

Navy Lt. Peggy Low joined the Women's Army Corps in 1975 to be a drummer in the band. It turned out there wasn't a band, so she spent the next three years as a nuclear, biological and chemical warfare instructor.

Today, she's the chaplain for Training Air Wing Six and the Blue Angels-and she's also a puppet master and ventriloquist.

Low wasn't too happy with her job in the Army, so after her first enlistment she left the military, got married and had a daughter. And during those years she owned a golf course in Salem, Ore.

She was also a licensed minister, but she wasn't ordained, so she worked as a volunteer with children and youth ministries. "I went back to school when my daughter started school," Low said. "I wanted to be an Army chaplain."

Low earned her bachelor's degree and in 1994, entered the Army National Guard as a chaplain's assistant and became a chaplain's candidate while attending seminary.

Finally, she completed the Army's Chaplain School-and was told she couldn't be an Army chaplain because she had passed the age limit for an active-duty chaplain-but she could be a chaplain in the National Guard, so she did.

"A Navy recruiter called me and said I wasn't too old for the Navy."

Her full-time job was as an associate pastor for a church and it worked out that at the same time the Navy recruiter offered her a job, the church she worked for was going to have to eliminate her position because of funding problems, so she joined the Navy in May 2001.

"I really wanted to be an Army chaplain, but that door slammed shut," Low said. "I never thought about the other branches."

## **Puppets**

"The reason I took this up (puppets) was that I became a children's pastor at a church, and I wanted a way to reach the kids," Low said. "'Sesame Street' is fast-paced. The old flannel boards don't work any more. I knew I had to come up with something fast-paced."

The chaplain said she attended a Sunday school teachers conference. At the conference someone was using puppets. Low said, "I've got to do that. I was real excited.

"I went home and ordered myself a puppet, but no one would teach me. I ordered a home study course (for ventriloquism). It took me about six months to get through it, but after about three months I practiced on my daughter's day care."

She said NAS Pensacola Command Chaplain Capt. Jefferson Atwater heard about her ventriloquism, and told Capt. John Pruitt, NAS Pensacola commanding officer, about it.

Capt. Pruitt helped her get in at Sacred Heart Children's Hospital and "that's where this whole thing got started. It just took off by word-of-mouth from there," Low said.

Low's "team" mostly consists of Corky, a goofy multicolored bird; Nancy, a ventriloquist doll with long, blond hair; Grandma the magic drawing board, complete with eyes and mouth that move; and a brass bottle, home of Charlie the bottle man (she throws her (Charlie's) voice into the bottle).

The chaplain likes to use Grandma to teach Bible verses to children. Low said Grandma doesn't hear well, so she makes mistakes when she quotes the verses. So the children have to keep repeating the verses to help Grandma learn them. By the time Grandma gets it right the children have them memorized.

Low performs about two shows each month at the children's hospital and afterward she takes the show from room to room for children who are bedridden and can't attend the main show.

Low's Team performs at vacation Bible schools; children's church, youth ministries and other church activities; Christmas parties; public schools; and she even uses them in her portion of the naval flight officer indoctrination at Sherman Field. "I've had to be very pluralistic," Low said. "I work with Protestant, Catholic and Jewish kids."

She is also teaching a group of Catholic children how to perform puppet shows.

As part of her Navy chaplain duties Low also holds a Bible study each week at the brig, she does the blessing of the wings for pilots and preaches at the command chapel on certain Sunday's and performs wedding ceremonies.

When she performs in public schools her focus is anti-drug and stranger danger.

Low likes to take her team beyond the front gate of NASP. "The community gets to meet a chaplain and see we're just like everyone else," Low said. "We all have different gifts and talents that we can use for the ministry. It lets the Pensacola community see what we do. We're not just at the chapel for Sailors and adults.

"There are only 57 women chaplains in the Navy," Low said. "Had it not been for the Navy and the age thing, I would have stayed in the National Guard. So I figure there was a purpose for the way it worked out and the way these other ministries have worked out.

"My goal is to get out there and do as much for the community as I can. It's always fun to get out there and get kids to smile. Puppets are a lot of fun, and they can reach kids. It's unbelievable how much attention kids pay to puppets.

"When I first got here (NAS Pensacola) I thought I would minister to Sailors. I thought my puppet ministry would be a thing of the past. I didn't realize there would be such a big need.

"Wherever it goes from here, who knows."