

## A Family Portrait

# STEPHEN McCALL

Stephen McCall wears three hats: Deputy Branch Chief in the Defense Department; minister and graduate student. During his military service he received the Kosovo Campaign medal, among other Air Force honors. He's an avid athlete, playing tennis, basketball and averaging 200 in bowling. He founded the TSA Ft. Walton/Pensacola Counties Support Group before moving to Virginia, where he is a support group leader for the Tidewater Region TSAGW Chapter. Currently, he is writing a book about a young boy with TS.



### Please tell us a little about your life as a minister and your work for the Department of Defense.

My weekends are for church but during the week I manage six programs at the Defense Department totaling \$6 billion. The programs involve GPS Satellites, Air Combat Command, etc. I have to understand some of the technology but my basic knowledge is the management of the systems and the engineers. I have to understand the location of the satellites, their capabilities and who can communicate with them. As for the technical aspects of launching them — I don't get into that. I do have to make sure that they launch on time because if not this affects the platform for the air combat command and we might not be able to meet our mission.

I got my minister's license in 2002. I run youth revivals in different churches, playing the keyboard and preaching to young adults. I'm a trustee at my church, do bible study and outreach in the community. I also travel a few times a year. I've been to South America and to Holland, France and Germany as a missionary.

### Has TS had an impact on your work?

I was in the military for three and half years during the Kosovo War at Aviano Air Base in Italy. The military didn't know about my TS as I was in denial about it. But the stress brought out my symptoms like when I was child. I was working 60/70 hours a week, six days a week in 12/15 hour shifts and I needed a medical discharge but I was afraid they'd say I should have said something earlier about TS and I'd be sent to jail. I didn't have my medical records so I had been hiding medical information from the military. I thought they say I'd lied.

I didn't realize that it wouldn't have happened that way but I had wanted to be a pilot and gotten an ROTC scholarship and made it through basic training and officer's training (without a word about TS).

They just thought I had an eye twitch. I got through it all. I don't know how.

I did get a medical discharge but not for TS, for leukemia. I got the discharge right before I would have become a lieutenant. They said I wouldn't have a normal life that I'd be sick all time, but I'm not and I live a very active life.

I decided not to tell my job about my TS. I still suppress my tics during briefings. As a senior civilian I have enough trouble with my age (29) as most of my peers (civilian employees) are in their late 40s to 60s. There's enough stress being young.

It can be a high stress job and it (TS) can get bad but when I'm at work I suppress it and then I go to my own area. I let it out in private. I think that TS affects me while I'm trying to learn something for my job. Sometimes when I'm reading my attention span is just not there and I have to read it over and over again, taking a long time and concentrating.

### What are your plans for the future?

I was just accepted into the College of William and Mary for my Master's in Education. I'm going on a Ph.D. track, starting my research early. I don't want to get anything for my disability or for being black. I want to be like everybody else, so no extra time for writing my essay and I was happy that they didn't want me to take the tests again with extra time. I want to be accepted for who I am.

### When were you diagnosed with TS?

Around the age of nine I had eye blinking and my mom thought it was just a childhood tic. But then it went to facial grimaces, motor and vocal tics and then the coprolalia started. Once that came up she took me to doctors and the second neurologist looked back at my history of tics and said it was TS. I took medication when I was 14 or 15 but it made me sleep.

My mom wanted me to join TSA but I

decided to suppress my tics. From age 15 to 25 I acted like I didn't have it. I'd blame it on an allergy, I'd try to use other words when I had coprolalia and echolalia. I had eye twitches, facial tics, head jerking and barking on and off, too.

I don't think I've lasted a day without twitching. The most I've gone is a couple of hours. But when I preach or teach, I have been told that I don't tic at all.

### How did your family react to your diagnosis of TS?

My mom was a great support to me. When I'd tic she would get closer to me not farther away. She was never embarrassed. Other people, including my dad, were embarrassed by it. My father would tell me not to bark or twitch. This added to my stress.

### What would you like to say to kids with TS and their parents?

As a kid I was under the impression that I was going to be nothing. So I'd say don't let TS hold you back; you can be a doctor, a lawyer, the president or the manager of a billion dollar program. TS has actually helped me in my life. I've pushed further because I didn't know I could do all this. I encourage parents to support their kid's ambitions. Let them at least try.

I graduated from high school with a 2.0 and received very low ACT scores. A lot of this had to do with being on medication and sleeping my life away. I think the medications have come a long way since then. Even though I still opt not to take medication, I'd rather just deal with the tics. Keeping busy and always having something to do hardly leaves any room to even think about tics.

I wish I would have listened to my mom when I was a teen and got involved with TSA because I could have reached so many people now. That is one of my main regrets. If I had all these role models when I was growing up, I probably would be on the moon right now or the next President.

