

When I was 16, I saw a 1978 made-for-TV melodrama called *Women at West Point*. Back then, it was enough to inspire me. I entered in 1980 and resigned two years later. I wasn't sure if the Army was right for me. Almost immediately, I realized my mistake and was lucky enough to be readmitted. I soon fell in love with my classmate Kenny McDonald. We were married three days after graduation.

Was it harder to be a woman at West Point? Well, I don't know what it's like to be a man at West Point. It seemed like 10 percent thought it was great that women were there, 10 percent hated it, and 80 percent couldn't have cared less. Without role models, women didn't know what "right" looked like. Could we have a successful Army career, be married, have children, and balance all those things? As women graduates started serving on the staff, cadets have told us how important it is to see how we make it work.

I'm the director of admissions, and we're seeing a moderate increase in applications, because a West Point education is fully funded. Having gone through my

## An Officer and a Gentlewoman

Colonel Deborah McDonald, West Point's first female admissions director, opens up

daughter's college selection process, I understand how stressful it can all be.

When Kenny was struck by an explosive in Iraq last year, he had been there almost 20 months. He had e-mail and a phone, so I'd convinced myself it wasn't dangerous, because I could talk to him. He was brought to Walter Reed last year on our son's birthday. That was Joshua's present: to be in the same room with his dad.

Kenny recovered quickly. We know the dangers, yet we feel giving back to the country that has given us so much is extremely important.

As told to

*Bridget Nelson Monroe*

