

After graduating from high school in a small SC town, Amalee Wise did not go to college. She graduated with an 'A' average near the top of her class. She works factory jobs but she needed more. She goes to the Air Force recruiting station to join, but the office is closed. She walks into the Navy office and thus begins her high-seas adventure!

Sailor Girl: **The Adventures of a Female Navy Sailor** by Esther Brown

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to find meaning, purpose, true love and success in her life"*

SAILOR GIRL

The Adventures of a Female Navy Sailor



ESTHER BROWN

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Chapter 1: The Beginnings

In May 1983, I, Amalee Wise, made a decision that would change my life forever. I was twenty-two years old. I didn't know what the future held for me, but I knew it had to be better than the bleak picture I saw at the time. I was living in Tallwood, South Carolina, a nice little town steeped in Southern traditions. Here you either went to school or worked hard all week, then on Sunday you would go to church. I grew up poor, but I had a mother and a father who worked hard on the farm to make sure their five children had the necessities to survive childhood and to graduate from high school. After that, however, we were on our own.

My father was rough and tough and could sometimes be a brute. He was a proud man, but he had a kind and gentle side. I will always remember his words of wisdom—expressions such as “Root, poor hog, or die,” “I ain't giving a cripple a crutch or a poor dog a bone,” and my favorite, “Give a man a fish and feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and feed him for a lifetime.” He passed away in 2005.

My mother was and still is the most influential person in my life. She was kind, gentle, smart, and beautiful. I love her dearly and miss her terribly. She passed away in 1991. She would always tell me how beautiful I was. She told me I was a special angel whom God had given her. The wisdom and the life lessons she instilled in me have helped me tremendously

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throughout the years. I often helped her around the house. She could not drive, and when I got my driver's license and a car, we would go shopping and would visit relatives and friends in the neighborhood. She was a beautiful woman inside and out and was loved by family and friends, but no one could have loved her as much as I did.

When I graduated from Heartsmill High School, I didn't pursue the idea of attending college. Family and friends did not encourage me to go, and neither did my school counselors, even though I graduated sixth in a class of 192 students, both black and white, with an A average. I felt cheated because none of the guidance counselors even talked to me about a scholarship. But I asked myself how much I wanted a higher education and whether I would fight for it. The answer was no, so I placed this apparent setback in my mind's folder as another lesson learned on the journey called life. Truth be known, after going to school for twelve years I was tired of it. But to this day I still wonder why I wasn't offered a scholarship.

After graduating from high school, I did what a lot of my friends and acquaintances did. I held a few jobs at manufacturing plants and dated local men. One I remember in particular was Nic. I dreamed of marrying him and of having his children. But because he was known to have a roving eye, I put that dream out of my mind and ended our relationship once and for all. This was one of the reasons I ended up

leaving my hometown. In the meantime, I hung out with friends and goofed around. I considered Patty one of the best friends a girl could have. She was fun and full of life. By the time I left the area, she had two kids out of wedlock, but she was still a lot of fun to be with when she had free time.

But hanging out and having fun was not enough for me, and I didn't want to continue working dead-end jobs for low wages. I kept thinking, *What the hell am I going to do with the rest of my life?* I had a hunger to do something worthwhile and fulfilling. I started thinking maybe I had made a mistake in not pursuing college. It seemed as if I had aced every test I had taken in high school, and with my grades, I probably could have gotten into any college of my choosing.

I got laid off at the last plant I worked for and spent a couple of years hustling to make ends meet and to help Mom and Dad put food on the table. My youngest sister, Lisa, and I would salvage items from the trash dump, wash and paint them, and sell them. We once found boxes of seeds from a local plant. The seeds were dated for the year before, but they were in clean boxes and unopened packets. We went to every neighborhood in Tallwood selling those seeds. That was a good find, and we made nearly \$1,000 in a couple of weeks.

After that money was spent, I returned to the same question: *What the hell am I going to do with the rest of my life?* I enrolled in nearby Lawrence Arlington Technical College and received my certification to become an OR surgical scrub

technician. I worked in a local hospital for two years, but after scrubbing in on every conceivable operation, I got tired of blood and guts, especially because I was making only the minimum wage at about six dollars an hour. I had a big title with little money. I again asked myself, *What am I going to do with the rest of my life?* Certainly this was not the answer!

One night, while sitting on the couch at home, I saw a commercial for the US Air Force. I saw jets flying high above the clouds to the tune of “Off we go into the wild blue yonder” as a voice said, “Aim high.” I found myself lost in those clouds and thought, *I want to be a part of that!* So the next day, I scraped up about four dollars to buy some gas, got into my old Ford, and drove about twenty miles to the nearest military recruiting station, in Lawrence, South Carolina.

It was so hot when I pulled into the parking lot that I wiped my face and re-applied a little makeup before entering the building. I passed by the army’s office, the marines’ office, and finally the navy’s office. Opposite the navy’s office I saw the air force office. I felt excited and I couldn’t wait to board one of those jets I saw on television. I got goose bumps. But when I knocked on the door, no one answered and the door was locked. I was disappointed to say the least. As I turned to leave the building, I saw a guy in a clean all-white navy uniform with medals and insignia splattered across it.

He walked out of his office and signaled me with his index finger to come in. I was about to say no because I had never

thought about joining the navy, but he said, “Let me tell you what the navy has to offer you. Those guys in the air force office are rarely in, and you could come back three or four more times and you might catch them in. But we have a lot more to offer you. We can even offer you a way to pay for your college.” He extended his hand and introduced himself as Petty Officer Bob Griffin. I shook his hand and followed him into his office. And that was the beginning of my navy career.

