

**WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT**  
**ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: Yardley Nelson Hunter

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: October 24, 2010

[Begin Interview]

TS: This is Therese Strohmer and today is October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010, I'm in Elon, North Carolina with Dr. Hunter and this is an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Project, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. And Dr. Hunter, how would you like your name to read on your collection?

YH: Doctor Yardley Nelson Hunter.

TS: Okay, very good. Well, Dr. Hunter, thank you so much for participating in this project.

YH: My pleasure.

TS: I would love for you to start by telling us a little bit about where you were born, where and when you were born, and where you grew up.

YH: Well, I was born in Buffalo, New York, a very cold blizzard-y day, February the 4<sup>th</sup>. And I'm the middle child of six children, baby girl, and I went to high school at—in Buffalo, very active in Buffalo, in my church and my community, working in the Junior Achievement program, in choir and church. And I saw a wonderful looking, beautiful woman in the church one day, I was eleven years old, and I said to my mom "I want to be just like her, I want to dress like her, look like her, be like her."

TS: About how old were you?

YH: I was about eleven going on twelve years old at the time, and hadn't quite made up my mind on what I wanted to be, except I knew I wanted to be a teacher, did not know what type, and I wanted to teach. I liked teachers at the time, I guess I liked school, too, that was why.

And she said, in her wisdom, "Then why don't you do what she did? Find out what school she went to, and why don't you go to her school?"

Ironically enough, seven years later, I went to Bennett College with four-year academic scholarship, and ten years later, she was my mentor.

TS: Is that right?

YH: So it was great.

TS: Wow.

YH: So I had a great experience in Buffalo.

TS: That's ironic, too. Well, what was it like growing up in Buffalo, New York? What kind of—did you live in the city or rural or suburbs, where did you live?

YH: I lived in what you'd call inner city, one would call it the projects, which we did call it. Ten buildings in one block, ten flights—eight flights on each building, and ten families in each flight. And I didn't know I was what you call a latchkey child until I read about it in education somewhere, that—

TS: Years later?

YH: Years later, that children who went back home with a key around their neck were called latchkey—latchkey children, or that we were considered to be children of poverty, not realizing that either. My mother always told me to be proud of myself and be happy in the skin I was in, and she raised us that way, so we were happy in that neighborhood. Neighborhood school, and I enjoyed it. However, in the fifth grade, I was tested as gifted and sent away from that school to a school across town. Had to catch a city bus, and had to go to the special school with the special students with these special skills, and I believe that gave me a lot of eye-opening opportunities I would not have had otherwise. My father could not read or write, and he learned how to write his name late in life. My sisters taught him. My mother's a high school graduate and she always believed that high school was just a passing thing for college, even though I'm first generation college, and the only one who graduated from college of my brothers and sisters.

TS: Out of the six of you?

YH: Out of the six of us. It still was something she expected all of us to do. So I enjoyed growing up in Buffalo, and I enjoyed the experiences that I had, and every time I wanted to try something, my mother, being a housekeeper, as they say—cleaned houses for people—

TS: Right.

YH: —would work even harder to make sure that I had the lunch money, the bus money—there was no free bussing at that time, no bussing, so we caught—I caught the

city bus, and I had the opportunity to do whatever was required for me to do to keep moving forward. And I'm very grateful for that support.

TS: What did your father do for a living?

YH: My father worked in Bethlehem Steel, which in Buffalo, New York, you either worked in one of the steel plants or the automotive plants, and he was a molder, so as we traveled up and down the highways going from his hometown, South Carolina, back to Buffalo, he would look over and say "You see that big pipe? It says Bethlehem Steel. That's what I make." So we knew he was a molder and he made these big pipes. But he stopped—he stopped working for some reason, never could understand why, what happened, but we ended up somewhat on welfare, and while he took odd jobs and whatever, we always had food, lights, whatever, and he always made sure we went to church. He didn't go, but he made sure we were there, he made sure everyone was there, and he always picked up my mom from church, we always wore our flowers for Mother's Day, and he made sure that—my mother made sure that we had our Sunday rides, Dairy Queen—

TS: [laughs] Excellent.

YH: Fine arts[?].

