WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: LaDansa Hailey Ussery

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 11 August 2015

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is August 11, 2015. My name is Therese Strohmer. I'm at the home of LaDansa Us—

LU: Hailey Ussery.

TS: —Hailey Ussery, and I'm in Cary, North Carolina, today to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. So LaDansa, could you state your name the way you want it to read on your collection?

LU: LaDansa Hailey Ussery.

TS: Okay. Well, why don't we start off by having you tell me a little bit about when and where you were born?

LU: I was born in New York City back in 1967. My mom and dad were, in a way, high school sweethearts; in a way. So I grew up running around between Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, the Bronx. [chuckles]

TS: What do you mean by "running around"?

LU: We lived in Queens, and then I had relatives that lived in the different boroughs. So my grandmother basically—she's still living today, she's a hundred [years old]—the house that I gr—that I know of is the only house she ever had, so that—everybody went there.

TS: Right.

LU: And so, that—

TS: It's like base camp, right?

LU: To this day, when we all go back to New York to visit, that's where we go; back to that house. But my mom had—there are eight siblings—at the time there were eight—and so they lived all over New York, so we just ran around; "Okay, this weekend you're going to go. We're going to spend the weekend with Aunt Louise," or, "We're going to go to Dot's house," so that's why I say I was all over the place.

TS: Got it.

LU: Yeah.

TS: How were you split out in the ages?

LU: As far as—

TS: So if there's eight, where you fit in that eight?

LU: No, there's not eight siblings, but me and my mom had eight siblings.

TS: Oh, I see; your aunts and uncles?

LU: My aunts and uncles.

TS: Got it. Oh, I see, so you're, like, just visiting and—

LU: Yes.

TS: I got it. Do you have any brothers and sisters?

LU: I have one brother and two sisters; I'm the oldest of the four.

TS: You're the oldest.

LU: I'm the oldest of the four. [both chuckle]

TS: She says that with, like, a little—

LU: Yeah.

TS: [chuckles]

LU: I'm the oldest of the four.

TS: What does that mean; why do you say it like that?

LU: Well, my dad was old school.

TS: Okay.

LU: You would have thought he was in the military.

TS: Yeah?

LU: But he has no military experience—no background—none of his siblings—but on my mom's side, all four of her brothers were in the military.

TS: Okay.

LU: So by me being the oldest I think was more—harder for my dad to let go, because I was the girl. I think if it was my brother—was the oldest—then it would have been a totally different situation; life would have been a little bit different.

TS: Yeah.

LU: But he was harder on me because I was the oldest and I was the one that was getting ready to jump the house, leave the house.

TS: Yeah. So [unclear] a little bit controlling, try to keep your—

LU: Oh, yeah. [chuckles] I went to Hunter College [New York]. The rules for him was, here I am, I'm seventeen, I graduated a year early from high school, but I could not go to a college that had a dorm, so I went to Hunter College for a year. I worked two jobs, and I was just getting my first curfew of being home at eleven o'clock. So.

TS: Yeah.

LU: He was tough.

TS: Yeah.

LU: He was tough.

TS: What about when you were younger, growing up in the city? What was that like? I mean, not a lot of people—a lot of people have a perception of what it's like to grow up in New York City, but they don't really know. So, like, what'd you do to play, what kind of fun did you have?

LU: Actually, for us, it was the opposite. Okay, growing up for us, we was always told, "If you go to the South, all the love, the Southerners, the groups—" No. I come to the South and it's nothing like that. Everybody go into their own homes, no one—It's not a village.

But when I lived in New York, a kid growing up, I can go on my grandmother's block right now and the seniors—the elders that are still there—they still come—if my car pulls up they come outside and go to my grandmother's step to say hello. That was a village, because if we were up and down the street playing, all the kids, and my grandmother had at the time a total of twenty six—she may now have thirty-two—grands [grandkids]—

TS: Yeah?

LU: We ran up and down the street. And so, if my mom—if my grandmother's friend down the street saw us doing wrong, they'd come outside and they'd pop you aside the head, they would make you go home, and by the time you get home they'd done called my grandmother.

TS: They already know what's going on.

LU: Yes. [both chuckle] So that block was the village.

TS: That's interesting, yeah.

LU: So they—We all—We had about five or six different parents. Biological, we had one—

TS: Right.

LU: —but everybody—

TS: Everybody's part of the family.

LU: Yes; everybody on the block.

TS: So it's a small community and they're all watching out for you.

LU: Yes. And—

TS: For good or for ill. [chuckles]

LU: Yes.

TS: Okay.

LU: And then the ones that have died—old age—their children moved into the homes and raised their children. So they don't even really leave the area; they don't really even leave the block. Unless that family has totally died off, that house always has a family member in it that we knew, that we grew up with, unless it's a generation two down where it was somebody that we grew up with, their kid can't live in there. Then it gets—Then we don't really know them that much.

TS: Right.

LU: But as far as the houses on the block, we all grew up with each other. And even if it was a building with apartments, the people that's living in there now grew up in that apartment. Their parents have died and they are in there and they're raising their kids.

TS: So it just stays a community.

LU: It just stays, yes.

TS: Well, what kind of things did you do for fun, then?

LU: Oh, we did everything. I was in the Girl Scouts, my brother was in the Boy Scouts; went to all the amusement parks.

TS: What kind of amusement parks are there to go to?

LU: We would go to Coney Island, to the beach. I used to live, in fact, across the street from the beach. You could look out the bedroom window and see the beach.

TS: Nice.

LU: But we did everything. Prospect Park is a big park. We went horseback riding. Back then there was a program called Fresh Air Fund and it was taking city kids and taking them to the country. So I would go and stay with a family. It wasn't a camp like everybody sees the camp in the woods. We actually—The city kids actually went and stayed with a family.

[The Fresh Air Fund, created in 1877, and now known as The Tribune Fresh Air Fund Aid Society, is a not-for-profit agency that provides free summer vacations in the country to New York City children from low-income communities, as a way for them to get away from hot, noisy city streets.]

TS: That lived in the country?

LU: Lived in the country. I used to go to Duncannon, Pennsylvania, every year, and to this day—I actually visited the family in May, so I've been knowing this family for forty-something years.

TS: So you know all their kids, what they've done?

LU: Yes. And we still con—stay in communication and we're talking. And it was only two weeks to a month, so my parents did that. They had us go away and see other things.

TS: That's not a short time, that's a long time for a kid.

LU: That's a long time, yeah.

TS: Yeah.

LU: Two weeks to a month. It just depended on the family and your interaction with the family, so—

TS: Now, did you go by yourself or did you go with a sibling?

LU: No, we went by ourselves; each one of us went to a different house. We would get on a bus, and the bus would have a whole bunch of little city kids, and we—the same—you went to the same home, and the other city kid that went with you, some houses took two, some houses took one. Like, my sister was the only one that went to her house because the family had three boys and the mom wanted a girl, so she would be the only one that went there. My brother went by himself to a family who had a lot of boys, but there was a big age gap between their youngest and their next kid.

TS: Oh, okay.

LU: So my brother and the young boy were more of the same age to play together.

TS: Oh, cool.

LU: My younger sister, they stopped the program by the time my younger sister was able to go.

TS: Oh, that's too bad.

LU: Yeah. But it was a really good experience, because we, all three of us, are still in contact with the families that we grew up with, and the kids.

TS: What did you learn from that experience?

LU: It's going to sound funny. Duncannon has no black people. Until this day, Duncannon, Pennsylvania, they do not have any black residents.

TS: Okay.

LU: So as a kid growing up, we learned the difference. We learned that there are racial [racist] people, but we don't have to deal with it. The family we lived with was very focused on

making sure we always had a good time, and they taught us different things; like, that's where I learned how to bike ride, horseback riding, swimming, camping, because that's stuff my parents didn't do.

TS: They're in the city.

LU: They're in the city. And so, we learned that there's something else out there. Instead of being city kids that never see anything else, it gave us an opportunity to see other things. So when I would go with them, they would even take us on their family trips. So we would go somewhere else, and you're like, "Okay, so there is a big world out here. There are other things out here." [chuckles]

TS: It kind of opened your eyes to possibilities and things.

LU: Yes. So that was the begin—My parents traveled a lot—

TS: Yeah?

LU: —but this—but they wouldn't travel to the same places. Like, my parents couldn't afford to take us to Hersheypark [family theme park in Pennsylvania], but when we went to the camp we would go to Hersheypark, and so you're like, "Oh, okay." So you saw—we saw a lot of different things; things that we may want to do in the future; all the different possibilities; things that we saw on TV that we thought didn't exist but do exist.

TS: Like what?

LU: Coal Miner's Daughter [1981 biographical film about Loretta Lynn, a legendary country singer that came from poverty to worldwide fame].

TS: Okay.

LU: Duncannon is a coal mining town. Until this day, they still use coal to heat and fuel their house.

TS: Okay.

LU: I was a city kid, I don't know nothing about that. All you know is you go and your parent tell you to flip a switch. [both chuckles] Turn on the—

TS: Like you're doing here today, right?

LU: Yeah, turn on the heat. So that was different experience.

TS: Interesting.

LU: Another experience was actually seeing where you get your meat from, because as a city kid you go to the grocery store. When we used to go to camp, they would take us to the farm and show us, "Okay, this is how cow—beef—" [chuckling]

TS: You turn a cow into beef. Yeah.

LU: That was a little hard as a kid; "I want that [?], you killed the cow."

TS: Right. Yeah, that would have been hard on me too.

LU: But you got to learn, and you got to learn—farmers, because in the city you don't see farms. So we ended up getting—That TV stuff that you would see, we actually saw it firsthand and know, "Oh, that's really real." [chuckles]

TS: Right. Well, what do you think you were able to share with the family that you stayed with; what do you think they learned from you?

LU: The city is not as bad as people made it out to be, and that we didn't have no home training, or always hustle and bustle and stuff. And for them—Well, when I went and visited in May—Mary Stansfield—we laughed because she showed pictures of trying to—her trying to comb my hair. [both chuckle] That was a hoot for her. She's like, "Yes, I remember. I learned how to cornrow. I learned how to do plaits."

And you're like, "Okay."

TS: What years were you doing the visitations there?

LU: I started at the age of five.

TS: Really?

LU: And I went there—

TS: So, like, early seventies [1970s].

LU: Yes.

TS: Okay.

LU: And I went there until I was about eleven.

TS: Wow. So six years.

LU: Yes.

TS: So really the seventies, and that was a time when there was a lot of racial discord going on in the country.

LU: Yes. Yes.

TS: Wow. That's very interesting.

LU: So we were—Simone and I technically—really and truly we were the only two black kids in the entire town, and so it was an introduction to some of the other kids there because they have never seen a black person before.

TS: What kind of experience was that? Did you get any kind of discrimination or hostility or—

LU: No.

TS: Just weird questions?

LU: We had questions.

TS: Yeah?

[Extraneous comments about dog redacted.]

TS: So you got some weird questions, you said?

LU: Yes. There was a little boy, he went up to the girl Simone—Simone McGee was the other kid that stayed with us.

TS: Oh, so the two of you?

LU: Yeah, there was two of us. And we were at the pool—I'll never ever forget—the little boy came up to Simone and said, "Are you black or are you dirty?"

And Simone said—Because our feet is white—the bottom of the feet and palm of my hands—so he wanted to know. And so, Simone says she was dirty and that her mom couldn't afford soap, and Mary was like, "Simone!" [both chuckle] So the little boy went running back across the side of the pool—

TS: He's all confused.

LU: Yes, and he said, "Mommy, she says she's dirty!" [chuckling]

But we had—we had—every year that we went we had a good time. But I really do believe that was because Mary—we dealt a lot with the mom because Dad was always

at work—his name was John Stansfield—he was always at work in the coal mine, so we dealt a lot with the mom, and she did an awesome job of actually protecting us.

TS: Yeah?

LU: Because we would never know, but we did know we were the only black kids in the town.

TS: So she ran interference or whatever.

LU: Yes, she would—or she would never take us to a place where she felt that we would be uncomfortable.

TS: Be uncomfortable. How many kids were there with you?

LU: It was just Simone and I from New York, and then Mary and John had two kids, Chris—Christine—and Mark, but Mark was always—they always timed it so Mark was away doing Boy Scout stuff, so we didn't really see Mark until I was about seven, eight years old.

TS: Really?

LU: Yes.

TS: So it's like the girls—

LU: It was just girls.

TS: —summer or whatever.

LU: Yes.

TS: That's pretty neat.

LU: Yeah.

TS: That's a great experience; I had never even heard of that program.

LU: Oh, yeah, it's Fresh Air Fund. And to this day I wish we could have that back so that they can get an experience, because it wasn't a bad experience. At least for me it was not a bad experience. It was routine, because everybody that got on the bus was the same kids we got on the bus with every year. The lady that ran the bus, Ms. McDermin[?], she was always on the bus and always the one taking us where we needed to go. And we all knew as we got older that Ms. McDermin was going to sing this one song and she knew she was going to put us to sleep.