Looking back, it is not so surprising that one door should be closed and another should be opened at the same time. I guess we all have experienced that from time to time. I guess that’s life. Some journeys end and others begin. Boy, what an amazing journey that started for me in that office that day! The recruiter scheduled me to take a military entrance exam. He got the results and said he was surprised. He said I had scored so high that I had qualified for every job the navy had to offer. He said, “Wow!” He told me that because of my college credits and my OR technology training, I would enter the navy at an advanced level. I could enter as an E3 instead of an E1. That meant a higher rank and, more important for me, more money. Yeah!

Within a week after walking into that recruiter’s office, he came to my home to pick me up for my physical exam and then to go to boot camp. It was a bittersweet day. My mother, my father, and my sisters were on the porch with me when the recruiter drove into the yard. He got out, grabbed my bag,

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threw it into the car, and said, "Hurry. I've got to put you on the bus to go to Columbia in an hour."

As I was hugging and kissing my family goodbye, one of my sisters said, "Don't go! Please stay with us." For a brief moment I was tempted to do just that, but I had come too far to turn around now. I told my family I would come back as soon as I could, but somehow I knew I would never return to that life again. I had every intention of coming back to that house, but it would not be the same because I was such a big part of what made that house a home. Everything would be different.

We were all crying as I got into the car and the recruiter drove out of the yard and onto the road that started me on a journey to the rest of my life. When I got to the bus station, he told me, "You're almost there, sailor girl. You are going to sail this world."

With a little attitude, I replied, "Yeah, I'm going to sail this whole wide world!" Two hours later, I was getting off the bus at the station in Columbia, South Carolina.

Chapter 2: The Training

Naval Training Center, Orlando, Florida, Boot Camp

When I walked into the military processing center in Columbia on my way to boot camp in Orlando, Florida, everything was rush, rush, rush. Go to this room; go to that room; take this test; take that test. Hurry up and get on the bus to go to the airport; take this package; here are your tickets—don't lose them! I was so tired when I got on that plane, but the adrenaline and the excitement took over.

I had never been on an airplane, but I knew this was the beginning of a lot of firsts for me. We arrived in Orlando at seven that night. By the time we got to the naval recruit training command base, had been processed, and had settled into our barracks, it was around 9:00 p.m. We were met by our company commanders. These three women had been in the navy from five to eight years and had firsthand knowledge of what lay ahead of us. They led us to our barracks and gave us our assigned bunks and lockers.

They gave us brief instructions about what to expect in the coming weeks and months. Our bunks were single beds, and we had to make them up every morning according to navy standards. That first night all ninety of us were running around in the barracks like chickens with our heads cut off. This was a

controlled environment but chaotic nevertheless. We got into bed about 11:30 p.m., but we had to say 2330 military time.

I told a few girls near me, “We can’t even use our own time. Boy, they are going to change everything we are used to.” They all agreed and laughed. Once I lay down and settled my mind, I began to doze off. Then there was an incredible furor. At about 3:30 a.m. someone flipped on the lights in the barracks, and I heard a loud, raspy female voice yell, “You got seven minutes to shit, shower, and shave and make it back on the line.” Everyone jumped up, ran to the head (the bathroom), and raced back to the middle of the floor in front of the bunks to get on line.

This event was shocking, scary, and fascinating at the same time. I’d never been awakened quite like that! Everything we did had to be done according to navy standards including the way we shined our boots, folded our clothes, wore our hair, brushed our teeth, walked, talked, marched, and ate. You name it, and there was a navy standard for it.

We had to march for drill training, march to the chow hall, march to classroom training, and march to medical and dental exams. Everywhere we went on base we had to march. Oh, did I mention we marched to march?

I managed to make it through boot camp, and with the exception of minor bumps and bruises and sore feet, I emerged unscathed, stronger, and more physically fit than I

had ever been in my life—all 132 pounds of me. I was ready to walk on any Paris runway and would have made any designer proud. I had it going on! My body was a brick house, fine and fit, waiting to be set on the firm foundation of life.

About ninety of us girls started boot camp together, and after three months we were down to about seventy-five. Some had gotten busted on drug tests, some had mental issues and could not adjust to being cooped up and monitored for three months, and some had other health and legal issues. But those of us who graduated knew we had made it through one of the most difficult and demanding times of our young lives.

I particularly remember Carla. She was my boot camp buddy. We relied on each other for support when we felt down and stressed. We all hugged and congratulated each other.

We marched in review before graduating in a beautiful ceremony on the base. Many of the girls families and friends, naval officers and dignitaries attended the ceremony. My family did not come because they could not afford it. But I did get a chance to call and chat with them.

The next day we boarded buses and went to Sea World in Orlando, where we had a blast on the rides and viewed the many sea creatures. And the day after that we received our marching orders to go to different parts of the world to continue our navy careers. What we had been through prepared us not only for our navy missions but for our

journeys in life, be they with our families or our friends or with the nation as a whole.

We were better citizens, more than ready to deal with the next chapter of our lives wherever the journey took us.

Naval Training Center, San Diego, California, A School

I boarded the plane at Orlando International Airport around 3:00p.m., feeling proud, with a great sense of accomplishment. With boot camp under my belt I was headed for my next adventure. I was happy and chatted it up with the other passengers. An older sailor who sat behind me said, "Sailor, you better watch it. You're a long way from that little town in South Carolina. You're part of a big navy and you're headed off into an even bigger world, so be careful!"

"Good advice. Thank you," I said.