TS: Did they—was your mother also from South Carolina?

YH: My mother's from Virginia.

TS: Virginia.

YH: She's—I think in her time, she would be considered to be middle class. My grandfather worked for the railroad, and so he had quite a bit of money, bought a lot of land. He was one of the first families in the neighborhood—you know Virginia, not very big, outside Charlottesville. He was one of the first families to have an outhouse in the house. [chuckles] As we call bathrooms. And he taught his children well, he did, and he taught my mother well. And my father sort of married up.

TS: How'd they meet?

YH: Now, that's always funny, because my father says he picked her up off the street. That's not true.

TS: [laughs]

YH: My mother worked in Washington D.C.

TS: Okay.

- YH: She'd had a child as a young girl and she left the child with my grandmother and she went to Washington D.C. to work the factories during the war. And she and her cousin were at the corner waiting for the bus.  
My father pulled up and said "Do you want a ride?"  
And of course they said "No," and then he cajoled them to get in the car, and they go for a ride. And after two or three "Do you want a ride?"s, he and my mom started dating, and I guess I'm part of that history, right there.
- TS: That's right. So they met during the war?
- YH: So they met during the war, while she was working in D.C. during the wartime effort. He worked in a restaurant and he had gotten into an accident and he had to stay in Washington while he was recuperating and he met my mom. But my mom was always active in some type of civic and social activities anyway, so.
- TS: Right. So you—so he did kind of pick her up on the street. [laughter]
- YH: He did kind of pick her up on the street, so it's understandable that they would get married on April Fools' Day, you know, keep the story—keep going, you know. But they always had a special relationship, and my father always provided. He was not a dead-beat parent as people may think, he was always there for my mother, he was always there for all of us, and I sometimes felt like I was going to be a United Negro Fund commercial, because I told him I wanted to go to college—go to college, of course, to be a teacher.
- TS: Right.
- YH: And he in turn says "Daddy can't help you, I wish I could help you, but I can't help you, you're going to have to take care of this yourself," and I told him not to worry, I would always be a good girl, I would always do what was best, and I would help myself. And so when I went into high school, my goal was to do as well as I could so I could go to college. So when I received my acceptance to go to college, I also received a letter to be a debutante, and my friends were going to be debutantes, and I wanted to be a debutante. I had worked all summer for this money to go to college. Seventy-five dollars to hold your room at that time, a lot of money, you know, a lot of money when it comes to 1971.  
And my mother says "You have a choice. You can pay seventy-five dollars and register to be a debutante, or you can pay the seventy-five dollars and hold your room for college. I'll support you, whatever you want to do." Wasn't a hard choice to make. Socially, it was, but I did send my money back to the college, and six weeks later, they told me I received a four-year academic scholarship to that college, and so my way to go to school was paid for, one hundred percent.
- TS: That's terrific.

YH: And while my friends were debutantes, and they may have gone to college too, I didn't have to pay a penny. I paid one hundred dollars in my senior year because tuition went up.

TS: But other than that.

YH: By then, I had—I was in the ROTC, so I just paid that whole bill off, but it was the best decision I could have made, but again, my mother—I praise her, my mother gave me the opportunity to make that decision, because she knew I would have to live with that decision, and I made the right one. And my father just packed me up and took me off to college.

TS: [laughs] Well, let me back up, still, just a little bit. When—you said you're the middle, kind of the middle—with six, you can't really be right in the middle, right?

YH: Four. [laughs]

TS: So, tell me a little bit about your siblings.

YH: My brother fought in the Korean conflict, Harrison, fought in the Korean conflict, in the army. And as you know, in those days, they went into the service very young, and he was enlisted, and his idea of the military was totally different than what the military was like when I went in, so he was appalled when he found out that my mother had allowed me to go into the military. How dare she? Those type of men that she was going to be around—but he's a good man, he lives in D.C., and when he came out, he was a GS1. They don't have GS1s anymore, but when he retired, he was a GM17, and they don't talk about GMs, because that's with the Secretary of Transportation, and that paid[?]. He did very well and unfortunately, though, he did contract malaria when he was in Korea, so every once in a while, he has a little bout and a reminder that he is in fact a serviceman who had effects of the war, of a conflict. Korea was not a war. My sister was very bright, she pretty much picked up a lot of the Cherokee in my father's side, Cherokee [white?], so she had beautiful long hair, black hair and very bright, and she could have gone to school free had she passed, but she chose not to pass, so she had two and a half years of college, civil engineering[?], and start working in corporate America. She's retired now, living in Charlotte, civilian, but her husband is retired Marine Corps, so she's still touched the military. My other sister is—and by the way, my brother is more than—he's more than sixteen—I would say he's more than twenty-some years older than I am.