TS: [chuckles]

LU: She would say, "Simon says all feets are still." So you're sitting and you can't move your feet because you want to win.

TS: Right.

LU: And then she'll say, "Simon says no chewing, chewing gum." And she'd come through and she'd pick all the gum out your mouths. Then she'll say, "Simon says close your eyes." You know we went to sleep. [both chuckle]

TS: She's smart. She had it under control.

LU: And then you wake up and you're there.

TS: Right. Wow, that's great. Oh, my gosh. So you're a young girl, you had these really interesting experiences. Now, where'd you go to school at; like, elementary?

LU: All in Brooklyn.

TS: Okay.

LU: I went to P.S. [Public School] 316 [Elijah Stroud] growing up. I went to high—no, middle school in Queens, and that was [I.S. 059] Springfield Gardens Middle School, and then I graduated high school from Prospect Heights [High School; now named International High School at Prospect Heights] back in Brooklyn.

TS: Did you like school?

LU: Yes, I enjoyed school; school wasn't bad. I enjoyed high school because I was on the high school swimming team, and there was only two females that made the team, so we ended up swimming when the boys swam, and so we always competed against boys.

TS: That's interesting. How'd you do?

LU: I think I did okay.

TS: Yeah?

LU: I got a—I have a trophy.

TS: Well, hey.

LU: [chuckles]

TS: That says it all, doesn't it? Well, do you think your years in Pennsylvania where you were learning to swim helped you out there?

LU: Yes, because I don't think my parents would have taught me how to swim. Well, actually, my mom is petrified of the water.

TS: Is she?

LU: She—Back when she was younger she said when they had—took swimming in school the coach pushed them all in.

TS: Yeah, that's not a good system.

LU: No. And so, she—to this day, she's not a fan of playing—she'll go knee high—

TS: Right.

LU: —but she—no. And my dad, no, he would never get in the water. He'd just look at you all and say, "Okay, have fun." Even on the beach he'll look and say, "Okay, have fun, just remember I don't swim." [both chuckle]

TS: What'd your folks do for a living?

LU: My dad was a janitor.

TS: Okay.

LU: And my mom, as the years went along, she did different things; she was a bank teller, then she turned around and actually ended up being a school teacher. My dad passed away in 2000, but my mom moved to Florida and she—this is her last year—she retires from Florida school system.

TS: Oh, so she's been teaching in Florida?

LU: Yes. Well, she started out in New York and she retired in New York, and when my dad passed she just—

TS: Went to Florida.

LU: —Florida and she needed something to do—

TS: Well, good for her.

LU: —because there was no one for her—even though my four siblings and there are eight grandkids between us, none of us had my mom watch our children, so she was kind of—"I'm bored. I don't have nothing to do," so she went back to the school system so she can have something to do.

TS: Yeah. What does she teach?

LU: She's only on the elementary level, so had fifth grade classes, she's taught computers. This year and last year she taught kindergarteners, so she's—

TS: That's a little different change. [chuckles]

LU: Yes.

TS: A little more high maintenance.

LU: Yes. [chuckling]

TS: Well, good for her. Okay, so you had, really, a lot of interesting things that you did as a young girl.

[Comment about dog redacted.]

TS: So when you say you liked school, were there any subjects that you liked in particular?

LU: P.E. [physical education].

TS: [chuckles] P.E., okay.

LU: Actually, at that—back then, History and Science; those were the two that I enjoyed the most.

TS: Was it because you had interesting teachers that helped with that, or just the subject matters?

LU: I think both.

TS: Yeah?

LU: Both. [unclear] good.

TS: Both good, interesting, and the teachers.

LU: Yes.

TS: You said you participated in swimming in high school. Did you play any other kind of sports or activities?

LU: No. As a kid growing up I was asthmatic.

TS: Okay.

LU: So swimming was more of a calming thing.

TS: Right, instead of running around and—

LU: Yes, so I just—

TS: —having to catch your breath.

LU: Yes. And it kept me—kept me going, kept me busy.

TS: What'd you do to play? Like, did you go to movies, did you—

LU: Oh, movies, we roller skated. Back then—I see it now but I didn't see it then—Back then we used to all think we didn't have enough—that [unclear] syndrome—but we actually had more than we really needed. Because my grandmother worked for Pressman Toy Company, and so every year—at the end of the year—they would, like—they would give her new games, and games that were surplus, and she would be bringing it home and she would hide it, and so that way Christmastime, I mean, she just rolled it all out, but it didn't cost her nothing.

TS: That's nice.

LU: And then my mom had worked for an advertising company and they would get a whole lot of different things, and they would give it to everybody that worked. So Gloria Vanderbilt and Billy [Bill] Blass were name brands that just came out. We had those clothes, but we just didn't think we had enough. [both chuckle]

TS: Of course not, because somebody else has got something else.

LU: Yes. You want to stop?

TS: Okay.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Okay, we're back again, and I was talking to you about, like, things that you did for fun.

LU: Yes, we did everything; we played Skully in the street.

TS: What's that?

LU: It's like a checkerboard.

TS: Okay.

LU: And you have points in the corners and you have a main point in the middle, and you take a top off of a drink and you pack it so that it'll have weight—[extraneous comment redacted]—and then we would plop it—like, pluck it and it would go across and you'd get—

TS: Like, flick it with your fingers?

LU: Yes.

TS: Okay.

LU: And you would get certain points for where it lands.

TS: Oh, cool, it's kind of like a marbles game—

LU: Yes.

TS: —but with the [bottle] tops and stuff.

LU: But with tops.

TS: And then you've got your squares to hit.

LU: We played baseball, football, basketball, in the street. [chuckles]

TS: Now, did you break any windows doing that?

LU: No.

TS: No?

LU: No, we was good. So between playing in the street, playing in the parks—we preferred, really, to play in the streets because the rules of the house, no matter where we were at—whether it was my grandmother's house, my aunt's house—when the street lights

come on you need to be on the step, or if not, in the house. So instead of trying to beat the street lights, we usually played on the block.

TS: Okay.

LU: So when the street lights came on you just walked on over to the step and you didn't get in trouble; nobody telling on you and stuff like that.

TS: So a certain kind of etiquette for play.

LU: Yes.

TS: There you go. Go ahead.

LU: And if a parent was outside then we could continue to play.

TS: Okay.

LU: As long as they were outside and they could see us, but when the streetlight came on—

TS: You had to be home.

LU: —you had to be home.

TS: Yeah. That's a good rule; I like that one. Well, when you're growing up and you're growing up, like, a young girl in the seventies, did you have any sense of racial tension that was going on at that time?

LU: Not in New York.

TS: Okay.

LU: Not in New York. And I think that's because everybody had their own areas, so the neighborhood I lived in was 90% black and Hispanic, and we did have Caucasians in the neighborhood.

TS: Did you have integrated schools?

LU: No.

TS: No?

LU: No, my school was all black.

TS: Was it?

LU: Yes.

TS: Not even Hispanic too?

LU: Hispanics were there, but we considered them being part of the family; blacks. [both chuckle] But, yes.

TS: Just the Caucasians were not—no whites.

LU: No.

TS: Okay.

LU: None. So we didn't really know. And then in New York you had Chinatown, you had Little Italy.

TS: Little enclaves; different kinds of communities.

LU: Yes. But we grew up as a melting pot family. Everybody called—My grandmother's maiden [name] was Binyard[?], and they said all the Binyards are a melting pot, because we—my grandmother always said there was no color. So, like, I have one uncle on my mom's side that's been married three times. He—no, four. Three of his wives are Asians and one was black. So that wasn't a big deal. I have cousins, my generation, who married Caucasians. So we were the melting pot, so we didn't—my grandmother would always say, "You threw us in a big black pot, you pour us out, you get the rainbow."

TS: [chuckles] Right.

LU: And so, we didn't know anything really.

TS: Right.

LU: I didn't understand racial tension until, actually, after I joined the army.

TS: Oh, okay, well, we'll get to that for sure then.

LU: Yeah.

TS: Well, when you were growing up, then, what kind of expectations—not then—but what kind of expectations did you have for yourself; like, what were your dreams; what did you think you wanted to do when you grew up?

LU: Growing up, I think it was more of that fairytale stuff; you wanted to be the ballerina; you wanted to be somebody famous; somebody—you was going to be rich. So we had—I think we had the typical, average kid dream. My dad didn't have that dream.

TS: No?

LU: No. [chuckles]

TS: What was he more like?

LU: He was like, "You need to take the typing class." Back then secretary was the big job and—"You can be a secretary, you need to take shorthand."

TS: Have a skill.

LU: Have a skill. And ballet, dance, we'd done those kind of things, but he would say, "That is an art, and artists starve." [both chuckles]

TS: So he was very practical about what you needed to do to try to make a living.

LU: Yes.

TS: How about your mom, what kind of—

LU: My mom was the same. Now, to give you the history with my mom and my dad, there's a ten year difference. My mom had me and married my dad at the age of sixteen, so my dad was strict. He was just hard in his own way and this is how it was going to be. During that time I give my dad praise because my mom ended up with a high school diploma, not a GED, back then, and you look at her today and she's walking around with two master's [degrees]. He's a very big, firm believer of education. My dad used to work nights and my mom worked days, and so when we came home from school we had the typical—you had to sit at the table, there was no TV turned on. He was on one side of the table helping you do your homework. And my younger sister, she ended up going to a Catholic college. My dad is Catholic, so he was actually there—she was calling him, "Daddy, I need help with these Hail Mary's [a Roman Catholic Prayer], and what they mean," and he was able to go—

TS: Help her out.

LU: With a sixth grade education.

TS: Excellent. So he could tell her [about] the rosary and all that?

LU: Yes.

TS: Interesting.

LU: And he's only did—he only—he dropped out of school at sixth grade.

TS: He well supported your efforts to—

LU: Yes.

TS: —try to—

LU: To better yourself.

TS: —better yourself.

LU: But you couldn't come to him with pipe dreams. You couldn't come to him and say, "Well, I'm going to be a famous singer."

He'd looked at you like, "No, you're not." [both chuckles] He was straight, "No, you're not. You're going to do this, this, this, and this."

TS: Realist; he was a realist.

LU: Yes.

TS: Yeah.

LU: Yes.

TS: Well, I'm sure that he had to really struggle to even get to where he was.

LU: Oh, yeah.

TS: In the era that he grew up in, I'm sure.

LU: Oh, yeah.

TS: Was he from New York City, too?

LU: No, my dad was actually—is actually—was actually from Cleveland, Ohio.

TS: Oh, Cleveland to New York City.

LU: Yes.

TS: Okay.

LU: His mom and dad had split younger—early years and his dad had moved to New York, so he followed behind his dad.

TS: Okay.

LU: So yes, he struggled; he struggled. He made sure every nickel and dime counted in some kind of way, and I see a lot of me in him, and I think all my siblings see a lot of them—we're just like him in so many aspects.

TS: You're not messing around—

LU: Yes.

TS: —with finances, right?

LU: No "finance messing around". Yes, you will get your education. My middle one says, "What's the sense of getting a college degree when you're not even going to get a job in that degree?" [chuckles]

And I'm like, "It shows that you started something and you had the ability to complete it." And I said, "No matter what, this is something no one can take away from you. This is an achievement."

And so, she's like, "Yeah, okay, Mommy, whatever." [both chuckle] "You can [?] tell me anything today." But yes, it's different.

TS: When you were in high school, when did you start thinking about going to college? You said you went to Hunter College.

LU: My dad started drilling that in when I was in the ninth grade.

TS: Yeah, that you were going to college, in his mind.

LU: In his mind.

TS: Did you want to?

LU: I wanted to go to a college away from home, in the dorm and everything, and get a little freedom, and that was not what was on his agenda.

TS: Well, let's go back to that, then, because you started telling about how you had to go to Hunter because you couldn't go to a dorm.

LU: Yes.

TS: How long did that last and what was that experience like?

LU: One year. It lasted one year and—Other kids were—classmates—they would run away from home, and my—I would tell my dad, "So-and-so ran away from home, and he's—because her stepdad was abusing her."

And he's like—He gives his advice, and his talk, and his thing was, back then, "What's the sense in running away from home? Where you going to go?" He said, "If you're going to run away from home, go somewhere where you know you're going to get a meal, fo—a meal, a roof over your head, and money on your back and clothes on you."

So I was like, "Okay."

And he said, "Now, I'm not talking about running away and being somebody's prostitute." [chuckles]

TS: Right.

LU: "No, I'm not talking about that."

So I started thinking. I was like, "Well, he's not going to let some of his grit go."

TS: Right.

