

## Turning Adversity into A Driving Force

Eleanor Thompson

MPA, Columbus State University 1997



*“It is no use saying, ‘we are doing our best.’ You have got to succeed in doing what is necessary to share your knowledge and build upon the knowledge of others.”*

At the age of 16, Eleanor was a homeless teen, on her own, after her mother’s marriage broke down. All she had was a couple of hundred dollars in a bank account and a job. Eleanor learned at a young age to work hard; it took her a bit of time to work smart. She was a married young mother, at the age of 18 to an Army Soldier, it was during this time that Eleanor started attending night school- this was a time when education wasn’t easily accessible. It is rare for a woman to achieve what Eleanor has achieved, given her circumstances.

Eleanor’s connections to the Army at Fort Benning are what brought her to Columbus, at the time Columbus State was going through the process of becoming a University. Arriving at Columbus State as a transfer student, Eleanor was taken aback by the personalized attention she received from the faculty. She recalls her first meeting, in setting her degree program, with the Sociology Chair, Dr. Horowitz and stated, “I was shocked and pleased with the attention.”

Columbus State’s diverse faculty brought practical, real-world experience, as well as theoretical academic application. “It was about learning,” learning how to work hard, work smart, add to your breadth and depth of knowledge, and to research and write. Columbus State had so much talent to be learned from. Archie Rainey organized and pulled in many partners and subject matter experts for the justice programs, such as courses from the Georgia Bureau of Investigations. All classes were in person, the curriculum kept moving, and was relevant.

“The attention to detail and critical thinking skills I learned while at Columbus State have served me very well.” Eleanor received an MPA with a focus on justice administration in the fall of 1997. Dr. Terry Norris and Dr. Bill Chappell were her program leads. That year, Eleanor helped in the Career Center and ran a program for youth mentorship in local schools called *College Bound for at Risk Youth*. This program, sponsored by local businesses, provided stipends for students.

Eleanor’s path to where she is now, and her accomplishments, started at Columbus State University. With her degree focus, the committed nature of all the faculty with a high level of attention to detail, and Columbus State’s Job Center, on campus. While she was a junior, Eleanor obtained her first justice-related, full-time paid position with benefits. She also did a lot of volunteer work for the Red Cross as a Training Instructor, as well as a responder for Columbus Rape Crisis.

During Eleanor’s graduate degree program, she found an advertisement for the U.S. Coast Guard at the Columbus State Career Center. She applied and received a commission as a U.S. Coast Guard Officer shortly after her MPA graduation, and “although my [active military] service was not career length,” Eleanor remained with the Coast Guard as a career civil servant.

Eleanor's career with the federal government has been an exciting one, where she has traveled the world to advance global transportation safety and security requirements with a Maritime focus.

Starting first as a Communications Officer onboard a [Coast Guard] cutter with a primary focus of drug interdiction, and then implementing a personnel incident response structure on the east coast, a response structure used for the 9/11 response in New York.

She then transitioned to international affairs, serving as a delegate on several occasions to the International Maritime Organization, a specialized agency of the U.N. Eleanor also developed Strategic direction for multi-mission operations in the Caribbean. All the while, ensuring that interns had opportunities for growth in this area with the Washington Center in D.C.

From there, Eleanor was part of the transition team, shifting into the newly created Department of Homeland Security. She worked very closely with the Transportation Security Administration on National Critical Infrastructure Protection, which included a focus on reducing risk across physical, cyber, and human elements. Eleanor supported the H1N1 Pandemic response in 2009 within this structure, the results of the sector advised the President during this critical time.

Continuing with Critical Infrastructure Protection, Eleanor had much interest in the new area of cybersecurity. She continued her academic study focusing on insider threat, specifically unintended, as there was a significant gap in the knowledge. Using this knowledge, Eleanor initiated the change in the Coast Guard in the area of cybersecurity, creating their first Cyber Strategy, and launching the first known response structure using Incident Command System (ICS) to respond in 2015 during the federal Cyber Sprint. From this, Eleanor transitioned to supporting the Chief Information Officer, where she continues to work.

In a different area, Eleanor is now focusing on accessibility in the agency's technology revolution. One thing that has always carried with Eleanor from Columbus State is "to do it well using the tools you are given." If it isn't perfect but does the job – that's ok too. Also, "to share your knowledge, and build upon the knowledge of others."

Recently Eleanor's book "*The insider threat; assessment and mitigation of risks*" was published, and it is available online at most booksellers. The book goes into greater detail about insider threats, especially unintended insider threat and what can be done about it. It is being published in Arabic in 2021, and the paperback should be released soon. It's also on Kindle.

### **Eleanor's Achievements**

Book Author, *The Insider Threat; Assessment and Mitigation of Risks*, 2018

U.S. Coast Guard Commandant's Superior Service Award, for Cybersecurity 2016

PhD Public Policy and Administration 2014 with Honors

Co-author to National Infrastructure Protection Plan (series)

Co-author to U.S. EU Declaration on Terrorism, signed by President GW Bush

U.S. Delegate for Council, Assembly, Technical Cooperation Committee, IMO 2001-2005

U.S. Delegate (various Asian-Pacific nations) promoting Homeland Security 2002-2004

USCG Commendation Medal 2000

Communications Officer, USCG, USCGC NORTHLAND (WMEC-904) 1998

MPA, BS, AAS 1996/1997 CSU