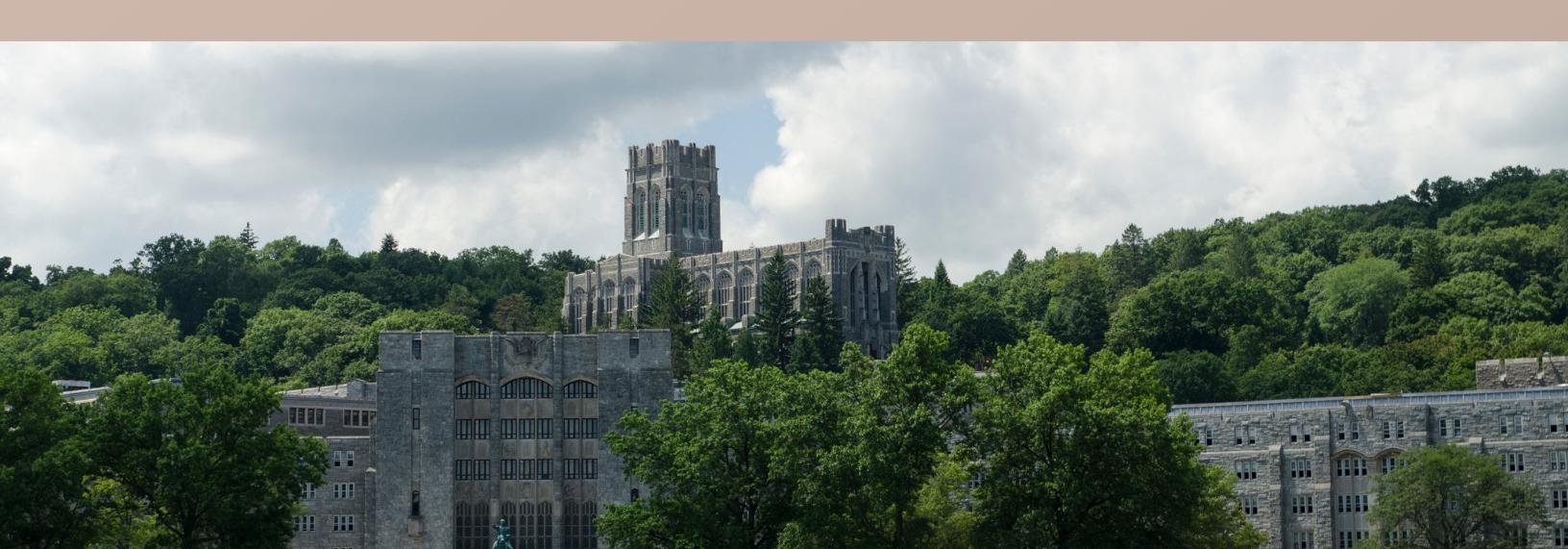
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My foundation didn't begin with the military

being surrounded by the harsh realities of living in the projects – drugs, violence, and systemic poverty – his parents enforced clear boundaries and unwavering expectations. That foundation would prove crucial when a West Point recruitment package arrived in the mail. BJ had planned to attend Florida A&M or Oakwood University to become a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. He'd performed well on his PSAT and National Merit exams, receiving recruitment materials from multiple universities. The West Point recruitment package, however, he initially ignored and threw it in the drawer. But when his mother discovered it, they watched it together. Even though he was unfamiliar with the storied institution, BJ recognized the potential in his future after watching it. As the realities sank in, **he realized that young men and women were transformed into principled warriors, scholars of strategy, stewards of duty, and defenders of freedom.** Recognizing this crucible of character and leadership opportunity, he embraced not just the chance—but a calling. At an institution rooted in tradition, honor, and excellence, he answered that call from the deepest chambers of his heart.

WEST POINT: UNLEARNING AND RELEARNING

This transformation would prove to be just the beginning of BJ's journey of growth and self-discovery. At West Point, BJ encountered diversity that challenged everything he thought he knew. His first roommates, although Americans, had diverse family traditions from India and the Philippines – so all three of them were familiar with being a minority and the challenges that come with being different. Later when he was assigned Caucasian roommates from Texas and Iowa, those roommates became his good friends and their friendship helped him systematically dismantle his preconceived notions.



"Unlearning previous beliefs required time and effort," he explains. There were difficult moments, including a racist incident when KKK material was placed on his computer. He later found out that it was supposed to be a joke and the person who had done it thought he would laugh it off. But in no uncertain terms, BJ let them know even if they did it as a joke, it was never okay, period. Overall, West Point taught him "the value of cross-cultural understanding and friendship."