I arrived at San Diego International Airport about 6:00 p.m. (it was a six-hour flight, but due to the different time zone it only showed three hours had passed on the clock). I took a bus to my training facility in San Diego with my sea bag and official orders in tow. I called home to check in with my family and to say I had arrived. We didn't have cell phones back then, and this was the first time I had spoken to family members since leaving boot camp. They did not have the money to attend my graduation at the training facility. I was sad about that but I understood.

I checked into the barracks and was shown the chow hall by two other girls. The chow hall was closed, but now I knew where to find it. I chatted with these girls during dinner at an on-base pizza parlor. Jenny was a nice girl from Denver, and Susan was a shy, petite girl from Houston. We chitchatted for about an hour and returned to the barracks. My lone barracks mate, Jessica, said she was sorry she was out when I arrived, but she was off base with a couple of guys from the men's barracks down the street.

When we were in boot camp, no males were allowed in our barracks, and we could not go on or off base with them. But A School was different. Men still were not allowed to enter our barracks, but they could come to the front desk of the building and inquire about the women housed there. We could go off base with them and talk to them on base. I told Jessica it was nice to finally be human again after the boot camp experience. She told me that her full name was Jessica Collins and that she was from a small town in Iowa. I told her that my name was Amalee Wise and I was from Tallwood, South Carolina. After that, we made small talk and went to bed. I slept like a rock!

I got up around five the next morning. This time became my new normal in the navy. I used the bathroom, showered, and checked into my school.

At the headquarters, which was about two blocks from my barracks, I met my instructor for electronics and electricity,

Mr. Guyet. He had brown hair, stood five feet six, and was slightly overweight. He was a civilian instructor hired by the navy. He introduced himself to the class, checked us in, and described the course. There were twenty-five of us in the class and only one other woman besides me—a good ratio, I thought. Mr. Guyet said the course would last six months but we would have a holiday break. It was already mid-November, and we were excited that we would be able to go home for the holidays. We were split into five study groups and were advised to get together to study at least two hours a night.

I got to choose the members of my group, and I picked what I thought were the best-looking men in the class. I admit I acted out of basic instinct, *but there is a correlation between looking good and being smart*, I thought. There certainly was in this class. All of the four men I selected were very smart. I kept my GPA at around 98 percent for the entire six months. School had always been easy for me. Teachers and classmates used to say I had a big brain.

The class ended around 4:00 p.m., and I teamed up with David, Justin, Larry, and Joseph. We agreed to meet in the study hall at around 5:00 p.m. each day after school but not that day. Since it was the first day of school, we needed to wind down and to eat supper. We said we would meet up at the base club, Planet Mariner, around five-thirty that afternoon.

I went back to my room at the women's barracks and unpacked my sea bag, which contained my navy-issued clothes, shoes, uniforms, and other personal items. I was still nervous and a little stressed, but it was all good because I was finally moving forward with my life. I had had a tough go of it back home for the last three years. I told my mom that when I returned I would build her a decent home. She said that would make her proud. She gave me a big hug the day I left, and so did my father and my sisters. We were all in tears that day. I told them not to cry for me but to pray for me as I made this journey into the unknown. All of them stood on the front porch as I drove away with the recruiter onto the road of hope and success.

I took a shower, got dressed, and was heading out the door when my roommate arrived. Jessica told me to wait because she wanted to join us. She threw down her books, took a shower, and got dressed in twenty minutes. We both applied a little makeup, which I borrowed from her. I hadn't had a chance to get any since graduating from boot camp, but she had come to the base two weeks earlier to start school. Jessica said that on the weekend she would show me where the Navy Exchange and the cool shops off base were. Realizing we had hit it off, we hugged.

"Come on," I said. "The guys are waiting, but first I have to call my family." She said she did too, so we went to the phone exchange station, a room with about twenty-five phone

booths. I was so happy to talk with my mom and the rest of the family, and they were glad all was going well. I agreed to call them the next day after school.

We headed to Planet Mariner where several of the students had already gathered. Everyone seemed to be happy, smiling, and laughing. Some were engaged in conversation, some were eating and drinking, and some were dancing to the vibrant music. All combined to create a magnificent sight. Here was a collection of the navy's finest young people—men and women, blacks, whites, Asians, and Hispanics. Most were fresh out of boot camp with beautiful bodies, beautiful faces, and beautiful attire. What an amazing scene! What an amazing feeling! I thought, *This nation truly is a melting pot. This place is like heaven on earth.*

When we walked in, two of the finest men I had ever seen immediately walked up to us and introduced themselves. The taller man, standing about six feet two, said his name was Barry. The other man said his name was Jose; he was about two inches shorter than Barry. These were two of the best-looking men I had ever seen. I thought, *Did heaven just open up and drop two angels down?* Jessica froze in her tracks. She was blushing with her mouth agape, her eyes so wide open I thought they were popping out of her head. I nudged her slightly, and she jumped as if snapping back to reality. We both said, "Pleased to meet you," and they said the same.

They asked if we were with anyone, and we said no. I told them I had some study mates coming, but I didn't see them. They asked if they could join us for the night, and we said, "Why not?" We grabbed an empty table. Barry winked at me and motioned me to sit near him, while Jose and Jessica sat down on the opposite side. We began chitchatting and getting to know each other. We all agreed we were hungry and ordered supper. After eating, we talked some more and danced several times.

