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NJROTC Senior Essay

To say that being a part of the Lassiter/Pope/Kell NJROTC has been merely meaningful to me seems like such an understatement. I hope my written words, can do my feelings toward the program justice. In order to tell you what the program has done for me, I will first have to tell you about myself and life before joining NJROTC.

My family moved to Georgia four days before the start of my freshman year. It was a hectic way to begin high school. On the first day of school, I looked around and wondered what they fed the kids here in Georgia. You could say I was a late bloomer, basically five foot nothing, a little chubby and extremely timid. Academically, I was placed in all accelerated classes. Unfortunately, my out of state middle school didn't prepare me for the rigors of Georgia high school. In addition to having poor esteem due to my less than stellar physical appearance, my grades reached an all time low, failing two classes in the first semester. I looked all around the school trying to find a place to fit in, without much success. The jocks had been playing their sports together since elementary school, I never learned to play an instrument, and joining the partying crowd was just not my style. When an upperclassmen booked checked me: slamming all of my books and papers to the ground as I walked out of the science building one day, it punctuated my isolation. I knew I had to change something. I muddled my way through those first two years, never really finding myself.

Towards the end of sophomore year, there came the time in which students were to register for classes for the following year. I wandered into the media center pondering what elective to take. As I approached the Carcer Tech area, my interest was peaked when I saw a man in a navy uniform standing behind a table. When I was younger, I was addicted to the military channel and drawn to all things military. How had I missed this before? There was actually a class I

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could feel a connection to. I walked up to the uniformed man and shyly asked, "What is this thing called NJROTC, and what do you do in there?" The man said he was Captain Wilkerson and that NJROTC was an elective that instills the principles of Honor, Courage and Discipline into the cadets that take part in the class, so that they can be efficient leaders in either the military or in the civilian world. Honestly, when he said cadets and military, he had me sold and I immediately gave him my elective card, he put a sticker on it, it was scanned and I was in. I had no idea what I was getting myself into, but it was the first positive thing that had happened in a long time.

Junior year started early for me. I was forced by my parents to attend the optional NJROTC freshman orientation. I thought I was too good for it, because I was a junior and everyone else would be freshmen. Looking back I am so happy that I went. We were taught early to listen to orders, how to correctly maneuver on the drill deck, and how to properly march. By this time, my body had caught up a bit to the home grown Georgia boys, but I hadn't pushed it much. PT and all those character building push ups began to change my body and my self esteem. With a new sense of belonging, my walls began coming down and people saw me differently. Early on, a group of last year's seniors were looking for an extra football player and I surprised myself by volunteering. These guys have no idea what that offer to join them meant, or how they helped to bring about the change in me. They made me feel at home. They made me feel comfortable with myself and like I was, and am, worth something. The guys helped me along in the program. What they lacked in academic success, they more than made up for with heart. This showed me that it didn't matter who I thought I was, being a successful cadet is within anyone, who has the desire.

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them is lucky. To be around two men who are so dedicated to the work they do with and for the cadets is inspiring. They taught me that if I wanted to be respected, I would have to give respect. This helped a lot when dealing with my family who probably spent my first two years of high school trying to figure out what had happened to me. I learned about leadership and have tried to emulate them. Before NJROTC I would have never volunteered to speak in front of a group. I tried to fly under the radar as much as possible. Not only do Captain and First Sergeant not allow you to be invisible, they make you want to stand up and take charge. As a result, I have taken many leadership roles in the unit, have been a facilitator at numerous church retreats, and even took a chance on myself and for the first time as a junior and played on a high school sports team. This program has helped me find my voice and given me the confidence to be someone I can be proud of.

In the Fall, I will be attending the college of my dreams. This is a direct result of the influence of NJROTC, my fellow cadets, and the two men who I will never forget. They gave me a reason to want to go to school, to push myself in all areas of my life, to raise my personal expectations, to never give up when things get tough, like at Parris Island USMC Recruit Depot, or when life seems overwhelming. Not only have I learned that I have the ability to set the course of my life with my choices and that I have the power to change my path. I will show my gratitude by making a difference for others by seeking out and helping those who remind me of my old self, by being a successful college student, commissioning into the military, and by living my life with Honor, Courage and Commitment.