LU: "I'm going to have to find a way to get out the house."

TS: Okay.

LU: That's when I joined the army.

TS: Okay, so you decided this was an escape from that?

LU: Yes.

TS: And how did you go about planning for that escape? Because it seems like you would have to have some—

LU: Yes, you had to have some planning. What I did was, I was still going to school, but ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] at the college was there, and I talked to a few people, and I talked to people that was doing ROTC, and I was like, "No, I can't stay home. This man will drive—"

TS: Not that long?

LU: Yeah, "This man's going to drive me nuts." And so, I went to a recruiter, and he told me a couple of things, and then I went and I had to tell my parents I had to go to work—which I didn't have to go to work—to go take the exam. And then I finished up that first year of college and I told my parents, "I'm not going back."

And they was like, "Yes, you are." And my mom was up there, "You need to get signed up for your classes."

And I said, "I joined the army;" they did not believe me.

TS: How old were you?

LU: I had turned eighteen and my mom was like, "I'm telling them—"
I said, "You can't do anything because I'm eighteen."
"I'm going to tell them you have asthma."
"Had a physical and I'm in good health." [chuckles] "I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do that."

TS: So you did make sure you had all your ducks in a row [idiom for being prepared] before you told them?

LU: Yes.

TS: Okay.

LU: Oh, yes. And so, then—

TS: Well, why'd you pick the army?

LU: I think because my two unc—my four uncles were in the army.

TS: Did you look at any other services?

LU: Nope.

TS: Okay.

LU: I looked strictly at the army.

TS: Okay.

LU: All four uncles had been in the Vietnam War.

TS: Okay.

LU: And my grandmother, she's a smart little lady. She pulls Sullivan's Law [correction: Sole Survivor Policy].

TS: Sullivan's Law. Oh.

[Sullivan's law is a mythical law prohibiting siblings from serving together on the same ship. It is based upon the tragedy of the five Sullivan brothers who were World War

II sailors who, while serving together on the USS *Juneau* (CL-52), were all killed in action on its sinking around 13 November 1942.]

[Sole Survivor Policy is designed to protect members of a family from the draft or from combat duty if they have already lost family members in military service]

LU: Yes, because all four of them was on the front line.

TS: Right.

LU: And so, my younger uncle came, actually, all the way back home, and they pulled two of them to the rear, and I only had one uncle on the front lines, but by then it was too late because all the mental damage, kind of, was already there.

TS: For the other two?

LU: For all four of them.

TS: Oh, okay.

LU: Because they all four went.

TS: And they were all on the front lines—

LU: Yes.

TS: —and then three of them got pulled back.

LU: Three of them got pulled back, yes.

TS: How long did it take your grandma to get that [unclear].

LU: I don't know, she won't talk too much in details about it.

TS: Really?

LU: But my mom and my aunts—three of the aunts and my mom—they talk about how she just had to be persistent in all the things she was doing. Because my grandfather died when I was five so I never met him or knew who he was.

TS: She's raising all these kids on her own.

LU: Yes, and then—

TS: And there were eight of them?

LU: Eight, and one aunt died. I never got to meet, really, her. Yeah, one aunt died of—I forgot what—pneumonia, and she was young. And my mom was the baby out of the eight.

TS: Oh.

LU: [laughing]

TS: That's good and bad, isn't it? It's got its blessings and its curses.

LU: Yes. But I knew I had to have everything in place before I told my mom and dad, and they still didn't believe me.

TS: [chuckles]

LU: They didn't believe me until October when the man came late to pick—my recruiter came late to pick me up, and when—

TS: You were leaving?

LU: Yes, and he came late—he came about thirty minutes late—and my mom was like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. See, you're trying to be a smart you-know-what-what-what."

TS: What happened when he showed up?

LU: They all just got quiet; the house got silent to where a pin can drop [idiom meaning it is very quiet]. And then my mom was [makes crying noise].

TS: She started crying?

LU: Yes.

TS: What did your dad do?

LU: My dad was just stunned. He was like—He just couldn't say nothing, he was just really stunned that I actually had did this. Yes.

TS: Interesting. Well, when you signed up, did you sign up for, like, a four year tour?

LU: Three year.

TS: Three year?

LU: A three year tour.

TS: Did you have a job you wanted to do, or were they going to throw you in general and pick in it basic?

LU: They said from off the bat that my results said that I needed to be in the communication or the mechanical field, and I didn't want to be a mechanic, so—

TS: Communication it was.

LU: Yes. And everybody back then when I—well, coming from the recruitment station, it seemed like everybody that came out of there, they were all offered to be a pump specialist—to go around with the gasoline and pump—and I was like, "No. I'm not doing that. It's too cold. I don't know where I'm going. No."

TS: This is in '85?

LU: Yes.

TS: Or—Yeah, '85.

LU: Eighty-five. And then they talked about how you could—in the vans and—because at first I was a 31R Multichannel—so 31 Mike [31M Multichannel Transmission Systems Operator.]. And then 31 Mike was faded out and we turned into 31 Foxes [31F Network Switching Systems Operators]. They talk about, "Oh, you can be in the van." [chuckles] "And be warm."

And they showed you the pictures and you're like, "That's what I want to do."

TS: Is that what you ended up doing?

LU: Yes. [chuckling]

TS: Okay, good. That's good. So let's talk a little bit, then, about getting to basic training. Did you fly, did you drive, take a train? I don't know what you did?

LU: They—Bus.

TS: Oh, bus, I forgot about that.

LU: The bus, yeah. A bus.

TS: And you went to South Carolina?

LU: Yes.

TS: Fort Jackson.

LU: Fort Jackson.

TS: And it's October so that's not like in the dead of summer.

LU: No, it wasn't so bad. It was an eye-opener. You know how you stay at the MEP [Military Entrance Processing] station and they prep you, giving you all this stuff? All the girls thought this was going to be light, this was going to be easy. When that cattle car came [chuckles] and they said, "Get your you-know-what up in here and start moving."

It was like, "Oh, oh, this is—"

TS: Tone changed?

LU: Tone changed. But it—For me it really wasn't that bad, because what they were saying and doing—remember I said my dad acted like he was a drill sergeant.

TS: Right.

LU: So when they did all this yelling—they called me "the giggler."

TS: [chuckles]

LU: And they—"Why are you laughing, Private Hailey?"

I was like, "I don't know. My dad—"

TS: Been there, done that.

LU: Yes.

TS: "It's not getting to me."

LU: No. Tried to break me down, having me paired up with the weakest person in the group. So if your partner didn't do what they were supposed to do, you both got in trouble. My partner made it through, because I was going to kill her. [both laugh]

TS: You're tenacious, then.

LU: Yes. Well, no, I would just push her—push her a little more—because I was—I don't like mass punishment. If you doing something wrong you need to get punished for what you doing, not—I don't want to get in trouble. As far as making up the beds and stuff, 90% of that stuff—truly, 90% of the stuff that basic training was supposed to train you, I was already doing. It wasn't a problem for me to get up and make up my bed and make sure it's made up tight and neat because that's the way my dad was. He was like, "You're the last person to get out your bed, you need to make it up every day." So every day before

you walked out the door your room was straightened up, the beds were made. Because his—in his head he said, "You never know who's going to die and walk into your house and your house is a wreck. Then you're embarrassed. They forget about the person who died; everybody's too busy talking about how dirty your house was." [both laugh] So it's true. And no matter how—You open up your house to somebody, if it's dirty, they don't care that they got to stay with you rent-free. They're going to talk about how dirty your house was. So that's how I grew up.

TS: Yeah. So he instilled a lot of discipline in you.

LU: Yes. And I didn't realize it until I joined the army, to say, "You saw—" We had about seventy girls, and by the time the month was over we were down to thirty, because so many of them just was—it just broke them down; the crying, the—They didn't understand about—you have to clean the—

TS: All the Mickey Mouse stuff [idiom for unimportant, petty tasks] you had to do.

LU: Yes. And the one area that really broke the girls down, we had to do pullups in order to eat. There was a pullup bar just before you went into the mess hall and you had—you started out—they said two pullups. If you couldn't do it you had to go to the back of the line. So you did this until you was able to start building up your pullups; you wanted to eat.

TS: Right.

LU: That broke down a lot of girls. Smoking cigarettes, that broke a lot of them down, because—

TS: How?

LU: —because they were nicotine freaks; they wanted to smoke a cigarette and they were like, "No, you can't smoke a cigarette. You only can smoke a cigarette when I say you can smoke a cigarette."

TS: Oh, okay.

LU: Yeah, that—And then some of them were just homesick.

TS: Yeah.

LU: Never been away from home, and the crying at night, and stuff like that. Basic training for me was really easy and comical.

TS: [chuckles] Was there anything physically difficult for you?

LU: Wearing the boots.

TS: Oh, okay, why is that?

LU: Because I didn't have flat feet going in and those boots were the worst things you can put on your feet. When we got off that cattle car, the first thing they made us do was take out our boots, open them up, roll them down some, and they filled it with water and they made us go on a hike. So by the time I came back you had blisters. Then the next day your second pair of boots—because they give you two pairs of boots—second day that's what we did. We got up that morning, they filled it up with water, talking about they need to stretch the leather, and we went on a hike. So I started off with blisters on my feet in basic.

TS: I haven't heard that before.

LU: Yes. And then going on the marches was kind of tough at times, because you're already pulling your big sack, you have your weapon, and then I had to pull my partner.

TS: To keep her moving?

LU: Yes. So—

TS: So that stuff was a little tough?

LU: That stuff, yes. If her bed wasn't made my bed got tossed right along with hers.

TS: Right.

LU: So I had to go over and make my bed early—it was a thing of you had to get up even earlier because I had to make sure my stuff was together, and then go over there and make sure her stuff was together. Mentally, for me, that was the hardest thing.

TS: Right, because you're pulling somebody else's weight, too.

LU: Yes. Those were the hard things.

TS: Yeah.

LU: Besides sleeping in the woods, that was my next hardest thing.

TS: Was it? You didn't like it so much?

LU: No.

TS: Now, you had been camping.

LU: Yeah, but see, you still had—it wasn't in a tent [chuckles], and it wasn't—

TS: You were just open air camping?

LU: Well, when I was younger they had a trailer; they would bring a trailer down.

TS: Oh. You weren't camping. [chuckles]

LU: That was camping to a city kid. They put out the fire and the whole nine [yards—idiom for "everything"]; that was camping.

TS: Okay.

LU: But in the army, that was a totally different camping, and that took a little bit for me, to understand that I had to sleep in a sleeping bag on the ground in a little pup tent, and all I can think about was snakes and the critters. And the next worst thing for me to get over was the outhouse.

TS: Oh, yeah. You definitely weren't camping before. [chuckles]

LU: Not that kind of camping.

TS: No. But you made it.

LU: Yes, I made it. When I came back home my mom and them was—they was okay. They came to graduation. I came home for about two weeks and then off I went to AIT [Advanced Individual Training].

TS: Academically, like, that stuff was okay, too, that you had to do?

LU: Yes.

TS: Learning all the military stuff?

LU: Yes.

TS: Okay.

LU: That just—That was like a normal thing. Truly, basic training was not as bad as a lot of people say it was for them; it really wasn't that bad. But then, like I said, I had a drill sergeant dad and he didn't know he was a drill sergeant.

TS: [chuckles] He didn't know.

LU: Yes.

TS: So AIT [Advanced Individual Training], where was that at?

LU: Fort Gordon.

TS: Oh, okay.

LU: Fort Gordon, Georgia.

TS: Okay. Tell me about that experience.

LU: That was—I was there from January to March, I think; March, April—

TS: In '86?

LU: In '86.

TS: Okay.

LU: That's where I met my husband.

TS: Okay.

LU: He was reclassifying. He was a radio op—a radio repair person and he was switching to a 31 Fox, and met him there. School was okay. I didn't have a problem with school, but a lot of other things happened.

TS: Okay.

LU: We were in a coed building and the boys were on one side, the girls on one side. I was on the first floor. Doing—Even then in AIT, the things I was introduced to was like, "Wow." I never knew men can get raped.

TS: You never knew what?

LU: Men can get raped.

TS: Oh, okay.

LU: They would be in—The young soldiers would go downtown—not Augusta; what's on the outside of Fort Gordon?

TS: I'm not sure.

LU: Some little town on the outside of it.

TS: Okay.

LU: And they would go and get a prostitute, and the prostitute would take them to a hotel and they were getting beat up, raped, and robbed. [chuckles]

TS: By the prostitutes?

LU: Yes. That was a new one for me. I was like, "Okay." But a lot of female soldiers were getting raped, too, by fellow soldiers during AIT.

TS: Were you aware of that at the time?

LU: No. Well, halfway through, then it started coming up and we noticed that the sergeants were saying the women were not allowed to go anywhere unless they were in pairs. You couldn't go in your room and just—they just kept stressing, "You can't be alone." Because somehow some of these guys were breaking in through the windows of the rooms and stuff. That was interesting.

