



Military Outreach USA

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FAITH, FAMILY, AND FINEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

"Every day is a great day! I have my faith, my family, and we live in the finest country in the world." Those who know me realize that this is my daily mantra, 24/7, 365 days per year. I have been truly blessed having been born in the United States to an immigrant Father from Japan and a Mother with Japanese immigrant parents. I grew up in the inner city of Chicago in the Logan Square neighborhood, a predominantly Polish/German/Italian area with virtually no minorities other than our immediate family. We were essentially a lower, middle-class family, did not own a home and my older brother and I shared a bedroom in the same 2 bedroom apartment we lived in from birth until we left home as young adults.

I never considered myself poor because we always had food on the table from our parents' retail gift shop business and our family unit was rock solid with our grandparents living with us for many of our formative years. Both our grandparents and parents were married for over fifty years. And, while inculcating a pride in our ethnic heritage, they always emphasized how blessed we were to live in the United States because of our freedoms and opportunities. And we especially appreciated our freedom to worship. Our local church, where my brother and I were both baptized and confirmed, was only three blocks from our apartment building, and our Sunday routine was, as a family to put on our Sunday best and walk together to church. My brother and I were raised strictly, held accountable, but we always knew we were loved.

In elementary school, I was a member of the church youth choir and was fortunate enough when I was 9 years-old to sing a solo on a TV religious hour program that appeared on the local independent channel. I also joined the Cub Scout Pack at my church and had my first exposure to Scouting's "For God and Country" motto which eventually became my life's theme.

When I became a Boy Scout, I attended the Boy Scout National Jamboree in Valley Forge, PA, in 1956 where I and 52,000 of my closest friends from all over the country and some international scouts joined us for over a week's outdoor camping activities. The visual theme of that event was the famous painting of President George Washington praying at Valley Forge. I was sponsored by an American Legion Post in Chicago to attend the Illinois Boys State convention in the summer of 1960. Once again, I had the opportunity to meet hundreds of highly-motivated and qualified boys, but this time sponsored by a military veteran service organization promoting patriotism and citizenship.

The Legion Post, by the way, was the famous Chicago Nisei Post 1183, comprised of mostly Japanese-American World War II Veterans, several of whom were from my church. Those men were my personal heroes, many having served with the famed 100th Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT) that to this date is the most highly decorated unit in the history of the United States Army for its size and time of service. Authorized approximately 4,500 soldiers, the 100th/442nd RCT was awarded over 9,000 Purple Hearts in 18 months of combat in the European Theater of Operations, and 21 members of that unit received the Congressional Medal of Honor. Their accomplishments were well-known among the millions of World War II veterans in our communities throughout the nation and opened up the doors of equal opportunity for subsequent generations of all Asian-Americans, such as yours truly.

In high school, I joined the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), and was trained for four years in military tactics, drill and ceremonies, marksmanship (we actually had a rifle range at the school), and, most importantly, learned important lessons of leadership, discipline, and



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teamwork while developing a sense of duty, honor, and country. At the same time, I was active in the high school Key Club (associated with the Kiwanis Club) as the Chaplain, and was the President of my church High School Youth Group.

So the seeds of serving my God and country were sown often throughout the early years of my life.

I should point out here two other factors that were huge in my life. First, I was a very, very good student. In fact, straight A's were the norm and my aptitude tests always placed me in the very high 90 percentiles. But although many of my peers were double-promoted in elementary school, I was never selected. So I decided to beat the system and I attended summer school in grammar school, high school, and graduate school, resulting in my graduating at 13 from elementary school, at 16 from high school, and having my Master's degree and Army Commission at the age of 21. I was the valedictorian of my elementary and high school graduating classes. Secondly, I was always the smallest guy in my class, never growing taller than 5'4-1/2" (proud of that 1/2") nor heavier than 125 lbs. Bottom line: I was always the youngest and smallest among my peers and a minority to boot so I had many obstacles to overcome, but I always had faith and family to encourage me and confidence in our American ethic of hard work and equal opportunity.

