

# FROM THE MEAN STREETS OF MIAMI

STORY BY BETH IPSEN, PIO



Alaska State Trooper Captain Tony April

Tony April was raised in one of the roughest cities in the nation. There weren't many paths leading out of the mean streets of Miami. Instead, most of them led to gangs, drugs and a life of crime.

So how did this sixth child of 10 kids end up in Alaska? More importantly, how did this man, who grew up with a distrust of law enforcement, become an Alaska State Trooper?

He remembers white police officers addressing African-Americans as "boy" and would spout racial epithets. "Everybody in the community was treated like a criminal," April said. He also remembers that once, while driving around with his wife in Virginia, he got pulled over for what he feels was no other reason than because he was black.

However, there was one officer in particular, a white officer, who treated people with respect. This officer left a lasting impression on April that wasn't immediately evident at the time, but is probably one of the main reasons why April is an Alaska State Trooper today.

"That respect goes a long way," April said. It's that respect that he aspires to pass along to people he has dealt with during his 17-year career, especially when visiting remote villages that may not always be happy to see a trooper.

April joined the Army as a way to escape Miami

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and see the world. Since he was raised in a loving home with great parents that believed in teaching their children discipline, hard work and respect, April easily adapted to life as a soldier. He eventually made his way to Alaska as a soldier at Fort Richardson outside Anchorage, the largest city in Alaska.

"At first, I didn't like Alaska," he admitted. It was cold and dark. In some parts of the state, it can get as cold as -70. In the northern part of the state, the sun doesn't show itself for 65 days.

"Change does not come without challenges and not every challenge is pleasant," he said. He still managed to make the most of his time in Alaska. That's where he met his wife of 27 years, Lisa.

After his three years of service was up, he separated from the Army but continued to serve in the Army National Guard. His wife, who was still in the Army, transferred to Virginia and April enrolled at Virginia State University. It was during this time that his guard unit was activated to provide security during the Greekfest Riots at Virginia Beach in 1989. He said rioters taunted him and fellow soldiers of his predominately black unit, calling them traitors to their own race.



Tony April's wife, Lisa, pins his new badge on his uniform after he was promoted to captain on Sept. 7, 2012.

After a year of college, life had other plans for the Aprils and he opted to work to support a growing family. The family, now with two daughters, Toya and Ashley, eventually transferred back to Alaska. He also transferred to an Alaska National Guard Unit. While serving his country, he discovered he was destined to become a law enforcement officer. That happened in 1997.

“I became an Alaska State Trooper because my desire to serve is strong. I wanted to serve people, to help them, to protect those who cannot otherwise protect themselves,” he said. “People who get into law enforcement like serving people. I don’t think people realize that.”

April’s military experience translated easily to his life in law enforcement. He has steadily climbed the ranks, working in different areas around the state including as an instructor at the training academy and three times in Bethel, a remote hub community. Troopers in Bethel provide public safety to 56 villages which are predominately Alaska Native and like Bethel, are only accessible by plane, boat or snowmachine. Getting to know the community is crucial when working in remote villages. It takes time and



effort to gain the trust of the villagers. It also takes a lot of respect in order to receive respect. April has worked hard at this. While attending community potlucks or fiddle festivals, he would eat some of the traditional food such as moose, caribou, seal oil, dried salmon sticks and *Akutaq* – berries mixed in with sugar, and vegetable shortening. He drew the line at fermented fish, also known as stink head soup.

It was his way of gaining trust by showing his trust in the villagers.

April is now a captain at headquarters in Anchorage. His daughters are grown – one works as an account executive in Florida and is married to a veteran who served a tour in Iraq and the other graduated from West Point and is seeking a medical career alongside her duty as an Army officer. Most of April’s day is now spent on administrative duties and ensuring that his fellow troopers get the support they need for their well-being. This peer support has become his passion.

“Success is measured not by a lifetime of achievement, but by the positive impact you make on the life of just one other person,” he said. 🏆

**At right: Tony April leads the formation at Alaska Police Memorial Day in Anchorage on May 10, 2008.**

**At left: Capt. Tony April, DPS Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Coordinator Randi Braeger and Capt. Andrew Merrill jump into Goose Lake in Anchorage on Dec. 20, 2014 to raise money for Special Olympics Alaska. Afterwards, when April was asked how it felt, he didn’t mince his words. “It’s cold!” he vehemently said. “It’s really cold for a Floridian.”**

