

# Carolyn Morgan: Building a Family Legacy of Service While Blazing Her Own Path

Military service is in Carolyn Morgan's blood. Passed down through three generations, she shares a tradition of service in the U.S. Air Force with her father, Julius, and her son, Joseph, all who – at one point in their careers – have served at Truax Field in Madison.

But when she joined the military, Carolyn's father wasn't quite ready for her to follow in his footsteps.

"I joined because my mom and dad said we either go to school or get a full-time job. I tried college and had four jobs and it wasn't really my thing," said Carolyn. "My dad didn't want any of us going into the military unless we went in as officers. But I just went ahead and went down to join. I remember my dad, right before dropping me off at the airport, saying 'you know you don't have to go, kid.'"

When Carolyn first joined the Wisconsin Air National Guard in 1980, she was one of the first African American women to enlist with the 115th Fighter Wing. In 1985, she started active duty and was sent to her first duty station in Misawa, Japan, then later to Sumter, South Carolina. She says she faced discrimination both as a woman and – like her father – as a person of color.

"My dad was in the service when there was still segregation; the barracks were still segregated. And for me, at the time, women couldn't serve in the Security Forces. Now women can be in most of the jobs that are out there, where we couldn't be before. It's evolving, it's getting better, but we're still looking at a lot of firsts."

Carolyn continues to find herself in the position of being one of those "firsts." From 2018 to 2020 she served as the first African American female commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8483 in Madison. She says she has advice for others who are breaking similar barriers: "Just keep going and ignore all the nay-sayers before you and after you. People are always going to talk about you, but the good thing is that if they're talking about you, they're leaving somebody else alone."

One of the newest branches of the family tree, Carolyn's son, Joseph, also served in the Air Force.

"He could have done anything, and he went in and became a crew chief. I was just so proud of him because my dad also started out as a mechanic on the airplanes. He just loved airplanes. So, the three of us could talk about stuff that nobody else could. We all had a little bond there."

Will there be yet another generation of Morgan family veterans? Perhaps. But for now, Carolyn is paying it forward by being an example to other trailblazers, much like she did when she first returned to Madison and mentored girls at La Follette High School, letting them know that "hey, we're here to help you see that there's other things that you can do besides just going to college or becoming a mom. And we showed them that we had wonderful careers in the military."

Carolyn Morgan, along with her father, Julius; mother, Verona; and son, Joseph McGonigle, were recently featured in a mural on the walls of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum.

"I cried when I saw it. I thought it would be me, my son, and my dad. But the artist wanted to feature my mother as well, and it makes sense. She's such an important part of our military family – the mother, grandmother, and wife," said Carolyn.

If you look closely, you'll notice the mural includes lyrics. Those lyrics, from a song by the musical group Take 6, are a tribute to Julius Morgan, who passed away last year. He often included the song at the end of tapes he sent Carolyn while she was deployed.



WDVA Secretary Mary Kolar thanked Carolyn and Verona Morgan for their participation in the Wisconsin Veterans Museum's mural project, depicted behind them. Portraits by Air Force veteran Shawn Ganther of Chili, Wisc.



The artwork is part of a collaboration in which The Veteran Print Project worked with veteran artists and the local veteran community to develop and produce murals that extend the stories of Wisconsin veterans from the inside of the museum to the street level surfaces of the building. The murals honor Wisconsin veterans with the aim of raising awareness of the contributions of veterans in our communities, even once their military service ends.