TS: Did you have any experience with any sexual harassment or anything like that at that time.

LU: Oh, sexual harassment was just a given thing. If you was nice looking even your sergeant hit on you, and you don't know which way to go because you're like, "Should I say something or shouldn't I say something? If I don't say nothing is it going to retaliate against me, and I'm doing—I'm out here pushing up to doomsday," so you kind of had to figure them out.

TS: How did you react?

LU: I had a friend, her last name is Kendrick, and Kendrick taught me what to do; she said, "Always be polite." [chuckles]

TS: Just be polite.

LU: She said, "Always be polite and keep it moving. Be polite and keep it moving." So that's how I got through AIT: be polite and keep it moving. And she also said, "Always hang around a few guys because then they don't know if you're dating one of them," and I hung around a lot more with my husband because I used—I bet back then I was head over heels, I thought he was just the cutest little man. And then he was actually—it was a blessing because his room was across from my room, so when he came out of his room I knew he—I knew, I was on him. [both laugh]

TS: He had no escape, huh?

LU: No escape. So that helped, too. But Kendrick would say little things and—

TS: Had she been in the service for long?

LU: She had a lot of female relatives that was in the military and they was telling her stuff to do and how to keep it—keep yourself safe and stuff like that. So I was like, "Okay, okay." And she actually was my roommate the whole time for AIT, and I actually—we still talk; we still talk.

TS: Did she stay in?

LU: She didn't do her twenty [years]. I think Kendrick did about ten years and then she got out. She said she had had enough, and she lives right in Virginia.

TS: Okay.

LU: So yeah, she got out and she called it a day. But older female soldiers would give us tidbits: You're a little wet behind the ears [idiom for inexperienced], don't be doing this, and don't be doing that. That's how I got through AIT.

TS: Yeah. Was that, like, an eye opener to realize that you were going to have this kind of tension, too?

LU: Yes.

TS: Yeah?

LU: Because I thought we were all equal, but it wasn't like that. That was my eye opener so that—yeah, they would prefer to have a man than a woman, and that old saying "barefooted and pregnant," it came to light.

TS: Yeah.

LU: It came to light.

TS: You hadn't had experiences like that before the army?

LU: No. And people think that because I came from the city I should have, but I kept telling them the city is big and you don't have to see a lot of stuff, and in your own way end up being naïve until you come to the South. Because as a kid growing up, every—we grew up thinking the best place to be is in the South; no hustle, no bustle; family gathering; the village theory—until I got to the South. [chuckles]

TS: And then you realized you had a lot of that already.

LU: Yes. Yes.

TS: Interesting. When did you and your husband get married? Did you get married in AIT?

LU: Nope.

TS: Later? Okay.

LU: We didn't get married until 1994.

TS: Ninety-four, okay.

LU: No, '93.

TS: Ninety-three.

LU: Ninety-three.

TS: So after you were out of the service.

LU: Yes.

TS: Okay, so you're single the whole time you were in?

LU: Yes.

TS: Alright. So you're in AIT, you're getting your schooling.

LU: I did the AIT biggie mistake, I got pregnant—

TS: Okay.

LU: —with my first. Then after AIT they sent me to Heidelberg [Germany].

TS: That was supposed to be your first [duty] station?

LU: Supposed to be my first station.

TS: Okay.

LU: I get there and I got a little bit of mixed emotions. I was too far away from Mommy, I'm having my first, this is my parent's first grandchild, and I had a little bit of that then. I wanted to be closer to my husband and the closest they could send me was Fort Hood, Texas, and he was stationed in White Sands, New Mexico [White Sands Missile Range?].

TS: That's the closest. But you weren't married yet so that's why—

LU: No. Yes, that was why.

TS: —they couldn't do a joint assignment.

LU: No joint assignment. And they didn't have another slot for a 31 FOX, because he was a 31 FOX and they—and even though White Sands do a lot of communication, they were over—they had more than they should have.

TS: Right.

LU: So the closest thing I could go to was Fort Hood. And see, Fort Hood is a big post. It's one of—

TS: It sure is.

LU: —the army's biggest posts. So I ended up at Fort Hood.

TS: How long were you in Germany, then? Not very long?

LU: Three months?

TS: Did you do anything when you were there?

LU: I traveled. I—They left me—They kept me at the MEP [Military Entrance Processing] Station—well, it's not a MEP Station, but the first place you go, they kept me there.

TS: Yeah?

LU: Because once I got there I said, "I want to go home." [both chuckle]

TS: So they never sent you to your unit?

LU: No.

TS: So just figuring out where to get you back.

LU: Yes, get me back, where to go. So I worked there; I worked at the front desk. When new people came in I assigned the rooms and stuff like that. And then they tried to keep me there and said, "You can—We need someone right here."

I was like, "No, I want to go home. I want to go home."

TS: "It's okay for right now but—" yeah.

LU: "I want to go home."

TS: Okay, so you went to Fort Hood.

LU: Yes, went to Fort Hood. My husband would come from New Mexico and visit me at Fort Hood whenever he could. I had my son—Well, when I got to Fort Hood, now, that was a big eye opener.

TS: Okay.

LU: That's when the world changed for me.

TS: Okay. How's that?

LU: Because my commander—the captain—he was a Mormon. I didn't know what a Mormon was, and he had—he didn't want me.

TS: He didn't want you what?

LU: At his unit.

TS: Why?

LU: Because I was pregnant and I didn't have a husband.

TS: Okay.

LU: And he didn't want me because of his religion, and he kept saying he already had two pregnant women. Well, one was an E-6 [staff sergeant] and the other one was a E-7 [Sergeant First Class], and they both were married, and they both worked in the supply, but he didn't want another one. So I had to deal with his negative ways.

TS: How would he express to you—I mean, would he just flat out say—

LU: Oh, yeah.

TS: Would he?

LU: Yeah. Yes, "I didn't want you here. You're pregnant, I don't want another pregnant woman in my group." It was like—

TS: How did you react to that?

LU: Nothing, you just stood there. He's the commander, you just—

TS: What was his rank?

LU: He was a captain.

TS: He was a captain.

LU: He was the captain, so you just stood there and you looked at him like, "What in the world did I do?"

So he put me on CQ [Charge of Quarters], so every day I did CQ during the day, and then as I went further along in my pregnancy he—you get a [limited physical activities] profile and he wanted to go against the profile.

[Change of Quarters is a tasked duty, usually for a twenty-four hour shift, in which a service member is to guard the front entrance to the barracks and/or other duties as assigned.]

Like, if they went to the field, he wanted me to work twenty-four hours on CQ, and then have a day off, and then go back to doing CQ. Well, my profile as I got bigger said no, so I had to—I had to get—the doctor that I was seeing at—on the base was a lieutenant colonel and she had to send him a nasty-gram [a letter expressing displeasure about actions taken or lack thereof], and, Lord, that made things even worse. He put a flag on me making my next rank—which should have been automatic—which was my Spec [Specialist]-4.

TS: He flagged [barred from promotion by senior officer] you?

LU: Yes.

TS: Just because you were on profile?

LU: Yes. So then when I got a certain amount of months he kicked me out of the barracks. So I'm still a PFC [private first class] with no—hardly no income, he kicks me out of the barracks, and then he wouldn't allow me to do—to get a—

TS: No BAQ [Basic Allowance for Quarters]?

LU: No BAQ and no rations.

TS: He just, like, kicking you out; "Go find a place, good luck."

LU: Good luck.

TS: He was trying to get rid of you.

LU: Yes.

TS: Wow. And you didn't have anywhere to turn for an advocacy or somebody to help you?

LU: When you start asking, you start talking, you don't get answers.

TS: No?

LU: No, because you're the girl.

TS: Like, "You did this to yourself, and so you deal with it"?

LU: Yes. And I wasn't attached to any of the—to any of the platoons. I was—

TS: Because you're doing CQ?

LU: Yes, I was by myself. So I didn't have a chain of command—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So it isolated you for that.

LU: Yes. So I figured it out.

TS: What'd you do?

LU: I got—Well, my husband was sending me extra money so that he'd make sure that I was there doing well. I made friends sitting on CQ. One of the girls that was in a different unit—her name was Jo—she had a room for rent, because she had a two bedroom place. We shared. She had a car. She—We would have to—most times have to be in the same—Oh, let me back up. I didn't even have a driver's license yet.

TS: Because you lived in the city; why would you need one?

LU: Right. [chuckles] So Jo helped me—[chuckling]

TS: How was that, getting that driver's license?

LU: Actually, it was easy, because after I had my son they threw me in a—

TS: Motor pool?

LU: Well, yeah, they took me down to the motor pool and they threw me in a truck and they said, "Start driving." So I was driving—

TS: A deuce and a half [2½-ton 6x6 cargo truck]?

LU: Deuce and a half, and after I drove that for a while they had gave me my military driver's license and I just took it down to the DMV [Division of Motor Vehicles] and the DMV gave me a regular driver's license.

TS: You didn't have to take a test?

LU: Didn't have to take a test, didn't have to do nothing; they just gave me a driver's license and sent me on my merrily way. And what was so funny—my parents had came to visit and I said, "Look, can y'all take me down to get a—"

And I came right back out and my dad said, "What the hell?"

TS: Right.

LU: I was like, "I showed them the military—showed them that I'm driving a big truck, they said, 'Here.'"

TS: "She can drive." [chuckles]

LU: "She can drive." And—

TS: That's a great story.

LU: And that was how I got my driver's license. But my first—Then I got connected to a platoon.

TS: Okay. So you started doing your real job?

LU: I started doing my real job, and my section chief and my platoon sergeant looked at me and said, "How long have you been in the army?" And by this time I was in two years, and they was like, "And you're still a PFC?"

I said, "Yes." I said, "The captain flagged me."

That's when I started getting my voice, because they were like, "No way. He shouldn't have flagged you," and they helped me get my Spec 4 [Specialist E4 rank]. And then when they realized I wasn't getting BAQ or separate rats [rations], they went to town [idiom for "do something thoroughly]. I actually ended getting back pay because I—

TS: Excellent.

LU: I was supposed to—When the commander kicked me out of the barracks I was supposed to get half of BAQ and I was supposed to get half of rations because it was just me, and once I had my son I would get the full benefit.

TS: The full—

LU: Yes.

TS: And so, they got you all caught up on that. So that was, like, the difference between him isolating you, right—

LU: Yes.

TS: —away from everybody—no advocacy, no chain of command that can help you—and then you get into a special unit who actually supports you.

LU: Yes. Well, my platoon.

TS: Your platoon.

LU: But I also think that the—my platoon sergeant and—my section chief was a female—her name was Sergeant Washington—and my platoon sergeant—I see his face, I just can't think of his name right now.

TS: It's okay; don't worry about it.

LU: But he—Them two were a big, big help in my life, because they put things on the even level for me. Sergeant Washington kind of took me under her—she only had a son so she always thought I was her little daughter—so she took me under her wing and she was like, "Okay, we're going to do this, this, this, and this, because this is crazy. This is just crazy," and that's when she started explaining, "He's only like that because he's a Mormon and he don't think that none of us is supposed to be here, so I fight him every day." [chuckles] And she—

TS: So you didn't feel like you were alone anymore, right?

LU: No. And then another private came in named Stolvalt[?]—she was Caucasian; Sergeant Washington is African-American—she took Stolvalt under her care, because he was doing things to Stolvalt—"Well, you shouldn't be here," dah, dah, dah. And Sergeant Washington kept us under her wing and she kept us moving. When I decided to get out she was really upset, because she said, "You could stay in, you can do thirty [years]; you'll make twenty [years] easily now that you know what to do."

And I was like, "Nah, I'm getting out. It's time. I'm tired of this." Between going to the field, every year we went to Germany for forty-five days.

TS: The REFORGER?

[Exercise Reforger (from REturn of FORces to GERmany) was an annual exercise conducted during and after the Cold War by NATO. It was intended to ensure that NATO had the ability to quickly deploy forces to West Germany in the event of a conflict with the Warsaw Pact]

LU: Yes. And then going to California for a month.

TS: A different kind of exercise?

LU: Yes. And then Fort Hood. We spent—The unit—Because we were connected to tankers, so tankers are always out, so it got to the point where I was paying rent for a place that I'd only see for a week, and then my son was—in a way he was being raised half the year with my parents and the other half with me.

TS: Where were your parents living; still in New York?

LU: Still in New York.

TS: So you had taken him there when you had to go on your TDYs [temporary duty] and stuff?

LU: Field trips, yes.

TS: Okay.

LU: Because I couldn't send him to his dad because he was there, too. [chuckles]

TS: Right.

LU: He was there, too, so it was like, "Well, you're not helping me."