Regarding my experience as a minority, I did encounter racial prejudice being the only Oriental (that's what we were called then and it frankly was not offensive to me) in my church and school. December 7th was especially sensitive and I often avoided going out on that day in public. Having said that, people, especially in the Midwest, are overwhelmingly fair and friendly with strong values and our family was accepted by our neighbors. It is a basic dichotomy of America that one of our greatest strengths is also one of our greatest weaknesses and that is our racial diversity. But the benefits of the resultant unique culture reflecting the contributions by our new immigrant citizens far outweigh the negatives of the racial tensions and prejudice of those few intolerant members in our communities. There have been clear examples in my life where I was denied opportunities or treated unfairly because of the color of my skin, but I never played the "race card" because I always considered and dismissed the source and knew that the best way to respond was not to over react but to prove them wrong by excelling in my performance.

My initial plan in college was to combine my passion for God and love of the military to become an Army Chaplain, but some theological differences with my denomination precluded that from happening, so I concentrated strictly on the military career path. I basically majored in ROTC at the University of Illinois. There was actually no such major, but the university was my avenue to an Army career and I participated in every conceivable activity at the University involved with the military --- the rifle team, the drill team, and the National Society of Pershing Rifles and, also, the National Society of Scabbard and Blade --- while obtaining my B.A. in English Literature. I received my regular army commission in 1965 as an Infantry Second Lieutenant from the University of Illinois and my thirty-two year career wearing our nation's uniform began.

My experiences with the Boy Scout National Jamboree, Illinois American Legion Boys State, and my Junior and Senior ROTC experiences exposed me to meeting individuals from all socio-economic strata which prepared me for my leadership role dealing with the soldiers of the United States Army who are a reflection of our society and for nearly seventy years have benefitted from the Army's institutional leadership in our society by being in the forefront of equal opportunity for both minorities and females.

I was honored to be an infantry platoon leader in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in the Republic of Korea and as an infantry company commander in the Republic of Vietnam, serving with some of the finest Americans in our nation. I had great Non-commissioned Officers (NCOs) who made me look good and commanders who challenged and mentored me. After my five years of active duty and two combat tours, I decided to leave the Regular Army and joined the Army Reserves, being committed to continue serving my country. Fifteen years later, I had the honor of being promoted to the rank of Brigadier General and two years later became the first Asian-American in the history of the U.S. Army to command an Army Division (the 70th Division in Livonia, MI)

that was mobilized for Desert Storm in 1991 and served at Fort Benning, GA.

My civilian career after I returned from Vietnam was mainly in the financial services industry with memberships in the Chicago Board Options Exchange, the New York Stock Exchange, and the Midwest Stock Exchange and subsequently ownership in a national stock brokerage firm.

As a result of my various life experiences and modest accomplishments, I have had numerous opportunities to address various religious, civic, and veterans' organizations. Among my favorites are the school appearances. I recently addressed my high school alma mater, Carl Schurz High School in the inner city of Chicago and emphasized that the students needed to take advantage of the educational opportunity provided by our great nation by graduating. I further emphasized that our nation provides unlimited career opportunities for those with an education and willing to work hard. I therefore exhorted them to "complete and compete". I have also been a volunteer instructor for the Command Religious Program at the U.S. Navy Great Lakes Recruit Training Center Chapel for fifteen years. My purpose there is to provide the recruits with a spiritual foundation for the rest of their lives whether or not they stay in the Navy.

I have been personally blessed in my life journey with a loving and supportive wife, Kyung Ja (K.J.), since 1971 and a wonderful daughter and son. I have stayed active in my church, volunteer service activities, and veterans' organizations and four years ago left my financial services career and founded Military Outreach USA, a national faith-based, non-profit organization to serve our active military, veterans, and their families.

Have I had failures and disappointments in life and could I have done some things better? Certainly. But my relationship with my God has sustained me through the valleys of life and provided me with peaks; my family has given me understanding and encouragement; and my country has given me the opportunity.

After making a Veteran's Day presentation at a high school, I received a thank you note from one of the seniors who closed by saying: "I will keep you in mind for years to come. Every day's a great day. Faith, family, and living in the best country in the world." He gets it.