Before we ate, some of the guys in the study group saw me and came over to the table. They asked me to sit at their table. I told them that I was comfortable where I was but that I would come over and chat with them later. I was having a blast with my newfound friends. As the years passed, I found that the whole navy community was just like that. It was always easy to meet people and to make fast friends. That night was the best time I had ever had in my life up to that point. In all of my twenty-two years, I had never felt so alive, so beautiful, so fit, so thankful to be me, so thankful just to be.

I made it over to my study group table and chatted with some of the guys in my class for a few minutes. I introduced them to my new friend, Barry, who came over with me. I knew how territorial men could be when it came to women, and I noticed my classmates did not feel comfortable with him since he was in another class. Barry noticed this too, so after about fifteen minutes, we returned to our table. I must have danced

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to about ten songs with about six guys that night. Jessica danced it up too. We agreed we were having a blast, but around 10:00 p.m. we both said it was time to go back to the barracks. We had had far too many drinks. They were hard to refuse since guys kept sending them over. The guys outnumbered the girls by four to one, a great ratio if you ask me.

We said goodbye to the guys we met and headed to the barracks. Barry and Jose asked to walk with us to the barracks, saying they wanted us to get there safely. We chuckled and said okay. When we arrived at the barracks, we walked to the side by a stand of evergreens. Barry and I got behind one tree, and Jessica and Jose got behind a tree beside us. They immediately started kissing.

Barry kissed me on my lips, and then we kissed long and hard. I had just finished boot camp and hadn't had any pleasure from the opposite sex for several months. We were hungry for pleasure, but I caught myself as I saw the base shore patrol approaching. We agreed to get together that weekend. It was hard to leave this man. My body cried out for more, but my head told me, *Say goodbye and get into the barracks.*

Jessica was all over Jose, kissing him in a deep, passionate embrace. I walked over and told them the shore patrol was coming. They broke up and we all said goodbye, agreeing to double date that weekend. It was Wednesday, but the

weekend seemed so far away. We said goodbye again and walked into the barracks.

Jessica and I went to our room. We were tipsy from all the mixed drinks. We washed up, chatted for a few minutes, and hit our racks (beds). It seemed that just as I dozed off to sleep it was time to get up. The alarm rang at 5:00 a.m. I jumped up, took a shower, and got dressed to go to school.

I was excited about learning the basics of electronics and electricity. Jessica and I studied in school and after school in our study groups. That Friday school ended at about 3:00 p.m., and I went over to Barry's barracks to see him and to discuss our weekend date. But to my surprise, before I entered the barracks door, I saw him on the side of the building, standing very close to another woman. They looked as though they were about to kiss. I was immediately struck with grief and anger. I ran back to my barracks and began to cry. I thought, *That bastard! How could he lead me on like that and tell me all of those nice things the other night if he already had a girlfriend on base?*

His apparent betrayal made me question the ability of any man to be honest in relationships. Were they all dirty, low-down bastards? Or was there something unique about me that attracted men who couldn't be honest or trusted? I harkened back to my life in Tallwood, where I had caught two men I dated, in compromising situations with other girls while we were romantically involved. Once you catch them they

always begin to lie. Surely I was not going to get myself caught up in a situation like that again!

If they all told me I was the most beautiful, the most charming, the smartest, and the sexiest woman they had ever met, why would they cheat on me with other women? The few men I slept with told me how much they enjoyed sex with me but said I did not share it often enough. I would tell them that my body was precious to me and that I did not want to wear it down before I got married.

So here I was again, alone, broken-hearted, and confused. But enough of the self-pity. I had an exciting navy career, and I had other friends who made my life interesting. I also had a mother and father who loved me. With all I had going for me, sooner or later I would find the right man, because I was Sailor Girl and I was going to sail this world.

Jessica soon came in and asked me why I was crying. I explained that I had seen Barry in a close-up encounter with another woman. She said Jose had not contacted her, so we agreed to get dressed and go out on the town. A messenger knocked on the door and gave us a note saying Barry and Jose were at the front desk and wanted to know if we would join them for a night out in San Diego.

“Oh dear. What do you think, Jessica?” I asked.

“I really want to go out with Jose,” she said.

“You go ahead,” I told her. “I am not feeling Barry tonight.”

“I’m not going if you don’t go,” she said.

“Go on. Don’t let my feelings about Barry spoil your fun with Jose,” I said.

“Nope,” she said adamantly. “I’m not going.”

She told the messenger to tell the guys we were not in the room.

“Jessica, you didn’t have to do that,” I said.

“Let’s get dressed and go to the Planet Mariner,” she said. “Then we can go downtown to shop, eat, have some drinks, and come back to the barracks.”

“Cool!” I said.

That night at the club a singer/DJ was playing all of the current hits. After having a snack, we had a few drinks and danced with a few guys. Then the DJ approached me and asked me my name. I told him, “Just call me Sailor Girl.” He said, “Sailor Girl?” Then he began singing a song that went something like this.

I met Sailor Girl when she came on the scene.

She was rocking them jeans if you know what I mean.

Sailor Girl

Sailor Girl, come and sail with me, and be all we can be.

Sailor Girl, rock my world.

Jessica and I laughed because his act was so funny. He exaggerated his voice, his facial features, and his dance moves to get a reaction from the audience. He slayed it, and we had a blast that night.

Since it was Friday, we had the whole weekend to ourselves. We planned to visit some beaches the next day and to sleep and study all day Sunday. We got dressed and went on our journey to downtown San Diego. We caught a bus at the front gate of the base. The bus dropped us off not far from the entrance to San Diego International Airport and near a main walkway. Shops lined the street.