More importantly, it taught him accountability. He recalls when a fellow West Point cadet who was uncannily mature spoke to him directly about how his victim mentality was getting in his way. It opened up BJ's eyes and he adopted what he calls "self-accountability." Military training at West Point emphasized personal responsibility and honesty. "I strive for integrity and avoid dishonesty in difficult situations," he says. These lessons of accountability and directness became the foundation of his leadership style.

FROM SOLDIER TO SERVANT

A previously undetected heart disease ended BJ's Army career too soon and derailed his dreams of attending Special Forces training. But it couldn't and didn't end his desire to help others. He simply redirected his heart for service as he transitioned from military to civilian life. He brought along his authentic leadership style – influenced by West Point and Army experience – to every role he took on. Following in his family's tradition of community service, BJ began volunteering extensively. He integrated into his new community



through coaching, church, and local organizations, always focused on "understanding and addressing community issues by asking questions and building connections."

His approach was methodical, military-like: assess the situation, identify the problems, develop solutions, and then pick the best course of action. As NAACP president, he emphasized the organization's ability to "access political leaders and influence policy at all levels." When he ran for commissioner president, he brought military and fraternity leadership experience to bear on local issues.

THE HEART FOR SERVICE

Political ambition is not what drives BJ, it's what you call a genuine heart for service. He's determined to fix government inefficiencies and stresses the need to reduce costs rather than increasing taxes to create more revenue. "Government services rarely exceed average quality."

But his approach comes from a desire to better serve the residents and not tear down what's already been built. He advocates for "collaborative problem-solving over divisive arguments" and encourages "unity and cooperation within communities"

Now running for State Delegate, BJ sees the opportunity as one where he can have the most impact. "Since St. Mary's County does not have Code Home Rule, we do not make our own legislation," he explains. "County commissioners mainly control budget and development, not lawmaking. State delegates create laws impacting St. Mary's County." For him, it's about being present to ensure legislation is passed that will truly enhance the lives of St. Mary's residents.



LESSONS FOR VETERANS

BJ's journey offers powerful lessons for veterans transitioning to civilian leadership:

1. **Start with accountability.** "Military training taught me personal responsibility and honesty," he says. That foundation translates directly to civilian leadership.
2. **Unlearn when necessary.** West Point taught him that growth requires challenging your own assumptions and being open to new perspectives.
3. **Lead with service, not politics.** His extensive, often unrecognized community work demonstrates that real leadership happens in the trenches, not just in elected office.
4. **Build bridges, not walls.** His diversity experience with his roommates at West Point taught him that understanding others is essential to effective leadership.

SERVICE-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

From Birmingham urban neighborhood to the halls of West Point and into the chambers of state government, BJ's story is one of continuous transformation. The loving discipline his parents instilled, combined with the accountability and integrity West Point demanded, forged a leader who serves not for recognition, but because community service is the passion that drives him.

While young leaders often face time constraints due to family responsibilities, BJ understands that age doesn't equate to maturity or capability. What matters is having a genuine heart for service—something that can't be taught but must be born within you, nurtured by your parents, enhanced by military training, and desperately needed by civilian communities.

BJ embodies that rare combination. His foundation demands that he put his entire self into serving his community, and that's exactly what he delivers.

SARGE'S OBSERVATION

My observation of BJ is a humble man who is confident in himself and isn't afraid to address the hard issues. He looks for areas of improvement, not just within himself, but within his community. He keeps his eyes and ears alert for any opportunity where his leadership and community service will have the greatest impact. This is what veteran leadership looks like in action.

For veterans wondering how their military values translate to civilian impact, BJ's journey provides a clear answer: the same accountability, integrity, and service-before-self that made you a good soldier will make you not only an effective community leader, but will nurture the servant's heart that transforms communities. The question isn't whether you're qualified to serve – it's whether you're willing to answer the call.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarge Julie Muster Bryson is a U.S. Army veteran with over a decade of military service, including a 15-month deployment during Operation Joint Endeavor. After completing her military career, she earned a master's degree in criminal justice and spent decades in public service before establishing Boots 2 Benefits LLC, a veteran-owned consulting firm specializing in VA disability claims preparation.

As a veteran, veteran's spouse, and mother of a veteran, Sarge brings a comprehensive 360-degree perspective to military life and the challenges veterans face when navigating the VA system. Sarge is the author of the Operation book series, including the upcoming *Operation FUBAR*, which provides tactical guidance for veterans filing VA disability claims. She founded the IGY6.2 Movement and Fund, embodying the pay-it-forward philosophy that ensures no veteran is left behind. Based in Maryland but serving throughout the States, Sarge continues to help veterans "crack the VA code". She can be reached at sarge@boots2benefits.com or (443) 924-6809.

