

Emily DiNallo & Joshua Freitas

Army vs. Navy

By Jenna Caputo

Photos Contributed by the DiNallo & Freitas Families



Emily DiNallo and Joshua Freitas have known each other for 12 years. Starting as neighbors and schoolmates, they're now about to be military graduates, and both are runners for the big Army vs. Navy football game this month.

Growing up right here in Clifton Park, they were active kids. Emily liked anything outside—lacrosse, field hockey, alpine skiing, swimming, hiking, and horseback riding. Joshua was committed to rowing, hiking, and playing with Rubik's cubes. Their time at Shenendehowa brings back fond memories.

"I was on the field hockey, lacrosse, cross-country, and indoor track teams," says Emily. "I loved playing sports and spending time with friends when I wasn't playing sports. I loved the environment of Shen (especially my team cultures). I am big into building solid relationships with those around me, which I made an effort to do at Shen."

"My biggest time commitment outside

of academics at Shen was rowing. That was what took up most of my free time in high school," says Joshua. "Aside from that, I really enjoyed the Spanish class that Emily and I had together senior year. Our teacher was the mother of one of the kids I wrestled with so that created a really fun dynamic in the class. We went on 'class field trips' outside of school to different restaurants in the Capital Region that served food from other countries. It became something like a foreign culture club, and by the end of the year, the class was really close."

The idea to go into the military was inspired by other people in their lives. Emily often attended her father's class reunions at the United States Military Academy (USMA), otherwise known as West Point. She looked up to her father and thought it might be just the life for her as well, so she began the long application process starting in her junior year with the Summer Leaders Experiences (SLE). The SLE is

offered to 1,000 applicants all over the country. "I applied to this because it is an opportunity to get exposure to what being a cadet at West Point is like. I loved SLE so much—that is when I knew I wanted to be a cadet and serve in the military," she says.

The arduous process continued with an array of physical tests, medical appointments, and interviews. While not always easy, her experience at West Point has been memorable, and something that Emily cherishes—especially since she's been able to share it with her big brother, Anthony, who graduated from West Point last year. "We have a very strong relationship, so that was a pure blessing to have my role model near me to look up to and guide me through hard times," she says.

The relationships she has built there are ones that will stick with her forever, coupled with the memories of her accomplishments over the years, finally receiving their rings this past summer in celebration of senior year, and of course the football games every



fall. Her parents always come to watch and host a big tailgate for all her friends, teammates, and mentors.

At 14 years old, Joshua's friend put the idea of joining the military in his head. As he learned more about the military over the years, he became increasingly more interested, and eventually applied to the Naval Academy so he could reach his goal of one day becoming an officer. After extensive interviews and a similar application process as Emily, he finally fulfilled his dream and has enjoyed his time in the Academy and on the rowing teams. "There are bad days, but my close relationship with my teammates makes it really easy to get through them," he says. "A lot is asked of us at times, but ultimately, everyone here is better for that. I look back at the person I was at the beginning of my Plebe (freshman) year, and I am happy with the way that my experience here has changed me."

Each year in December, the two institutions face off in a friendly but competitive rivalry on the football field. The scope of the event reaches across the nation as the whole country celebrates the two military academies. The day leading up to the game, each Academy runs the ball roughly 150 miles over the 24-hour period directly onto the field for the opening of the game.

Joshua and Emily are both runners for their respective schools. The process is a little different for each of them. At Navy, this task is assigned to the 13th Company, which is a random group of midshipmen. "None of us are trained runners," says Joshua. "We break the distance into 10-mile legs and pass the ball off as we go. It

is run through the night, so the ball does not stop moving from Annapolis to the game. Because this is the last year I will run the ball, the members of my class in 13th Company will be given the privilege of running the ball onto the field before the game."

For Army, the task is assigned to the Marathon Team. Emily is excited to participate this year. "We divide the run up into two or three vans (depending on where the game is) and take shifts running with the ball all the way from West Point directly onto the football field. The ball never stops moving and absolutely never hits the ground. It is very meaningful to the school because it's a way to get all the cadets/staff/faculty excited to 'Beat Navy'! It kind of symbolizes the final push that we all have in the semester. The football team works so hard during the entire year, this is our big game, so having the corps cheering behind them is huge to build camaraderie and motivate them."

This year, the Marathon Team will do the run a little differently. In keeping with the message of the game, they will be stopping along the way at memorials commemorating the events of 9/11 and those that have fought and died in the conflicts that followed. The last five miles of the ball run are open to the public, and anyone that would like to be a part of the last leg of the journey to the MetLife stadium is welcome to join.