“Let’s get a tattoo,” Jessica said. I said that sounded like fun, so we walked into a tattoo parlor. She got a dragon tattoo with flowers around it on her lower back. I got a red rose tattoo on my left butt cheek. It was beautiful, but the procedure was painful. Fortunately, it healed quickly.

We bought a lot of personal items—makeup, jewelry, and clothes—and continued to shop until we got hungry. We ate supper at an amazing Mexican restaurant. The food was delicious. We hit a couple of bars after that and had a few drinks. By this time it was about 9:00 p.m., and after fending

off several men who wanted us to spend the night with them, we thought it would be wise to start walking to the bus depot to head back to the base.

We got on the bus and arrived at the barracks at around 9:45 p.m. We unpacked our purchases and got ready for bed. We agreed we were very tired. I thought about Barry. Did he spend the night with that girl in some motel, was he back in his barracks, or was he still out on the town drinking and partying? All these questions about a man I barely knew. Still, I slept well that night.

The next day, Saturday, Jessica and I got up around 9:00 a.m., cleaned our room, and did our laundry. Though it was mid-November the weather was warm, and we decided to go to Mission Beach. We walked on the boardwalk and flirted with the guys there and on the beach. We decided not to change into swimwear because the wind was brisk and the water was not warm enough. Jessica was fun to be with and was a sweet girl, but I needed male companionship. We ate lunch at a burger restaurant and went to a mall. We returned to the base around 5:00 p.m. and decided to go out to the base club after putting our things away in the barracks.

When we got to the club we saw Barry and Jose. Barry was dancing with the girl I had seen him with at the barracks, and Jose was dancing with a girl I hadn't seen before. Jessica said, "Look, Jose is with another girl too. Now I know how you feel."

After the song ended, Jose came over and said he was excited to see us. Barry soon followed and said the same thing.

“I bet you are,” Jessica said.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Jose asked.

Barry said they had met the two girls about a month earlier and had gone out with them a few times. He said that those girls had dated several guys on base and that he and Jose were not interested in either of them.

The two men asked if they could sit with us, and we said that was okay. We found a table near the back. When we sat down, Barry asked what had happened the night before when he and Jose had come to the barracks to take us out. Jessica looked at me, and I said, “Oh, we probably were in the laundry room washing some items.

“Where did you go after that?” Jose asked.

“Since we didn’t see you guys, we went off base to the downtown area,” I told him.

“We went to check on you a couple of times, and then we went off base too,” Barry said. “So sorry we missed you girls.”

We talked some more and ordered drinks. Then we got hot dogs and French fries. The two girls the men had been dancing with came over to the table and asked Barry and Jose if they were going off base with the group. Four other guys were

waiting at the door for them. Jose said they had planned to get tattoos and asked if we would like to come along. I said we had gotten tattoos the day before and told them, "Have a good time, guys. See you later."

They got up reluctantly, and Barry said, "Goodbye. We'll see you girls later."

When they had left, Jessica looked at me and said, "Oh well."

I shrugged and said, "Yeah. We'll be okay." We had a few more drinks, danced, and turned in around 10:00 p.m. The next day, Sunday, we relaxed and ate snacks we had picked up. We watched TV and studied, and then we went to the chow hall to get supper. We were in bed by about 10:00 p.m.

The next week was incredibly busy. I got deep into my studies and learned a great deal about electronics and electricity. Subjects included Ohm's law, current flow, RF frequencies and promulgations, direct current, AC current, microwaves, and telephone communications. My main goal was to study hard and to pass my test with 97 percent accuracy. I passed with 98 percent accuracy.

I saw Barry on the base from time to time. We spoke briefly but went about our business. Most of us had to work through Thanksgiving week, but we were given plenty of short days to call home and to talk to our families. The base shut down for a two-week Christmas break.

The week before the break, Jessica and I along with my class study group—David, Justin, Larry, and Joseph—went down to Tijuana, Mexico. Tijuana is directly across the border from San Ysidro, California. After we got off the bus, the military liaison at the border took us aside and said, “Sailors, you are going into a different country. Be careful, be safe, and stay together.” We were told to be back before midnight because that was when the last bus left. With those precautions in mind, we walked across the border into the city of Tijuana and into Mexico. Wow! We were excited to be in another country.

It took us about fifteen minutes to get to the main shops and the bars. Along the way we noticed that the local people were poor and that some areas were shantytowns. But the people were friendly, waving and smiling. Some asked for money, and others tried to sell us food, flowers, souvenirs, and gadgets. We bought a few items and continued on until we got to downtown Tijuana. It was about 7:45 p.m. The four boys wanted to stop at the first strip club they saw. Just to be team players, Jessica and I walked in with them. The señoritas were young, beautiful, sexy, and very scantily clad. The guys were beside themselves with excitement.

Jessica and I told the guys we would walk across the street and shop. We said we would be back shortly and would not go too far down the street. The guys told us to be careful and to return soon. We said we would. As we were leaving, we saw the señoritas on stage approach the boys and do all sorts of

stripper maneuvers right above the guys' heads. The four of them were having a blast.

We went to a jewelry shop next door and bought earrings and then to a general store where we purchased more items. We returned to the strip club about 9:30 p.m. The boys were finishing up their drinks, and we agreed to go to another bar down the street. There I had a drink, and the others had a few beers and a few more drinks. We went to a Mexican restaurant and ordered a late supper. Then we headed back to the border. We were all tipsy, and two of the guys were downright drunk. They were throwing up and wobbling as we made our way to the San Ysidro port crossing. We got there about 11:15 p.m. and headed for the base. We all agreed we had had a great time. We returned to our barracks and went to bed.