TS: Well, let's talk about a couple of those exercises; like, what you had to do on a job. When you were deployed TDY to Germany for the REFORGER, what was the experience like?

LU: The first time I went it was—it was hard, because when we get to Germany it's like a whole new station with all these soldiers, and women were being raped. You couldn't tell them who was raping you because there's so many soldiers you didn't know. They were being raped in the oddest places. Like, I can get up and I can go to the—to take a shower. Well, it's an open building in a sense and only one half of it had the toilets; there's no separation of toilets; everybody is just seeing everybody. Then you have a row of sinks, and then on the other side of the sinks was just an open mass of showers. Well, to get into

this building you can go on both sides, so the guys would walk through and act like, "Oh, we didn't know it was the girls'." So if you're in there by yourself—

You're like, "Wow, okay, soldiers raping soldiers. Okay."

Then some of the places we had to shower, you—they didn't—because at the time the Germans don't—didn't have women, so everywhere we went was strictly men. We had to get used to the fact that you come out the shower, and they can be individual stalls on a German Kaserne [German, meaning "barracks"], and there's a German man standing there waiting. Either he wants to get in that shower that you just came out of, or he's just interested to look because you're a black woman. So you come out—

TS: Did that happen to you?

LU: Oh, yeah.

TS: Yeah?

LU: Yeah. So you just—you get to the point you're numb; you're like, "Whatever." But they don't never touch you; the German guys, they just look; you're on display. So you learn, "Okay, I turned off this water. I need to get dressed in the shower and come out." And then the sink would be one big round circle in the middle, and he's shaving and you brushing your teeth. [chuckling] So you got used—because you wanted to shower so bad to where you just didn't care anymore; you're like, "Whatever. Get a peek, I don't care, I need to bathe," because you've been out in the field for, already, a week and a half and you're bathing out of a bucket. So now, when you really can get some real water on you, you really didn't care anymore.

TS: Right. So that was really difficult?

LU: At the beginning, yes, because you're like, "What in the world? No privacy? What? What is going on here?" But you got used to it. After you do a few of them you're like, "Okay, whatever."

TS: Did it ever change?

LU: No.

TS: It was always the same?

LU: Always the same; always the same.

TS: How were the guys in your unit that you worked with?

LU: Now, they were the best—the best—because in my platoon there was thirty of us, but only three females. They protected us. So if they knew we were going to take a shower and we was back at—like in California where the shower thing is open, one guy—some

of the guys would be on each end and tell them, "You can't go in there. You can't go in there. Our girls are in there. You can't go in there."

But we did the same things for them in the sense of, if we were doing a laundry run we would take all their laundry and wash their clothes. We didn't sleep in separate tents. We would get a GP [general purpose] medium [tent] and they would put up a partition for the three of us. They said we had to. If we want to go on trips like this we had to sleep in the same tent with them.

We were not allowed to go out in the dark because that was the—that was another problem. You go out in the dark to go to the bathroom, in California and in Germany, you can't see the hand—your hand because it's so dark. You don't know who's jumped you and who's beating on you and stuff. So we were not allowed to go nowhere.

TS: Because they were protecting you.

LU: Yes.

TS: But there's a trade-off, you said; stuff that you did for them that [unclear] them too.

LU: We would go—Like, we would tell our platoon sergeant, "It's that girl time and we need to make a mad run," and we'll take everybody's orders [chuckles], and then they'd give us a truck and the three of us would just go—we may take two of the guys with us—and we'll go into town and we'll being back everybody something.

TS: Whatever they want?

LU: Whatever they wanted. And Sergeant Washington knew how to get around; she's like, "Look, it's all of y'all. Y'all don't have the same issues we have. We need to go and do some girl stuff!"

And our platoon sergeant would say, "Well, what if you was in a war?"

"We would still have to do some girl stuff!" [both chuckling] "That doesn't change."

And so, we would—it was like a brother/sister thing.

TS: Yeah. I've heard that quite a bit, that that's—

LU: That was, I think—

TS: It's like either a father/daughter—

LU: Yes.

TS: —or a brother—usually it's the father/daughter.

LU: Father—The platoon sergeant was the father.

TS: Yeah, and the brother/sister—

LU: And then everybody else was the brothers and the sisters.

TS: So you felt safe within your particular platoon?

LU: My platoon, yes, yes, because once everyone got to know each other—and the nice thing was that our platoon sergeant would have—every six months we would have a platoon gathering and we would do something different. Like, in Texas where they do the [NASA] rocket launch, he did a whole family trip. He got us some buses, and husbands, wives, we all went.

TS: Houston?

LU: Yes, and saw the [Space Center Houston] museum and stuff like that. Or he would have a barbecue at his house. His wife would go nuts. She was in the army, too. She would go nuts because she was like, "Oh my God." But everybody would bring stuff. And he said this way the wives didn't have to think there was some kind of a relationship going on with the three of us.

TS: They could all see, meet you.

LU: Yes, that is was—Yes, that the three women on the team was just sisters. Then some of the wives were happy, because they would say, "Yeah, since y'all been in the unit I get better gifts." [both laugh] Because they'll come and they'll say, "Well—"

TS: "What should I get," right?

LU: Yes. "It's her birthday—" and dah, dah, dah. "We get better gifts."

TS: That's awesome.

LU: Or, "He come home, he don't—he helps out, he do whatever."
And we was like, "Well, this is what sisters are for." So yes, I had a good unit.

TS: That's good. What was the breakdown of the unit? So you've got three women. For racial breakdown—I got the mostly men, thirty men.

LU: Mostly men.

TS: Or twenty-seven men, three women?

LU: Three women, yes.

TS: And then your—

LU: Then we had all nationalities.

TS: Yeah?

LU: Yeah.

TS: It was pretty diverse?

LU: Yes.

TS: Was that something that seemed natural; like, working with all different sort of—

LU: For me, it was.

TS: Yes.

LU: From being in New York.

TS: Right.

LU: Stovalt it was a little different. Stovalt was funny. The first time Stovalt really saw a black person was when she joined the army.

TS: Oh, this is the white—

LU: Yeah.

TS: —the white woman that Washington took under her wing too.

LU: Yes.

TS: Okay. So it was you, Washington, and Stovalt.

LU: And Stovalt, yes.

TS: Okay. And so, she was having a cultural experience.

LU: Yes. Because she came from a little town and there wasn't nothing there but Caucasians. So when she joined the military it was a total eye opener for her to see that, "Oh, there really are—they do exist." [chuckles]

But she fell into—she fell in with everyone. No one took her questions personable. Like, one time when we was in Germany, she said—and this happened to me twice—she wanted to know what was the difference between American blacks and Africans. I said, "There's a big difference; big difference"

TS: How'd you explain to her?

LU: I broke down as much as I could—I said, "Our features are different. Our way of life, of course, is different." I told her—I said, "Africans don't believe that we're black, so we are on their hate list."

And she used to say, "Well, how do you know the difference?"

I used to tease her and say, "The typical African will wear calf-high socks with sandals and be very colorful with all their colors, and an American black, color coordinated, have on Nikes [athletic shoe]." [both chuckle]

And they one day when we was downtown—I don't know where we were—but we were downtown, and it could have been in "K-town," she's come back—she comes running back in, "I see the difference! I see the difference!"

[Between 1950 and 1955, Kaiserslautern, Germany developed into the largest U.S. military community outside of the United States. It was also referred to as "K-town," a term coined by the American military population who had trouble pronouncing the name]

And you're like, "Really?"

We had—She had to adjust to where some of the black men was married to Asian women, and she would ask them questions about that; Why did you choose an Asian woman? And some of the guys were truthful; some of them, you know they wasn't truthful.

TS: Just messing with her?

LU: Yeah. And yeah, she learned; she learned a lot. At least I hope she did.

TS: Yeah.

LU: Yeah.

TS: Tell me about your job. What was a typical day?

LU: Typical day was throwing up a sixty foot antenna, camouflaging that old van—well, it was three vans, because we had one van that had COMSAT [communication satellite], then one van that actually—you talked and you had the phones up and stuff, and then we had operations. So usually those three vans were backed up like this to each other and we would camouflage all of that.

A typical day was always making sure the tankers could talk [communicate with each other]. We was basically an operator, and people would come in and say their phones are not working right, and you investigate why while we out in the field.

Jumping; being able—where we may put up everything today and then get ready to get settled in and they'll say, "Break it down. You're jumping; the tankers are leaving."

And you're like, "Oh my God. I've got to tear this crap down." And you tear it back down and get to the next spot, because we always had to be—we usually had to be there before the tankers, so by the time they get there they had comm [communications] up.

Some units was awesome. Some units, they sucked. Sometimes, yeah, they just sucked, because the—they was just truly tankers, they didn't really care. Like, we may go out to a place and there's no mess hall. They don't care. They get Mermites [insulated food containers] brought in every day.

TS: What's that?

LU: They're like—You could have three thermoses inside of them, and somewhere else the food was cooked and they'd throw them in there, and they put the tops on them to keep them warm, and they bring them out to your site, and you got somebody just dishing it out. [chuckling]

TS: So that's the slop? Okay.

LU: That's when we would hate being with that unit. We learned stuff like—Our "Cable Dog" guys [soldiers who set up communications], they were really, really country boys, and you would smell food and you want to go over there. That's how I got introduced to eating snake and frog, because of them. Because you're like, "Really?"

"Oh yeah, dead kill is the best meat.

You're like, "Eww."

TS: But it was pretty good?

LU: The snake was.

TS: Yeah?

LU: And the frog, but they would have everything; they would have squirrel, they would have possum.

TS: So they would just pick up whatever they could find, or shoot it?

LU: Or they go out there and kill it.

TS: Yeah.

LU: They were true blue country boys, and they knew how to hunt, and so if you wanted a piece of meat you always went to the Cable Dogs. [chuckles]

TS: Now, they're called the Cable Dogs?

LU: Yeah, because all they did for us was run our cable lines.

TS: Okay.

LU: And once they did that they were done. And they would put up their tent and stuff and we'd go over there, "What? What? I smell food."

TS: "What is that you're making today?"

LU: Yeah. "Hmm, I don't want to eat what you got today."
They're talking about, "Didn't you see that roadkill?"
"No,—"

TS: "Don't tell me about it."

LU: But they were—Yeah, if you wanted something different you always go over to the Cable Dogs, and you're like, "Hmm, I don't want to mess with that."

TS: Well, how was food overall in the army for you? You had different kinds of experiences with it, like when you were out deployed and then you're—

LU: Yeah. [extraneous comments about daughter redacted]

[Recording Paused]

TS: Yeah, because there's different ways you can experience that, I guess.

LU: Yeah. Well, I stopped eating pork. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, you did?

LU: Yeah, because our mess hall sergeant, we'd go up to the field and pork was not something he thoroughly cooked.

TS: Okay.

LU: And so, you figure you in Texas, and you have a hundred and ten degrees, and he's not cooking pork great, people fall out.

TS: They get sick?

LU: Yes. So we ended up bringing a foot locker and you would load it up with food, and 90% of the time when we in the field you didn't—

TS: You didn't go to mess, you just ate what you brought.

LU: Yes, unless we was going for water or milk for cereal, but I lived off of ramen.

TS: Did you?

LU: Yes.

TS: [chuckles]

LU: Ramen and cereal. Every now and then somebody would do a run to the commissary and get some steaks or something and bring out a little a grill and you'd grill and stuff, but the mess hall, most—

TS: No?

LU: No.

TS: Not doing it?

LU: No, not doing it at all. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, you had talked about your housing; like you were in the barracks and that was kind of a scary situation, you said, at the one place at AIT. Was that where—

LU: That was in AIT, yes.

TS: Okay. And then at Fort Hood you—

LU: I stayed in the barracks for a short time.

TS: Then you were roommating—

LU: Roommates with a girl.

TS: Is that how you stayed the rest of the time?

LU: No, actually—my last year there I actually ended up in [on-base] housing.

TS: Okay. How was that?

LU: That wasn't bad at all. I had—The people that lived over me, she really took care of me in

her own way, because she was married, she was at home. Her daughter and my son played together a lot. And sometimes I'll be rushing because I'm trying to get him to his godparents house so that they can watch—so she—the wife can watch him, because her husband was also in my unit, and we had to go to the field. So sometimes I would run out and I would actually leave my key in the door. So she'd always come downstairs and check and make—take the key out the door, and I'm like, "Oh, this is just messed up." And then it got to the point where she would even sometimes—I'd come—she knows when I'm coming—because her husband was in our unit too—and she knew that I was coming home, she would actually cook and have dinner on the counter for me. And I would come home and I'm like, "I know she just put it here," because it'd be real warm. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah. That's nice.