Whether at school or at "play," Emily is a very active person and still loves to be outdoors and with friends. During school, they are required to take eight Department of Physical Education



classes, which include things like military movement, boxing, combatatives, survival swimming, workout design, Olympic weightlifting, and strength development, as well as a host of electives they can add as well. Outside of school, she continues to run, play sports with her friends, hike, work out, and go into Cornwall or Beacon for brunch with friends whenever she can. As a people person, her friendships and family are high priorities in her life.

"The friends and family that I have in my life are the reason I wake up every day in such a good mood. To know that I get to see all these wonderful people I am surrounded by every day is such a blessing."

After graduation, she hopes to earn a slot as an Army Aviation Officer. Her goal is to fly a UH60M helicopter, but she's happy to



fly whatever they give her. Her true dream is to be assigned to the same duty station as her brother, who is now an Apache Pilot. “My brother has been my role model throughout my entire life. Anthony is the hardest working, most humble individual I have ever been in the presence of. He continuously impresses me with accomplishments and new hobbies/talents. To see how much his hard work and sheer determination have paid off make me so proud to be his sister.”

At home, Emily and Anthony live with their parents, Marybeth and Anthony DiNallo, as well as their dog, Ranger. Their whole family is into physical fitness, and Emily and her brother participated

in team sports since they could walk. Their dad would even hold them on a bar (pullup-style) and stand under them to see how long they could hang on. “The pictures of this make me smile and laugh so much,” says Emily. “As little babies, we were hanging on a pullup bar, SMILING! It is so cute!”

Those cherished family moments and support have continued throughout school, and Emily’s mother has been the foundation rock of it all. “Throughout my whole life, she has poured her heart and soul into our family, but it took me leaving home for West Point to realize the true scope of her kindness. Between the weeks of planning, baking, and

cooking that are required for hosting tailgates, to driving to West Point on my birthday just to have dinner with me, my mom has shown me what family truly means. She is the most generous, most selfless person I have ever met. I cherish every second I spend with my mother, as I aspire to one day be one tenth of the mother/support system that she has been for me. I know West Point tries to inculcate these values as well, but I can say with full confidence that it is my mother who has instilled that in me. My mother amazes me because she is always so happy, loving, and welcoming.”

Working as a cadet limits things, but Emily also loves to travel. She tries to



head to Florida to visit family whenever she can and recently was on a shadowing assignment in Seattle for three weeks and loved it. When home, her favorite activity is to run at SPAC and grab brunch afterwards at Iron Roost in Ballston Spa.

Joshua is a member of the Lightweight Rowing team at school. Recruited right out of high school, it has been a major part of his Academy experience. “I credit much of my success and development as a person over the last three years to the time I spent on the team, and I would like to thank my coaches, Shawn Bagnall and James Sands, for their mentorship,” he says.

When not at school or practice, Joshua likes to spend time with his girlfriend and teammates in downtown Annapolis. He also enjoys traveling, which was a key component to the appeal of the Navy for him. So far, he has most enjoyed his visit to San Diego, CA.

When at home with his mom and dad, Sharyn & Carlos Freitas, grandmother, Dorothy Cashman, and his brother, Jason, Joshua likes to hike the many spots around the Capital District and to sing along to every word of the Broadway musical, *Hamilton*. After graduation, he’s looking forward to becoming a Naval Officer and will be happy to work in whatever aspect the Navy feels he will

be most useful. Whatever that may be, he hopes to stay in close contact with the people he’s met during his time at the Naval Academy. “Maintaining relationships can be difficult once you go your separate ways from a service academy, but these are some of the best people I could have ever hoped to meet,” he says.

It’s the people that are the most important to Emily as well, and she’s especially grateful for the support of her family over the years. Whether it’s seeing them at her athletic events or knowing they’re there to offer advice whenever needed, their support is what gets her through every challenge and motivates her to do even better. “I want to highlight them and not just me, because as cliché as it sounds, I would not be even close to where I am today without them,” she says. “I look down at my uniform every day and see my nametape that says ‘DiNallo,’ and pure pride overwhelms me every single time. My brain gets flooded with gratitude and reminds me why I love to work so hard every day and that I am where I am because of my family. It just makes me so proud to be a DiNallo.”

While the two friends and neighbors may be on opposite sides of their schools’ field rivalries, they both have a similar attitude

about how to succeed. Emily’s mantra of “Where there’s a will, there’s a way,” and Joshua’s of “How you do anything is how you’ll do everything,” is a good reminder to always believe in yourself and keep moving forward.

As Joshua says, “People are often going to say you aren’t capable of doing the things you want to. That’s only true if you listen to them!”