The next week was short. We went to school for two days, and the base took a two-week Christmas break so all of us could go home to see our families. Thank God!

December 18, 1983, Home for the Holidays

I boarded a Delta flight at San Diego International Airport. After seven hours in the air, I arrived at Columbia International Airport in South Carolina around six that evening. I rented a car and drove an hour and a half to my home in Tallwood to see my family.

When I got home, I couldn't wait to give my mother a big hug. I had missed her so much. I also hugged my father and my sister Lisa. We were all jubilant. They asked all sorts of questions about the navy. After chitchatting for a while, we got in the rental car and went downtown to my favorite diner, Rickey's Chicken. I have traveled to many places, but I have tasted no fried chicken like Rickey's. After taking my parents back home, Lisa and I went to the local hot spot, Fun's Place. I had a chance to see some of my hometown friends and was the center of attention. They all wanted to know about the navy. After spending an hour or so telling them about my journey so far, I wanted to go home, take a hot shower, and rest.

Throughout the next week, I visited friends and relatives in Tallwood, telling them about my experiences and catching up on what was going on in their lives. My dear friend Patty told me that life was hard for her and that she wished she didn't have two kids so she could join the navy and be stationed with me. I spent the night with her and her kids, talking about the good times we had before I left town. She said she knew I had too much going for me to accept life in a place like Tallwood, where there were few if any opportunities to excel. "Amalee, you were always so smart and brainy," Patty told me. She said she was proud of me for defying the odds as a woman in the military. I thanked her and helped her pay some of her bills. I love that girl. I wished her the best with her kids and her life, gave her a hug, and headed home.

On my way back, I saw an old flame, Nic, at a gas station. He ran up to the car and offered to pump gas for me. He asked if we could get together that night or before I returned to school. I told him that when I stopped seeing a guy, there was no turning back. I asked a pointed question: if he didn't care enough for me to stop dating other girls before I left, what made him think I could trust him now?

He said that he was sorry he hurt me by cheating on me but that if I gave him another chance, he would show he cared deeply about me. He said I was all he needed in his life.

"Sorry," I said, "but I am moving on with my life." I shook his hand and wished him the best. I told Nic that I harbored no hard feelings but that he had failed to understand me and that I did not believe he ever could. "When I told you I demanded loyalty that's what I meant," I said. I reminded him he had broken my heart when I saw him around town with other women. I asked him if he realized how that hurt me.

Nic said he missed me and would prove how much he loved me if I gave him another chance. He said he was just experimenting to see if I was the best girl for him, and now he realized I was.

"I told you I would be gone after the second time," I said, "and now I'm gone. Goodbye. I hope you have a nice life." After pumping my gas, I got into my car and drove off. This encounter led me to write my first song.

I'll Be Gone

You've been running around all over town,
Talking 'bout the loving you've been laying down.
A girl over here, you've got a girl over there.
Ah, you got a girl just about everywhere.
Well, I know you, and baby you know me.
I'm gonna talk to you, honey, naturally.
You betta treat me right and stop a treating me wrong,
'Cause if you blink your eye once, baby I'll be gone.
Be gone, be gone, be gone, baby I'll be gone.

You say that your love for me is oh so true,
And you say that your heart will never turn blue.
Believing in you is a thing of the past.
If you want my love, you betta change real fast.
You betta, you betta, you betta treat me right.
You betta, you betta, you betta treat me right.

The Adventures of a Female Navy Sailor

You betta treat me right and stop a treating me wrong,

'Cause if you blink your eye once, baby I'll be gone.

Be gone, be gone, be gone, baby I'll be gone.

You'll regret the day when I walk away.

You'll regret the day, baby, that you treated me that way.

It'll be your loss, and you know that's no lie.

Ah, you won't miss your water till your well runs dry.

You betta, you betta, you betta treat me right.

You betta, you betta, you betta treat me right.

You betta treat me right and stop a treating me wrong,

'Cause if you blink your eye once, baby I'll be gone.

Be gone, be gone, be gone, baby I'll be gone.

Be gone, be gone, be gone, baby I'll be gone.

Be gone, be gone, be gone, baby I'll be gone!

When I got home I wrote the complete lyrics. Writing this song solidified my decision never to return to Nic. And I never did. I did not know what the future held for me and my love life, but I knew it wouldn't be holding him!

Sailor Girl

When I discussed this situation with my father, he told me, "Sometimes you think someone is hot shit on a silver platter, but a lot of times they are just a cold turd on a paper plate." I laughed at that saying and never forgot it.

It was the Christmas Holidays. We had a great time shopping, cooking, decorating and exchanging gifts. Being with my family reminded me of the old days, but I had changed. I was becoming a woman. Material things didn't excite me like they once did.

I was searching for a deeper, and a more fulfilling meaning to life. My family noticed it too. My mom said, "Look at my little girl, she's all grown up now!" It brought tears to her eyes, and to mine.

Before leaving Tallwood, I contacted my friend Helen, who had become a real estate agent. We had lunch together, and I told her that my parents worked hard to raise their children and that I wanted to build them a new house because they lived in a run-down shack that was not fit for habitation.

She said a lot of people in the area were taking advantage of a new FHA loan. She said she would work up an application and get back with me.

I asked for her number since I would be traveling all over, and it would be best for me to contact her. Within two years of

that conversation, I had paid off my parents' \$3,000 debt, and they were living in a brand-new three-bedroom brick house.