LU: Yeah. She was great. Living on base wasn't bad. The only bad experience I had, I had a—my neighbor next to me had dogs and that didn't bother me; the dogs had puppies. One of the puppies kept coming over into my house and coming inside. Like, if I left my screen door open so that my son could go outside and play, the dog would come inside my house. So we kept the dog. As he was getting bigger—there's a big gap between my house—because it was, like, four apartments—

TS: Okay.

LU: —and then it was this gap, and then it was another four.

TS: Another four apartments, okay.

LU: The people that lived in the house over, because the puppy was outside, the daughter came and thought, "Oh, I can play with him," and he snipped her, and so she had to get stitches. So the dog had to be quarantined and all this—That was my worst experience. And then my—the commander had to get into it, the first sergeant. Then they wanted to get on my back because they said housing rule is that if you have a pet you got to put a fence up, and I didn't know I had to put up—he was actually tied and up under the patio, just there.

TS: Right.

LU: And the parents said, "Oh, well, we thought that he would—he looked friendly so we didn't think he would bite."

I'm like, "Oh my God. Okay. So I'm going through all of this because you thought it was okay?"

It wasn't like she played with it before. We didn't even speak to each other, because we barely saw each other, but it was okay for you to let her across and play with my dog.

But it was—That was like the last four months of me being in the army. At that

time I was getting out.

TS: You knew you were getting out?

LU: Yes. And my commander did waive everything, because they was like—if I was going to be there longer, then yeah.

TS: You have to put the fence up?

LU: Yes. But he was quarantined for two months, and I had to pay for him to get out—get out of puppy jail—and go from there. But other than that, housing wasn't bad at all.

TS: Yeah.

LU: It wasn't bad.

TS: You talked a little bit about the—I don't know if this is the right word but—the struggles of being a single parent.

LU: Yes.

TS: You've said that that's really, probably, why you got out.

LU: Yeah, that's why.

TS: What other issues did you have as a single parent in the army that you could say, "I wish the army would do it this way instead of that way," or something like that?

LU: I think they should have more programs for single parents. Because—Okay, when I got out the army and I married my husband, when we went to have the second child—ACS [Army Community Service]—well, I wasn't married to him yet—no, this is the third child—ACS gave programs in Germany, and those same pro—and the programs was like, if you come to a child development class on how you should be raising your child, and there's a panel of—not a panel but a bunch of other parents—at the end of each session you'll get a case of milk. So I would get powdered milk because I had to nurse. Well, if they would have pushed that to the single parents when was in the military, that would have helped financially, knowing that—

TS: That was available.

LU: —that was available. And it probably did, but the thing is, the communicating and letting the single people know that you have all these other opportunities that you can take upon. A lot of things I've learned about the military was after I got married. Like, back then, I didn't know as a single parent, and because I was an E-4, I was granted so many hours a month for free daycare.

TS: But you didn't know it.

LU: I didn't know it. And see, I could have had my son's godmother drop him off for a couple hours so that when I was in the field she would get relief from him. Because, I mean, this month—every month we was in the field, guaranteed two weeks, but that wasn't a long enough time for me to keep saying I'm going to send him to New York.

TS: Right.

LU: So she would take him for the two weeks to help me out. But if I would have known during that time I would have saved my hours and she could have at least dropped him off there, because her daughter was in school.

TS: Right, so she could have gotten a break, too, then.

LU: Yeah. Yes.

TS: Yeah, that's interesting.

LU: But no one want to offer up no advice, in that—

TS: There wasn't, like, a centralized places where you could go and figure out what services were available?

LU: It probably was.

TS: But you didn't know about it. [chuckles]

LU: But I didn't know what it—know it.

TS: Yeah. It seems like you learned a lot of things through just word of mouth in your unit.

LU: Yes.

TS: Your platoon.

LU: Yes, but I was the only single parent in my platoon.

TS: Right.

LU: Well, Stovalt didn't have any kids, and all the guys, well, they were either married or they were single, but they didn't have no kids. But the—

TS: They weren't dealing with it.

LU: No.

TS: Interesting. Were there any other issues that you think about now, with the single parenting?

LU: I think when it comes down to a single parent—I think just, period, for a woman back then—just the due respect. So if I come to my commander and say, "Hey, I'm pregnant," or, "Here's my profile—" they even treated you differently when you was on a profile from the man, and that shouldn't stop that woman from getting her next rank. Just overall, just the treatment, and some aspects of a woman, should not have never been.

For example, when I got out the military, I didn't know that I could take my DD 214 [Department of Defense form 214, which states a veteran's status of discharge from military service] and go to the VA [Veterans Administration] hospital; they just booted me out. I didn't—I never received any classes—exit classes, in the sense of, "Here's how you do your résumé; this is what you need to be doing." I didn't get any of those things. It was more like, "Okay, your home on record is New York. We're going to ship your crap there. See ya." [chuckles] "Here's your DD 214." Yeah.

TS: Right.

LU: But now I'm like, "Hold on, wait a minute." I could have put in a VA claim for having lost my arches from—in my foot; now I'm flatfoot. All kinds of things I could have done back then but I just didn't know. So just educating women.

TS: Right, giving the information to them so they can—

LU: Yes.

TS: That's interesting.

LU: And it's just not me. I have a few other ladies that got out in the seventies that did not know what their benefits were. One lady just found out in 2009—now, this is really bad—she just found out in 2009 that when they—when she got out they gave her a 100% disability because she had hurt her back. She didn't get a disability check until 2009.

TS: Really?

LU: Yes. She did—

TS: Did they give her back pay or anything?

LU: They gave her back pay, but it happened by accident. Somebody told her to take her paperwork—because she was in pain—because it would hurt her off and on, and someone educated her and told her, "Why are you going to the regular doctor? Go to the

VA." When she went to the VA and they was doing her paperwork, that's when they realized that they kicked her out with 100% disability.

TS: Nobody ever—Wow.

LU: No one ever told her.

TS: But she's getting it now?

LU: She's getting it now. And she was a—when she got out she was a single mom.

TS: Yeah. I've talked to a lot of woman who are on different sides of whether or not they think women should have children, or be single parents, in the military. Not just the army but across the board. Because with the WAC [Woman's Army Corps], before you came in—

LU: Yes.

TS: —up until the mid-seventies you couldn't even have a child or even have an adopted child.

LU: Right.

TS: And so, that's how they came through. And so, some of them are like, "You shouldn't—That's not—If you're going to take care of a child you should take care of the child, and it's the woman's responsibility," and so—"What do you do about deployments?" I mean, many women of that era are against having single parents—female single parents I should say—in the service. And others aren't; they fully supported the change. But how would you respond to that if you had a chance to?

LU: It'd never stop a single person; they have to live; they have to make decisions. That's what you call having your parent care package in place, and I did. My main providers would have been—if anything happened to me, would be my parents. But if I had to wake up in the middle of the night because I have to go and be deployed, I had things in place; he would automatically go to his godmother. In fact, my son has two godmothers. One of them still live in Killeen, Texas today, and the other one is in Kansas, and there have been times where we were called in at three o'clock in the morning and I had to take him to one of his godmothers. One of his godmothers, because we had got deployed at the last minute and had to go overseas, she took my son to New York.

TS: To your parents for you?

LU: Yeah, and she stayed there with them for—stayed with my parents for two weeks—because her husband was also gone—and she stayed with my parents—

TS: Oh, she stayed with your parents.

LU: Yeah, she stayed with my parents for two weeks, and then she left my son there, then she went to Kansas and stayed with her family for two weeks, and then she came back and picked him up when we were en route coming back. So if there's a will there's a way, to make it work, because regardless, if we were on the outside we still have to go to work.

TS: Right.

LU: And even in that era, we were still the lowest man on the totem pole, and some jobs—if you're trying to make it in the ranks they going to make you work longer and harder, so you still would have to have someone as a backup to help you. So I think either way a single parent is a single parent and they just have to make it work.

TS: And you're saying if the parenting plan is in place—

LU: Yes.

TS: —then that's a good, secure way to insure that things are done right.

LU: Yes. And for the army it's still—you still have to have a parent care package. My son—At the time my son and his wife—she just got out in December, and they have three kids, and the care package was—her parents—her mom lives in Oklahoma, and I'm here, so what they decided was that the kids would come to us, because, one, we can get there within six hours if they have to go somewhere, but not only that, I have an aunt—one of my mom's sisters lives in Atlanta, which is only two hours away—so she—they would—I mean, if they had to pick up and go right then and there my aunt can be there in two hours and take the kids, and then I will go to her to get the kids.

TS: Hand them off to you.

LU: Yes. Because her mom is in Oklahoma, it would take her too long to get to them, but that's a—

TS: You could do it.

LU: I can do it. That's a parent care plan. [chuckles]

TS: Right.

LU: Even for them, when they both went in the military, they had to have a parent care plan and it had to be strong. So I had Power of Attorney, I have all their birth certificates, their medical records, just so if—at the time when she was in the military, if they both get deployed. In fact, at one point both of them were going to be in Afghanistan at the same time; I knew I was going to get all three kids. She decided, "Nope, that's okay," and she

got out this past December, and then my son's unit changed to where he's overseas for three months, he's home for a month, he goes back overseas for three months, and they're doing this for twenty-four full months. Yes. It's all about having a—So even married people have their issues.

TS: Right. Right. Well, how many of your children went into the service?

LU: Just the one.

TS: Just the one?

LU: So far. My middle one is talking about going into the air force.

TS: Is your middle one a boy or a girl?

LU: Girl. I only have one boy.

TS: One boy.

LU: One boy.

TS: Would you recommend it to her?

LU: I told them all, "Go."

TS: Yeah? Why?

LU: I said, "Regardless of what everybody say, it is a job. You do get medical benefits. It's like anything out here. You got to—You have to live, so why not join the military? You get to travel. You get to see stuff. When you get out, if you do like your dad, you do twenty years, you get a retirement check, you're not dried up; you're not to where you can't do anything." Well, for the most part, depending on when you go on; your age. "But overall, the military's going to take care of you. You may not like the way they do certain things, but they're going to take care of you." So I tell them all, "Join."

I have friends where they say their kids are unruly and they have issues with their kids, and I told them, "Tell them to join the military. They will get discipline, some way, some form. They're either going to make it or not make it."

"Oh, well, Afghanistan—"

I'm like, "And right now you walk down the street you can get hit by a bus." [chuckles] "Okay?" I said, "Look at the little thirteen year old, and he's with some friends and he gets shoot—shoot up in a car."

TS: Right.

LU: Same environment—hostile.

TS: Well, how do you think your life has been different because you joined the army—[background noise] I'll pause it.

[Recording Paused]

LU: I'm ready.

TS: Okay. Did you hear my question? Sorry.

LU: No, do it again. Say it again.

TS: How do you think your life has been different because you joined the army back in 1985?

LU: I think I'm more well-rounded, because as a city kid, like I said, I didn't see the racial things; not in my face. By going to Texas, it was in my face. I mean, there's towns in Texas that back then they said, "No niggers allowed."

TS: At that time?

LU: At that time, and there's still a couple little places that says, "No niggers allowed," [chuckling] in Texas.

TS: What other kind of racial experiences did you see?

LU: It was mainly stuff like that.

TS: In Texas?

LU: In Texas: "No niggers allowed;" "This is your last chance;" "Don't come—Don't stop in our town." The military used to give us a list of places that we could and could not go to because of the racial tensions and stuff like that. So you—It's in my face now, versus it not—growing up. It made me a better person on how to deal with it, because North Carolina has its little racial issues, so I know how to handle it and don't take it too—Like, some of these folks, and the cops and stuff, "Oh, they just wanted to kill the black kid."

I handle it different. "Really? What happened? Give me the whole story, not pieces of the story."

I dealt with the little criticism of—living right here in Cary, they call Cary the containment area for relocated Yankees.

TS: Oh, really? [chuckles]

LU: Yes. [chuckles] Ninety-percent of the people that live in Cary are from the north. So, like,

it—it rolls off my shoulder and I don't even think about it. The military made me more focused, I think, on, "This is what I want to do; this is what I want—this is how I want to raise my kids; these are the things I want out of life." Like, they've never been to an all one race—well, I can't say it that way. They've never been to an all-black school.

TS: Segregated school?

LU: Yes, or lived in that kind of neighborhood, and I thank the military for opening up the doors and saying, "Hey, this is a whole new thing. A big—" like my grandmother—the melting pot. And so, when my husband got out—and he's from Halifax.

TS: He's from North Carolina?

LU: He's from North Carolina.

TS: Okay.

LU: And they struggled in Halifax; the kids did. Not with schoolwork or anything, but just understanding the whole concept—you live in the county, you can't do—you have to pay extra to do anything in the city limits.

TS: Are you're talking about your husband or your kids?

LU: The kids.

TS: Which kids?

LU: The three here. My kids.

TS: So you were in Halifax for a while.

LU: When he first got out—

TS: Okay.

