

MY AMAZING PAULA

By John F. Hall

When I married Paula, the former Paula Andree Oakley of Golden Pond, Kentucky, we were both teenagers. I was 19 and Paula was 18. I was still an enlisted soldier stationed at



Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Paula was a freshman at Murray State University, in Murray, Kentucky. At that time, cellphones and computers had not become available to the general public. Paula was a business major. She aced a typing class using an IBM Selectric typewriter. We moved into her parent's home in Golden Pond. I had three months to serve until my three-year enlistment was completed. Paula went in search of a job. Jeannie Stuart Hospital, in Hopkinsville, Kentucky was in need of a histologist. The normal qualifications to become a histologist was to have a bachelor's degree with a major in medical technology or one of the life sciences. Paula had one year of college, but the Pathologist, that hired her, trained her to make tissue slides. Paula would slice tissue samples, and put them between two thin pieces of glass. The Pathologist would then look at the tissue slides through a microscope, and analyze it. This Pathologist's husband was an Army doctor at the Fort Campbell Army Hospital. She would bring Paula to the Army Hospital for more training.

Paula's mother, Pauline Towler Oakley, was working in Civil Service, in the transportation section. She suggested that Paula apply for a clerk/typist job on Fort Campbell. It would pay twice as much as the histologist trainee job. The main requirement for the job was to type a letter. Paula could type 120 words a minute on an electric typewriter, with no mistakes. She was immediately hired. Paula was sent to the 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. She told me this true story. Sometime in April of 1976, she was typing a letter in the 2nd Brigade Headquarters. The new Brigade Commander, Colonel Colin Powell, walked over to her desk. He said: "Do you know who I am?" Paula replied: "Yes! Sir!" Colonel Powell replied: "Well! I am your boss!" Paula replied: "Yes! Sir!" And Colonel Powell turned and walked away.

Paula applied for a forms design job in the Adjutant General (AG) Section. She was hired, and she would design all the forms that were required. These included helicopter check lists. During large exercises, She would be detailed to type after-action reports. She would go to the 101st Airborne Division Headquarters, and type out reports, 12 hours a day. When the Division Commander's secretary was on vacation, or was sick, they would detail Paula to take her place, until she returned. They detailed Paula, not just because she was efficient, but because she was the best typist on post. Paula's high school friend, Judy Clark, suggested that she apply for an open position job, where she worked, in records management. Paula applied and was hired. At home, Paula was a wonderful mother to our son, John Andrew. She would deny buying herself new clothes, so that our son would have new clothes. I had law enforcement and Army Reserve jobs that had me away a lot. Paula would take our little son fishing and deer hunting. She was a Den Mother when he was in the Cub Scouts.

Paula's job in the Records Management Section, required her to inspect all the records in the Army Hospital. The Army Hospital had a clinic north of Memphis, Tennessee. She and Judy Clark, who worked with her, had to inspect their records. So an Army Huey helicopter took her and Judy down to inspect that unit's records. Paula's records management program was inspected by an Inspector from Washington DC. He told her that her program was the best that he had ever inspected. He asked if she would come to the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, to clean up their program, that was a mess. Paula told him that she has a son, and a husband, and a life, and he needs to find some one else to clean up their mess.



Paula later became the Records Manager. One of the requirements of being a Records Manager, is to attend records management conferences, held in big cities like Chicago. Paula asked me to go with her to a records management conference in New Orleans. I told her that I would go, but I wanted to drive to Fulton, Kentucky, to park our care at an unmanned train depot. Then we would take an Amtrak sleeper car. It was late at night when the train stopped at the depot. A Porter opened the train door, pulled out a two-step, and said: "Welcome to the City of New Orleans Train. Please follow me, and I will take you to your room."

Paula applied for the position of Chief of Administrative Services at the Army Hospital on Fort Campbell. She was interviewed for the position by a female Army captain. She said to Paula: "Your boss gave you a bad report, but I am going to take a chance on you." She hired and promoted Paula. Paula's old boss did not want to lose her. In my opinion, he was a real jerk. Paula was made the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Officer for the hospital. She had 25 military and civilian employees under her supervision. This included the hospital mail room. Any vendor coming to the hospital had to go through her office. She had the responsibility to compile the Annual Hospital Historical Report. She drafted me to help her put that report together.

The government was trying to cut costs and eliminate positions. Civil Service employees were being replaced by the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS). The new system became mandatory for all those hired after January 1, 1987. The number of military and civilians under Paula's supervision was reduced down from 25 to six, but the amount of work remained the same. The Office of Personnel Management offered Paula a substantial cash bonus to take an early retirement. After 32 years of service on Fort Campbell, Paula had enough. She took the bonus and retired.

This freed Paula to become a care giver to her dad, Andrew C. Oakley. He was on dialysis for many years, and she would drive him for his treatment in Murray, Kentucky. His eye sight prevented him from driving, so Paula would drive him where he needed to go. After Andrew died, Paula became the caregiver for her mother, Pauline Towler Oakley, until she died. Paula never wore a military uniform or carried a rifle. But she served with honor. May God bless, the broken road, that led me to my amazing Paula.

John F. Hall

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