I left Tallwood the day after talking to Helen, boarded a flight in Columbia, and returned to A School in San Diego. I felt relaxed and happy, and I had peace of mind about my friends but especially about my family. I could not wait until my parents had a new home. It had become my mission to build my family, especially my mother, a nice brick home as soon as I could, and I had set this plan in motion. My mother said all the elders in her church had told her how special and blessed her daughter was to do this for her. She said they all prayed for me and for the success of my career in the US Navy.

It was now January 1984, and I had a new lease on life. I had escaped the mediocrity and poverty of life back home. I now had missions and goals, and I had a vehicle that could make them realities. In the US Navy you can sail as far as your vision takes you. Not only did the navy pay me a good salary, but all of my health care, dental, housing, and living expenses were covered as well. I was going to pursue every option available to me. I was going to be the best version of myself I could be, fulfilling all of my hopes and dreams in the process. I had developed an insatiable appetite to succeed and was determined to do just that!

Now my big brain was being put to use in a way that satisfied me. During the next four months I completed the electronics courses by studying very hard, going out only on weekends to

escape boredom. Because I did so well in my initial electronics training, I was given specialized training to service and operate the navy's new computerized telephone exchange system. Few people in the interior communications field had been given that special training, so I felt privileged.

Jessica and I had a few dates with Barry and Jose. One night in March, a month before I graduated, Barry informed me he would be leaving for his ship at the end of the month. He said he had received his orders to go to an aircraft carrier, the USS *Enspire* and would like to spend time alone with me before he left. I had fallen in love with Barry. However, I knew that we were at the school only temporarily and that we would soon be moving on to our permanent duty stations aboard ships, so I was reluctant to show my true feelings for him. I acted nonchalantly about our relationship. I had not received my permanent orders, but I knew they would be coming down soon. I agreed to go to a San Diego resort with Barry the following weekend. He said everything would be on him, but I said we should split the bill fifty-fifty, and he reluctantly agreed. We agreed to have lunch on the beach that Saturday. After that, we would decide what we would do.

The next week seemed so long. Each day felt like a week, and that week felt like a month. I stayed on base that Friday night and went with Jessica to the base club for supper. I told her I planned to spend Saturday with Barry. She said that she understood and that she wanted to spend time alone with

Jose. She had spent a couple of nights with Jose at local hotels, but I had never spent the night alone with Barry. I still was not sure whether I would end up spending the night with him, but I would definitely spend the earlier part of the day with him. Jessica stayed with some other girls at the club, but I was ready to call it a night. After watching TV for a while, I went to bed early, around 10:00 p.m.

I woke up around 8:00 a.m., took a shower, packed for a beach day, and did my laundry. I left Jessica in the room. She was sleeping heavily but managed to say “Have a nice day” when I returned to place my laundry on the bed.

As I was leaving the room, I said, “Thanks. You too.” I felt good and I dressed a little sexier than I normally would. I was wearing a white halter top with a pair of beige capris. I had my hair in an up ponytail with a bang in front. I wore light makeup with red lipstick. I sat on the couch at the front desk in the barracks, waiting for a handsome guy named Barry Grant to take me on a date.

Barry arrived at about 9:45 a.m. I was so glad to see him I rushed to the door when he walked in. He said, “Wow, you look good.”

I could see the passion in his eyes, and I am sure he could see the passion in mine. I said, “Thank you.”

We walked to the gate to get on the bus heading toward the ocean. We decided to take a cab the rest of the way to the Pacific beach resort. We ate a nice breakfast at a restaurant, and then we hit the beach. We had a wonderful time. The weather was warm, with a cool breeze floating over the ocean every now and then. We were in and out of the water. I had changed into a one-piece bathing suit, and Barry had changed into knee-length shorts. We mingled with people who convinced us to play a game of beach volleyball. Our team won, but we were worn out!

I was having so much fun that when Barry asked if we should get a room at the resort hotel, I quickly answered, "Yes, I'm exhausted," without giving it a single thought. Then I gathered my thoughts and considered the deep meaning of sharing a room with this man. But once I had committed myself, I would not change my mind. This man was beautiful, fine in body, mind, and spirit, and was absolutely awesome to hang out with. Since I was not ready to go back to the barracks, I needed a place to refresh myself and to relax.

We checked into the Crystal Pier Hotel. Before going to our cottage, we went to a bar and ordered steak and seafood for supper. We got sodas to quench our thirst and took the food to our room. Barry asked if I wanted to stay the night or just for a while.

"If we stay tonight, will you love me forever?" I asked playfully.

“Amalee, I am going to love you forever anyway,” he said. “You are a wonderful woman and a really good friend. How can I not love you? You are absolutely amazing!”

That warmed my heart. It was nice to see all of the beautiful people going about their tasks, entering and leaving the building, checking in and checking out. I felt we were part of the in crowd. These people and the exhilarating atmosphere made me feel vibrant. I thought, *Yes, I could be a part of this lifestyle forever!* Anticipating what would probably happen upstairs that night, I immediately heard these lyrics in my head.

If I Stay Tonight

I like your style, and I like your disposition.

I might stay for a while if you make a proposition.

If I stay tonight, will you love me forever?

And if we play tonight, will our friendship end?

For so long I've been watching you from a distance.

It's time to check you out, see what you're all about.

I think we both agree. Let's solve the mystery tonight!

I like your style, and I like your personality.