LU: —for about four months; May to September.

TS: I see.

LU: And the military helped me understand that, okay, I want a colorful world, I don't want just one world, and when we moved to North Carolina and went to Halifax it was one world, and they couldn't handle it, so we knew we had to come this way so that we can get that colorful world.

The military did a lot for me. It showed me the things that I just didn't see because I was never introduced to it: How important it is to respect everybody and everybody's

race; and you can learn from everybody's race. Being in a building—in a dorm and they don't care if you don't know what an Indian girl is and what her ways—they're going to throw you in that dorm room together and you're going to come out, you're going to be like, "Wow." [chuckles] So I think the military gave me a lot.

TS: Do you think it helps you see, then, people more as individuals instead of in these groups, in a stereotypical way?

LU: I saw that before I came.

TS: Right, because of the melting pot you were in.

LU: Yes. I saw that before I came.

TS: It reinforced that.

LU: It reinforced it, but then it made me want to venture out a little bit more—

TS: Okay, outside your comfort zone.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

LU: —and learn different—Yes, and learn the different cultures, and do more in the different cultures. I believe between my raising and the military and when I married my husband, it helped me put the girls—my two younger ones, they started out in German schools, and they were the only ones—the only black Americans in the schools. And a lot of people say, "Why?"

I say, "Because they are living in a country where they need to learn the language and the culture. I don't know how long we're going to be here—" and it just so happened my husband ended up reenlisting and staying there, so we were in Germany for six years.

TS: That's some irony in that, whereas you were crying to go home. [chuckles]

LU: When I first went there, yes, yes. And they go back and didn't want to leave, yeah.

TS: Yeah, I'm sure.

LU: But I think that had a lot to do with growing up.

TS: Yeah. Oh, of course, and you were away from your family and your first house[?], the way you explained it.

LU: Yeah.

TS: Well, you talked about that racial conflict is off-post a lot more than on-post, so was it less so on-post, you think?

LU: Oh yeah, it was definitely less.

TS: Yeah?

LU: It was less, because I think on-post we were more of that family.

TS: Everybody's looking out for everybody within that unit?

LU: Yes. [dog barking] I think he's getting ready to go.

TS: You want me to pause again? I've got to meet your dog. [both chuckle] Okay, so on-post it was more like a family, is what you're saying. Okay.

LU: Yes. And unless you lived in a building that had 90% soldiers, you still had that unity. But once you decide, "Okay, I'm going to move further out," that unity started breaking down and you didn't—

TS: Okay. Do as much stuff together, and things like that?

LU: Yes. Because when I was in the army—Well, before I moved on post I did—went from out of the barracks into my first apartment, and I actually bought a trailer for my son and I, and it was in Nolanville, Texas, on—it was about thirty—twenty or thirty miles away from Fort Hood.

TS: Okay.

LU: And Nolanville [chuckles], I didn't know it was not really the place for me to live.

TS: Oh, really? Okay.

LU: Yeah. It was a little interesting. There was no—In the mobile home section I lived in, it was gorgeous, and I was like, "Perfect," because you always want the—a nice neighborhood for your kid to grow up in and stuff, but I didn't realize how anti-soldier some of my neighbors were. [chuckling]

TS: Oh, anti-soldier.

LU: Yes.

TS: Not anti-army.

LU: Just anti-solider.

TS: Okay, soldier.

LU: And then my biggest introduction to the rebel flag, and you're like, "Wow, okay." And how Nolan—Actually, Nolanville was on *60 Minutes* [American newsmagazine television program] as the speed trap town in Texas. Now, if you make *60 Minutes*, you're doing something.

TS: [chuckles] Did you get caught up in the speed trap?

LU: No, but it was just other little nitpick things that you just wouldn't think about. Like I said, I still didn't have car. I had a driver's license but I didn't buy me a car. So I always—

TS: You had to depend on other people to help you?

LU: Yes. And my son and I, I got him in a stroller and we're walking, and I'm going to the store, and the cop comes up to you and says, "Where you going? Where do you live?"

And you telling him, "I live right—" Dah di dah, and he's typing it in to make sure.

"Let me see your ID."

You're like, "Really?" [chuckles]

TS: And you're just walking.

LU: Just walking. So once I was able to move on base, I moved on base, and I sold the mobile home.

TS: Left that behind.

LU: Left that behind. Because my dad was saying, "Oh, no, you can bring it back." And see, we actually lived in Queens and we had a big yard for little city kids, and I could have put a trailer back in—behind my mom and dad's house and it wouldn't have did a dent in their yard.

TS: [chuckles] Really?

LU: Yeah, wouldn't have put a dent in their yard. But I was like, "No, no, I'm leaving it right there. I'm moving on base, just so I can get that unity."

TS: Well, if you had to weigh issues of gender and issues of race, as your experience in the army, would you say one was harder to navigate than the other? Maybe "harder" is not the right word.

LU: I know what you're saying. I would say race.

TS: Okay.

LU: Not on the base, but on the outside. And then on the base it would be the gender.

TS: Really?

LU: Yes.

TS: Okay.

LU: Depending on who was in charge of you.

TS: That made a big difference, didn't it?

LU: Yes.

TS: Did that one captain that was the Mormon ever leave and then somebody new come in and it was better?

LU: Yes, it got—and it got better. And actually, we ended up with a different first sergeant who had a totally different outlook and perspective, and things got a lot better. Sometimes I wish I'd never got out. Sometimes I wish that I would have just stayed in and did my twenty, because I think when I look at it life would still be a little bit different. I would be, maybe, two steps ahead.

TS: Right.

LU: But—

TS: That's always a "if you knew then what you know now," sort of thing, and you can't—

LU: You can't change it.

TS: No.

LU: But I do stress it to everyone join—my niece joined and when she got in she went in as a private, and she retired three months ago as a first lieutenant, because she did go back to OCS [Officer Candidate] School and she did go from black to gold [from enlisted to officer], and yeah, she's—she tells us all the time, "That was the best thing I did."

And she came from Halifax, and we was like, "There's nothing here. You need to learn, you need to grow."

My sister-in-law—my husband's younger brother's wife—we told her to go in. He didn't want to go in. They wasn't married at the time, they were just dating, and she went in, and she had went to Korea and came back and she realized—they got married and

they have two kids, but she realized that Halifax is not where she needed to be. She lives in Greensboro.

TS: Does she?

LU: Yes.

TS: And she's out now?

LU: She's out—She didn't—She—

TS: You're going to have to give me her name too. [both chuckle]

LU: I'll give it to you. I'll tell her too.

TS: That's great.

LU: She got out and right now she works for Greensboro County prison [Greensboro Detention Center].

TS: Okay.

LU: But when she got out she tried to live in Roanoke Rapids [Virginia] and it just—

TS: It wasn't fitting anymore?

LU: No.

TS: You think, maybe, when you get out there you get this different worldview and you just can't go back—

LU: Yes.

TS: —to certain places anymore.

LU: Yes. Now, see, I can go back to New York.

TS: Because that world view was already big, in a sense.

LU: Yes.

TS: Right. Some senses no, but some yes, right?

LU: Yes. And for my niece and my sister-in-law, when they—my niece never came back to Roanoke Rapids. She just knew she would never go back to live. Now, she goes to visit

family and everything, but as far as her living, she knew—

TS: Right, that's what I mean by going back.

LU: No, she—No. And Kita[?]—Kita came back to Roanoke Rapids and she was like, "I can't do this," and Kita been living in Greensboro for at least—I think she got out in 2004, so she's been in Greensboro since 2006—somewhere around that time frame—and she refuses—she'll visit her family but she says she will never move there. And you're right, it's when you get out and you can see, "Oh, wow, we don't have to live this way." Yes.

TS: It makes a big difference.

LU: Makes a big difference. You want more.

TS: Your expectations are a lot different.

LU: Yes. Yes. Now, I would have lived in Roanoke Rapids under duress [both chuckle], but it was where my husband was from. And my mom would tell me, "Don't say anything. He's going to jump ship."

TS: Let him figure it out?

LU: Yeah, because he left when he was eighteen, but he just wanted to be closer to his mom, and my parents, wherever you go, they come. It just was weird that when we got home May 19, my dad actually died June 19. Yes. So it was—But it still didn't matter; it was a thing of, wherever we go, my family always showed up; I mean, they always—you—they always show up. You know it's bad when your sister calls you and she's like, "I'm getting off the exit, I'm getting ready to go Lowe's [store], you want anything?"

And that's mainly because they even know your area, your environment, and they know what time somebody's going to be in your house, and you're like, "No."

Or they—"Well, we're going to pick up X, Y, Z for dinner."

I'm like, "Really? Where you at?" [both chuckle]

"Oh, we almost at your exit. First we're going to go here," and I'm—

TS: Yeah. They know the layout because they've been here so much.

LU: Yes. So my family—Even when we lived—Even when I was in the army and I was in Texas, my family came. My sisters would come for six weeks, seven weeks, because—when they was out of school. When I was in AIT and I was getting ready to graduate, my siblings came to see me graduate. So from my side of the family it—

TS: You had a lot of support.

LU: Yes. Wherever we go, they show up. So it was to come here to be with him, but my mom told me, she said, "Don't say anything. He's not going to like living in Halifax." And

when they started giving out the rules, and then when he learned that—Okay, you did all this time in the military and the only job in Halifax is to work in somebody's factory, he was driving from Roanoke Rapids to Chapel Hill, two hours one way.

TS: That's tough.

LU: And he did that from July to September 31, until we got into here.

TS: Till you moved down here.

LU: Yes. And she said, "He's going to get tired of doing that. Don't say anything." He loves his mom, yes, but he's going to have to make—

TS: Yeah.

LU: And he did; he was like, "I can't do this."
I was like, "Okay." [both chuckling]

TS: I'll help find a house.

LU: Actually, he found this house.

TS: Good. Good. Well, when you got out yourself, you didn't really go right into the civilian world because you're still—then you—

LU: No, I actually—when I got out I did go into the civilian world.

TS: Oh, you did? Okay. You want to talk about that?

LU: Okay. It's kind of weird. But I did; I got out and I went back to New York.

TS: Okay.

LU: My son and I went back to New York. I had got me an apartment, and my first job was a receptionist for a air-conditioner company. They was making air-conditioners for big corporations and stuff. And I didn't fit the mold of the place.

TS: What was the mold?

LU: Pretty, slender girls, walking with the high heels. I still had that military—

TS: Bearing, shall we say?

LU: Yes. Yes. And if you said something that I didn't like I didn't hold my tongue [idiom for not talking]—I didn't learn how to hold my tongue yet—and I didn't fit that mold. But

what I didn't realize was that at nighttime, where this place was at, it was full of prostitutes at night. So the guys that was making the air-conditioners, I was coming to open up the gates and the doors and I would say, "Good morning," to them, and they wouldn't speak to me. And I didn't realize why until one of the other ladies said, "That's because the time you're coming is around the time that the prostitutes are clearing out, so they may think you're one of them until they get to meet you."

And I was like, "Okay."

And when I told my dad of the surroundings—"You must quit!" [chuckling]

TS: Yeah, I'm sure. I'm sure he was right on that.

LU: "You can't stay there! You can't—" dah, dah, dah, dah.

TS: Was that transition into the civilian world after your army service difficult?

LU: Yes. Because you're living on base and you don't realize how much the light [electricity] and all of that cost, and I wanted a job so bad so I took the first one. And I really wasn't out the army yet; I was still on—

TS: Your terminal leave?

LU: —terminal leave, and I had three months and—but I was like, "Nope, I want a job right now." And I didn't realize ten dollars an hour was no money. [chuckling]

And then I left that job and I got a job working for Con [Consolidated] Edison [Inc.] and I was working in the—I was reading meters. Well, first I was doing underground manhole repair, and that paid well, but my dad had a heart attack [idiom for got upset] with that because he was always thinking, "You're a girl, you need—this is not the type of job you need."

So I switched and I became a meter reader. And he was always scared the tar, because I would have to low—lower down a thirty pound black pot of tar to the person under me, or if I was down at the bottom—he said, "That tar gets on you, it's going to burn your skin and—" Yeah, my dad was a trip.

But he—I switched and I became a meter reader, and—

TS: That has its own challenges.

LU: Yes. You meet the weirdos and go in the houses and—

TS: Pets; dogs?

LU: That didn't even bother me.

TS: No?

LU: No, that didn't bother me.

TS: The people were more scary?

LU: I was actually—Yes. I was actually locked in a basement, because the superintendent of the building said that—the super—he said that he was going to keep me. Yeah.

TS: Keep you?

LU: Keep me. So he locked me in the meter room.

TS: Like, kidnap you?

LU: Yeah.

TS: What happened?

