

A Mom and an Officer

A woman executive officer of *Constitution*? Yes, in 1996, for the first time in history. But, as a mother and a student of sociology and psychology, Lieutenant Commander Claire V. Bloom had more than her gender to make her different from those who came before her. Instead of her three sons and a daughter, she had 60 men and women to discipline, support, counsel and train. She spent her busy days writing letters and reports, making presentations and working with her staff so that they could develop the skills they needed to succeed.

But Claire Bloom's life was not always so

interesting. Twenty years ago, a job that had started out with great promise had become routine. Should she just quit, as she had before? She sat down and took a long, hard look at herself. What was she going to have to show for her life if she kept job hopping? She had to find something that would hold her interest. One day she realized that she had always been interested in military service, and she set out to find the Army recruiting office in Dallas, Texas. Then fate stepped in. She got lost and wound up at the Navy office instead, where, as it turns out, she found just what she was seeking. Today Lieutenant Commander Bloom admits her job is not always easy, but she is never bored.

Making It Better

Young Joseph Wilson watched the traffic passing by his home on the main street of Belzoni, Mississippi. He noticed that his house, with its faded paint and unmowed lawn, was the worst looking place on the street. His father had died when Joseph was four years old, and his mother worked hard to raise six children, leaving her little time to maintain the house and yard.

The Wilsons lived on the side of town where only blacks lived. The town had two separate parks, two separate school systems, two little leagues, two separate worlds. But what could Joseph do about it? Looking for a place to start, he decided to begin at home. He mowed the lawn, and with the money his mother paid him, he

bought a can of dark green paint and painted the window sills of that little house, giving it a whole new look. Joseph knew he couldn't change everything, but he had dreams. "I wanted it to look better," he recalls. "I wanted to be something."

When Wilson joined the Navy, that "can do" spirit helped him climb rapidly through the ranks to chief bosun mate. In 1994 he was chosen from 180,000 sailors to be the Atlantic Fleet Sailor of the Year. During the summer of 1997, Joseph was command chief on *Constitution* or third in charge. His main responsibility was keeping morale high, "keeping everybody satisfied," he said. He chose his job because he thought he could make a difference in the lives of sailors, encouraging and prodding them to do their best, just as he had done.

GLOSSARY

- **indenture:** contract binding one person to work for another for a period of time
- **apprenticeship:** the commitment of a period of time a person is bound to serve another to learn an art or trade
- **diagonal riders:** thick planks of wood running on a diagonal along the inside of the hull from the keel to the beams of the berth deck to keep the ship from twisting out of shape or sagging in the bow or stern.
- **loader:** member of gun crew who shoves the powder cartridge and ball into the barrel of the gun
- **Ottoman Empire:** vast empire that stretched from modern day Italy across the Middle East, centered around the Black Sea, which flourished from the late 13th century to 1924



Portrait of Josiah Powell
By A.E. Burt, 1895 / Courtesy US Navy/
USS Constitution Museum, Boston