Sailor Girl

If I stay for a while, we could make it a reality.
If I stay tonight, will you love me forever?
And if we play tonight, will our friendship end?
For so long I've been watching you from a distance.
It's time to check you out, see what you're all about.
If I stay tonight, I know our love will take us higher.
And if I stay tonight, baby, we might start a fire.
We'll find the truth somehow. I think the time is now.
I thought I'd take a flip when I saw his lips as he said:
I like your style, and I like your disposition.
If you stay for a while I'll make a proposition.
If you stay tonight, I will love you forever?
And if we play tonight, our friendship will not end?
For so long I've been watching you from a distance.
It's time to check you out, see what you're all about.
I think we both agree. Let's solve the mystery tonight!
I think we both agree. Let's solve the mystery tonight!

We went to our cottage, which had a front deck. The room had a queen-size bed, a TV, a bar, a desk, a kitchen, chairs, and a table. Immediately upon entering the room, Barry pulled me close to him. We embraced in a kiss. My body needed this, my soul needed this, and my heart needed this, but my head was being stubborn and was not cooperating. This was a classic battle between heart and head. My body and my soul teamed up with my heart and left my head standing alone on the shore, still saying, “No, no, no. You’re going to regret this.”

We fell onto the bed in a frenzied tussle. Barry took off his shirt and began to help me peel off mine. I didn’t need much help. I was as hungry for this as he was, if not more! All of the juices in my body were flowing. We took off the rest of our clothes and got down to the business at hand: pure, healthy, heavily passionate sex between a man and a woman. It had been close to a year since I’d had sex. Barry was gentle, given the heat of the moment. We were locked in the grip of pleasure. It was amazing! It was everything I thought lovemaking could be but had never experienced until that night.

Here were two beautiful people, I thought, beautiful in body, mind, and spirit, sharing, giving and receiving pleasure.

When we finished, Barry gave me another passionate kiss and told me he would love me forever. He said this was the best time he had ever had with a woman. I told him it was the best time I had ever had with a man.

After that night, I met up with Barry at the base club a couple of times. Then February 15, the dreaded day, arrived. Jessica and I were crying as we said goodbye to Barry and Jose. We knew this day was coming, but it still hurt terribly. These were our guys, and we had shared so much together. Life can be cruel. The two men were both going to the USS *Enspire* because they were in the buddy program and were guaranteed to get the same duty station. We had no idea if we would ever see them again, knowing how one road leads to many others. Given all the peaks and valleys of life, if we did meet again, would we have the same feelings for each other? Would our desire for each other be the same? Would Barry still love me? I didn't know, but at that moment I felt loved. I felt his heart and his soul. I knew he loved me and would miss me badly. And he knew I loved him. Whatever might happen in the future, we had brought light into each other's world. And no one could ever take that away from us!

Jessica and I continued to go to school, and we sometimes went out, but we knew it would be a while before we got over Barry and Jose. We would often talk about them. We shared important details about our relationships. For instance, I did not know Jessica had told Jose she wanted to marry him. She did not know Barry and I had pledged to go on vacation together as soon as we could get leave at the same time. Within a month Jessica got her orders. She was happy, but she was sad that she had to leave me behind. This was a bittersweet moment for me too, but just as I knew I would

have to say goodbye to my family and to Barry, I realized this day was coming. I wished Jessica well, and we hugged and agreed to keep in touch.

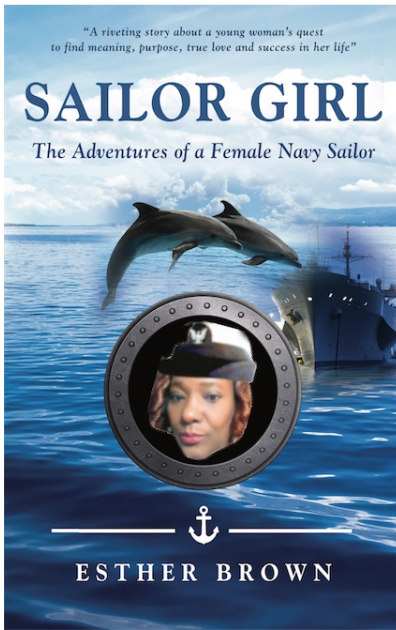
On April 15, 1984, I received my orders to the USS *Repair*, which was obviously a repair ship. The training I received in A School had prepared me to operate and to service the telephone and other communication systems, the ship's gyrocompass, other navigational and electronic systems on my ship and on other ships in the fleet. I had to say goodbye to all of my classmates, especially my study mates. We had gotten to know each other really well. We hugged and promised to keep in touch.

I was given a month's leave before I began my duties on the *Repair*. I went home to spend time with my family and friends. I also needed to wind down. I had a blast. Patty, my sister Lisa, and I went to Myrtle Beach. I told them everything was on me. The US Navy had paid me well, and I had managed to save what I thought was a small fortune. I had about \$6,000 in my bank account, and I thought I was rich. We stayed at a very nice Holiday Inn hotel conveniently located on the beachfront. We bought leopard print bikinis and jumped into the water. We got so much attention from the men that we thought we were Hollywood movie stars.

One night we went to a bar with three men we met. We ate supper and had a few drinks. We danced and partied until two that morning. We finally made it to our room. Lisa was

Sailor Girl

throwing up in the bathroom all night. We got a little sleep before the sun came up. Then we packed and I drove them home. After about two weeks in Tallwood, I flew back to San Diego.



After graduating from high school in a small SC town, Amalee Wise did not go to college. She graduated with an 'A' average near the top of her class. She works factory jobs but she needed more. She goes to the Air Force recruiting station to join, but the office is closed. She walks into the Navy office and thus begins her high-seas adventure!

Sailor Girl: **The Adventures of a Female Navy Sailor** by Esther Brown

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