LU: Once again, because of the army, I learned how to connect with the guys, and there was only two female meter readers and there was five guys, and the way they had it was that the blocks crisscrossed each other, so if one of the guys as going across they should see you on your route, but we also this thing were all of us would get together and we would have lunch together every day, just so that we all know that we were okay. Because some of the guys said they would come and knocking on the door and the husband was thinking that the wives was sleeping with them, and they get guns pulled out on them and stuff.

So this one day I didn't show up, so they started looking for me. And then they can track, because you had your meter—where's your last building—and they tracked it, and he said, "Oh, I didn't know she was still down there." [chuckles] Yeah.

TS: Did you ever go back there again?

LU: No. What happened—Well, I continued to do meter reader work, but for his building, one of the guys would come and read the meters and go from there. Yeah, had the men—and we would do the same—like a military thing—we would do the same—the two girls—we would do the same thing for the men, because the men would have the women that would come to the doors naked, and we would have the men that would come to the door naked. And they knew it was us so we would flip them. [both laughing]

TS: Surprise!

LU: Yeah. We would flip it.

TS: So you were watching out for each other.

LU: Even then; even then.

TS: That's interesting.

LU: It was different, just trying to get back into the world, because I really didn't have a lot of work experience before I joined. I was working—I was a home attendant—one of my jobs—and the other job was Baker's Shoe Store, as sales person, so that's not really a lot of experience before I joined the army.

TS: Well, do you think there's anything that you would want to address that civilians may not know or understand about people who have been in the service that they don't appreciate?

LU: I think they need to understand—is our discipline, because I have that problem now. Even now, at work. I work as a business analyst for the state, and it's with the school software that's statewide. And everybody told me I always have this mean look, and I have this no nonsense, and I said, "It's not that. I'm the biggest kid on the block, but—" the military install a certain discipline in you, and regardless of what you do it's there. And work ethics is really, really there.

So when you—When y'all say, "I got a headache and I'm not coming to work," I don't understand that because that's not what I'm used to. Or when you say—we have meetings and you was given a task, and we come back a week later and we're still reiterating everything that we was supposed to have done, we've lost—

TS: A week.

LU: —a week.

TS: I think somebody explained it to me once as, there's no sense of urgency.

LU: There isn't. And for us it was always, "Hurry up. Rush. Get there." And even if you're going to sit there, look, you're there. [both chuckle]

TS: But there's a sense of urgency about getting it done and doing it as a team—

LU: Yes.

TS: —that is kind of missing in the some of the civilian jobs, that people have had that I've talked to.

LU: Yes.

TS: You would agree with that?

LU: I agree. And the longer they been doing the job, the more relaxed and the more laid backed they are, to where they really don't care. And so, I think maybe that—maybe the state has to understand it's not good to have somebody work thirty years; twenty years is enough.

TS: Get some fresh—

LU: Yes.

TS: —energy in there.

LU: Yes. Because look at the—that's what the military is doing; how do they keep things rolling? They not going to have a—some of the higher rankings may be older as dinosaurs—but the ones that's really doing the grunt work—the work that's being done—they in there the twenty years at an early age, they make their twenty years, and they still have time to live.

But with the state, you go in eighteen, but you have to do thirty years. So I think they get complacent. Then you have somebody like me that come in and I rattle their boats because they're like, "No, we don't do it this way."

TS: Stuck in their trench of whatever they've been doing back and forth.

LU: Yes, and they think—like I said, at my job they think I'm just mean and don't want—some of them don't want to approach me, and I'm like, "I'm the biggest kid around, but you have to understand when it's time to work it's time to work." Anyway. Well, you been out the army for so long now you—I'm like—I went in the army young so it's a mindset—

TS: Well, you were disciplined when you went in too.

LU: Yeah, my dad was nuts. [both chuckle]

TS: Now, you told me—I think off tape—that you did use your GI benefit for a few things.

LU: Yes. I used it while—when I got married with my husband, I used it to go to school and—actually I used it before then. When I got out the military I thought I wanted to be a hairdresser, so I did the Wilfred Barbizon—Wilfred Beauty Academy [Wilfred Academy of Hair & Beauty Culture]. I did that and I finished the training, I just never went to get certified, because after a while I was like, "I don't want to do this."

TS: Right.

LU: [chuckles] And then I still had money left over, and so when I married my husband I went to City of Chicago on the base—in New Mexico, and it was mainly on the videotapes, so we'd have to listen to the videotapes and answer questions, and then I had to go to the learning center to take the exams.

TS: Okay. Kind of like a correspondence [course]—

LU: Yes. I finished that, and then we ended up going to Germany, and when we went to Germany I said—I had started doing in-house home care, so I said, "Well, might as well get my degree in early childhood, so I started doing that. But before I could finish we came back; he retired. And so, I used the rest of the GI Bill when I got here and went to Wake Tech [Wake Technical Community College] and finished up all the courses I needed, and then transferred them to—back to Texas. So I did use my—

TS: Did you ever use it for buying a house; any of the—

LU: The VA loan? This house.

TS: This house?

LU: This house. Well, actually, my husband used his. I haven't used mine yet.

TS: Oh, okay.

LU: I haven't used mine yet.

TS: I have a couple general questions for you.

LU: Yes.

TS: Since you've been out, and since your husband retired, the roles that women have in the army have really changed, in that the combat roles are opening up. What do you think about that? Do you think there's anything that women shouldn't be able to do, not just in the army, but in the military?

LU: No. I think we should be able to do it all; we should be able to do it all.

TS: What do you say to those who say women aren't strong enough, they—

LU: I think they full of it.

TS: Or the unit cohesion I think is another one.

LU: I think they just full of it. If you give a woman the chance she will prove that she can do it. And we know our ability; we know when we should stop; we know how far we can go. But if that man is fighting, and he's on the front line, I don't see why women—if she want to be on that front line then let her be on that front line. She may bring more than—To me, men—I'm trying to say this so it's not so negative—men thinks with their third leg [referring to a man's penis], and we truly think with logic. I've seen where men would—the water barrel is—the water buffalo [portable water tank] is about a half a mile and they're all carrying the [water] jug up the half—up to the water buffalo to fill it up with water, so they walked a half a mile there and they walked a half a mile back with

these heavy things, and then the women, they'll throw it on the back of the truck and take all of them, which is less manpower [chuckles], drive up there, send one person, fill up all the water jugs, and come on back.

TS: You save time and manpower and energy.

LU: Yes. So we think differently. I believe a woman can do it because we think differently. We bring to the table a different aspect of it all. We can multitask. Show me a man that can multitask. So I feel that we can bring a lot to the table if we're given the opportunity.

TS: The other kind of controversial issue lately—not so recently but—has been homosexuals in the military. When you were in they didn't even have "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," they had—

LU: That is so correct.

TS: —you're gay, you're out, if you get caught.

["Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is the official U.S. policy on military service by gays, bisexuals, and lesbians. The policy prohibited military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted homosexual or bisexual service members, while barring openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual people from military service. Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed 20 September 2011]

LU: Yeah.

TS: And then they had "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and that was repealed. What do you think about that whole issue?

LU: I don't care. As long as the person is respecting the other person, in the sense of not pushing up on them, I really don't care, because when it's all said and done they're going to bleed just like you're going to bleed. What you do behind your closed doors is your business. I don't care. As long as you're not parading all down the street and acting crazy with it, I don't—I truly and honestly really don't care. I believe that, yes, they should be able to serve. Why not? Yes, they can get married. Don't even have to call it "marriage"; you can call it anything else you want to call it, because I think it's just the word "marriage" that's throwing people off. I don't really care. Because I look at it this way: they're together, and why shouldn't I be able to put you on my insurance if I chose to put you on my insurance? It's better to do it that way than for you to go and every time I turn around you're in the emergency room and you're still costing me money. So I really—

TS: So if they can do the job—

LU: If they can do the job, let them do it.

TS: Same as women.

LU: Yes, same as women. I don't really care. Because if you started saying, "Oh, well, you're a homosexual and you can't join," I truly think people will start using that as an excuse. Sooner or later we won't have anyone that's willing to join, and then the draft will come back. Just my—Just how I'm thinking about it.

TS: Well, I mean, it's true that some people tried to use that during Vietnam.

LU: Yes. So I'm like, "No, let's just go ahead on and put everybody on the front line." [both chuckle]

TS: What does patriotism mean to you?

LU: It means being—duty, honor, respect. Living—Not so much living by a code of honor, but just being aware of everyone and—oh, man, it means so many different things to me. Overall, being you, but being the best you can be as you. Don't look at one person or one race and disrespect them. Just be who you are. But every time you meet somebody different, don't slash them down, don't be rude, listen and learn first, because you may find out that it's not all that bad. But mainly, honor; honor and duty.

TS: Would you do it again; go back in?

LU: Oh yeah. If I could—

TS: I mean, I knew the answer, but—

LU: Yeah. I would go back in, and I would go back—well, no, I would not; not this era; not with these—not with this group; not with this group.

TS: What do you mean?

LU: My son tells me they walk around now and they have a sensitivity card and all this other stuff and I'm like—

TS: A sensitivity card?

LU: You can show your commander—It's a little card and it had smiley faces on it—smiley faces on it to say how you're feeling, so you can tell your commander, "What you said to me is a three." [chuckles] "You hurt my feelings." So not this army—

TS: But the other one that you were in.

LU: —but the other army.

TS: That's interesting. I have not heard about the sensitivity card.

LU: Yeah. They get sensitivity training and some other things, and I'm like, "Wow. Okay." [chuckles]

TS: I don't have any more formal questions, but is there anything that you want to add that we haven't talked about, or just a final thing you'd like to say?

LU: No, not really. If I could do it again I would do it again. If I can be a strong advocate to tell folks, "If your kid is not going anywhere, and you know they're going down a rough road, get them into ROTC, and maybe they will just move on and join the military. Military's not the all [be all and end all], but it will give them something; something to get focused with."

For my husband, he wanted to get out of Halifax so it did great for him. For me, I wanted to get out of my home, so it did wonders for me. My son joined because after he graduated he didn't like working two jobs. So he came in the house and said—because we told him, "Join. You don't have to work two jobs." He was working two jobs, still not getting ends to meet, and had a roommate.

TS: Just struggling economically.

LU: Yes. And then no medical benefits, because if he paid medical benefits that was 90% of his paychecks. So he just decided, "I'm joining," and he did. He came home, he said, "I hooked it up so that I don't—my lease is up in July, can I move in with y'all until October, and I'm gone," and he's been in there for five years. And if I asked him today, he say, "Oh, they stupid—they this, they that—but I ain't getting out." [both chuckle]

TS: Because he knows what it's like on the other side.

LU: On the other side. And he know I'm going to be in the back of his head telling him, "You have three kids. Your oldest is seven, the youngest is three. You need medical [insurance]." [chuckles]

TS: Keep supporting him.

LU: Yeah. "You need medical, because medical out here will eat your paycheck alive, and the economy is not the best, and y'all will struggle; y'all will struggle really hard." And so, he knows I'll be on the back of his head.

And my middle one, when she graduates in December, she said, "Yeah, I'm thinking about joining the air force." [both chuckle] She wants to be a firefighter. She's taking the Raleigh exam the 24th and 25th of this month.

I told her, "If you don't pass, then what?" She know—She's applied for Delta Airline. Delta Airline have eighteen hundred openings for airline stewardess. I said, "You

have no children. That's something else you can do."

And she said, "I'm going to pass the test to be the firefighter, and I'm going to do this for about three years, maybe less, and then I'm joining the air force and I'm going to be a firefighter."

And I said, "You do understand when you join the air force it doesn't really mean that you're going to be out there doing fire—taking down fires. You may end up being a firefighter code person, or you may be in a building, or you may be doing trainings. So do understand that."

And I said that to a friend of mine and she said, "You didn't tell her that you do understand you join the air force, you join the military, you can be—"

"No, I want her to understand that she may not be doing—"

TS: The job she wants to do.

LU: Right. I don't care about her joining. I'm all—

TS: Yeah.

LU: I asked her, "Why wait? Do it now."

TS: Right.

LU: "No, Mommy, I need to see the outside world."

I was like, "Okay, whatever."

The baby girl is the last one and I think eventually she's going to—

TS: That's the one that came down here?

LU: Yes. She's going to end up going, too. So I tell everybody, "Do three years, it's not—it'll go by fast. If you make it to that third year, reenlist, because it's not as bad as you think. Don't listen to the ones that never been in, and don't listen to the Vietnam vets. This is a new world, a new era. Yes, we have Afghanistan going on, but it is what it is. So make the best of it wherever you go, do the best you can, and keep it moving."

TS: Keep it moving.

LU: Keep it moving.

TS: Sounds like a good place to end. What do you think?

LU: Yes.

TS: Well, thank you very much.

LU: Thank you.

TS: Appreciate it.

LU: I've had fun with you.

TS: I had fun, too.

[End of Interview]