A Servant on an Unsinkable Ship

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It was August of 1812. Dressed in a worn apron and carrying buckets of soapy water, I clumsily made my way towards the stern of the mighty ship, the U.S. Frigate *Constitution*. I had to complete my duties as a servant girl. The waves were strong, fiercely rocking the boat. The heat was relentless and beat down on the ship. Men were scrambling past me in haste. The air was thick with humidity and the spray of sea salt on this hot summer day. Even though the work was exhausting, I realized the privilege I enjoyed being present on this great ship and serving the men on it.

At the time, I was unaware of the importance of being on the *Constitution* and the impact it would make in the war. On August 19, 1812,4 an alert was sounded on board the *Constitution* that captured the attention of the Captain, Isaac Hull. There was a warship sighted in the

distance. As the *Constitution* pursued the ship, men were running on deck trying to prepare for the upcoming threat. I saw sailors restocking ammunition, loading muskets, and shortening the sails to prepare for the upcoming confrontation. I heard Captain Hull ordering the crew to lighten the ship by throwing gallons of water overboard, which would help the *Constitution* gain speed. The crowd of sailors on the deck prevented me from perceiving the danger that we were facing. Unable to push through the crowd of men, I climbed to gain a higher vantage point. I looked with dismay at the sight before me: the British H.M. Ship *Guerrière2*. Captain Dacres of the *Guerrière* must have regarded the situation with ease and confidence as it had already caused numerous problems for other American vessels. Many were looking towards the horizon, tormented with

the thought that defeat was inevitable. Suddenly, I hear a thunder-like noise unlike any other I

have heard before. The *Guerrière* had fired upon the *Constitution*. Men on the ship began calling

for a counterattack. However, Captain Hull ordered his men to be patient as the ship drew nearer. Many received this order with apprehension. The tension was palpable. All anyone could do was wait for the inevitable confrontation to occur.

Late in the afternoon, the *Guerrière* had used enormous cannonballs1 to attack the *Constitution*. The ship was violently thrust to the side, setting hundreds of men off-balanced. The cannonballs were designed to sink the *Constitution*; however, they miraculously ricocheted1 off

of the side of the ship. I heard someone yell, “Huzza, her sides are made of iron1.” Soon after, the

two ships became interlocked, and chaos ensued. Ear ringing shots sounded as both sides began to fire upon one another. Quickly, I sought shelter behind an overturned table. The air reeked of gunpowder, smoke, and blood. I saw people from both sides falling lifelessly to the floor. The ships suddenly lurched as they broke apart. Slowly, I crawled out of hiding to see the *Guerrière* in distress. The ship was severely weakened from the effects of the onslaught. Teetering in the wind, I saw the mizzenmast of their ship fall5 with a crash. The *Guerrière* was almost unrecognizable as the mighty ship it once was. I looked around the *Constitution* to see what damage it had befallen. The ship appeared unscathed. I was astonished to see that the ship was intact with no significant damage.

After recovering from his acute injuries, Captain James Dacres of the *Guerrière* surrendered on August 19, 1812. The *Guerrière* had suffered fifteen casualties,3 whereas the *Constitution* had only suffered seven causalities. Assessing the situation, Captain Hull deemed the ship to be unsalvageable, and the victorious *Constitution* set fire2 to the remains of the *Guerrière*. As I watched it burn, I thought about the battle that had just occurred. I realized how appreciative I was to the men who had fought to protect both the United States of America and

the ideals for which it stands. At that moment, I felt a surge of patriotism that I have never felt before. The events that had taken place that day had given me a renewed sense of pride to be an American.

On August 30, 1812,4 the *Constitution* had returned to port with over three hundred prisoners5. As the ship was approaching the shore, I could see huge masses of people trying to catch a glimpse of the now legendary ship. I could feel the excitement in the air as people were waiting to welcome the crew home. When stepping on shore, I sensed a difference in the demeanor of the general American public. It could not be denied that Americans had developed a new sense of nationalism and pride3 because of the *Constitution* victory over the British H.M. Ship *Guerrière*. I could hear people talking in the streets about America’s great naval power, calling the ship “Old Ironsides2.” Before arriving home, I did not fully realize the impact that the *Constitution* victory would have. The ship had truly boosted the morale of nearly all Americans. Looking back, I realized the importance of what I witnessed and the bravery of every man. Each person risked his life for the United States of America. As I reminisce on the days I had spent working on “Old Ironsides,” I will always remember how honored I am to have served on the U.S. Frigate *Constitution* and my pride to be an American.

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Biography

My current educational goals are to attend Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. I have worked hard all throughout high school to achieve my dreams of attending this university. I plan to study Kinesiology in hopes of becoming a Physical Therapist in the future. For me, there was no defining moment when I decided that my future lays in healthcare. My decision to become a physical therapist was far more gradual and considered. Looking back, a key moment that contributed to my decision was watching my special needs brother receive Early

Intervention physical therapy. His physical therapist often involved me in therapy activities, and

I recall how excited I was helping my brother’s balance improve and teaching him how to walk. I was fascinated with all the equipment and machines that were in the clinic and how quickly he improved with the recommended exercise program. I knew that to be a stellar therapist, I would have to achieve academically. Presently, I am about to graduate from Benet Academy which is a college preparatory high school in Lisle, Illinois. During high school, I decided to challenge myself and enrolled in honors and AP courses. Courses such as Honors Algebra, Honors Geometry, Honors Spanish, Advanced Algebra & Trigonometry, and AP Calculus AB have helped me grow in my study skills before attending college. I am also a member of National Honors Society and have maintained a 4.0/4.0 GPA throughout high school. Working hard in school has better prepared me better for the challenging college courses that lay ahead.

Throughout high school, I have immersed myself in volunteering with organizations such as Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) and Western DuPage Special Recreation Association (WDSRA), as well as school sponsored events. I also work seasonally at the Sea Lion Pool, teaching young children how to swim. I have been involved in clubs and organizations such as Spanish Club, Art Club, Current Events Club, and National Honors Society. My work ethic has allowed me to strike a balance, allowing me to excel both in my extracurricular activities and in my studies.

Apart from my studies, clubs, and volunteer work, I am involved with Varsity Volleyball and JV Soccer. I developed skills through my extracurricular activities that have served me well as I became the founder and president of SpikeBall Club at my school. The skills that I have learned in high school will continue to be useful in the future. In college, I intend on continuing to work hard to excel academically as well as stay involved through clubs and intramurals on campus. I am excited to begin my studies and look forward to the social and academic opportunities of college. My commitment and desire to become a physical therapist has been strengthened through my experiences with my brother, my volunteerism in the community, and my strong interest in my academic work related to the human body. By becoming a Physical Therapist, I would have the opportunity to help people on a daily basis. This would be an incredible way to dedicate my life towards helping people improve their quality of life. I intend to work hard in everything I do in order to achieve this dream.