TS: Yes.

YH: And my sister is seven years older, and my other sister is six, and she lives in Buffalo, she's the child who never left home.

TS: Okay.

YH: There's always one, that stays close to home, that decides this is where they like, and so she still lives in Buffalo. She did not finish high school, and she's the one with the common sense and the horse sense in the family. The rest of us have the book sense, but she has the horse sense and the common sense. Then I come next, and so when they married and left home, I ended up from being the middle child, baby girl, to being the oldest child, only girl.

TS: Oh, right.

YH: So that role kind of shifted, so my brother behind me is a retired master sergeant in the air force.

TS: Oh, okay.

YH: And he lives in Elmira, New York, and interestingly enough, we thought four children were too many, would you believe that every one of his children went to college, and he does not have a single college bill, because he pays every time they go to school. So now my—his youngest child is in school, and her bill is caught up, and I'm so proud, because when she graduates, she won't have a bill like I have a bill. And he's a wonderful man, very close to the church and very family-oriented. My baby brother, who's three years younger than me, lives in Kinston [NC], and he's Marine Corps, he went into the Marine Corps. He didn't want to go into the air force because his sister was an officer and his brother was a high-ranking NCO, he didn't want to go into the army because his big brother was already in the army, had been in the army, so he chose the Marine Corps, and—let's see if I can back up. He was—my brother was—my baby brother was—

TS: What's his name?

YH: Terence, Terence. T-E-R-E-N-C-E, Terence Nelson.

TS: What's the name of the brother that went in the air force?

YH: Robert Nelson III. And of course my oldest brother was Harrison Levi Davis. But Robert Nelson III was in Beirut, he was also—and Terence was involved in the Falkner [Falklands?] War, and he was also in Beirut. So we've all had a brush or a feel during some strong event in the military, as far as the conflicts.

TS: You sure have.

YH: When—interesting thing, though, when I told my mother and father I wanted to join the air force, they said “Well, you always knew what you wanted to do, so go ahead and do it.”

TS: [laughs] Not a lot of resistance? From your parents?

YH: No, none whatsoever! Well, when Robert decided he wanted to go into the military, my father cried. “Oh, no,” he said “He’s leaving us and going into the military.” When my baby brother Terence decided he wanted to go into the military, my mother cried “Oh, no.”

TS: Well, that was her baby, come on.

YH: Her baby! I said “But Mommy, I’m your baby, I’m your baby girl.”  
She says “You’ll take care of yourself, no matter what you do, you’ll fall on your feet, that’s it.” So apparently—

TS: Different reactions.

YH: Different reactions, but it’s interesting, because one would think that they would be really concerned about their little girl, and of course, during that time, women going in the military had its—it had its image.

TS: Yes. What kind of image—how would you portray that image?

YH: I had an advisor at Bennett College, her name was Dr. Helen Tropia[?]. She had been in the army, and she was in charge of the special program for graduates—the graduates that had gotten my scholarship.  
And she sat down with me when I told her I was going to join ROTC at North Carolina A and T State University, and she said “I want to explain something to you.” She says, “People have a certain thought about women going into the military. They think that they’re going in to find a husband or they may have an alternative lifestyle so they want to blend in with the masses, or they’re so tomboyish that they’re never going to get married anyway, so that’s just what they really wanted to do. You’re none of that, and so you’re going to have to make it very clear to them that you’re none of that. Besides that, I don’t want you ever to walk into a meeting with a pad or a pen, because you’re nobody’s secretary. You’re going to be an officer, so you don’t take minutes. So don’t get into the habit of being assumed that you’re a secretary, and don’t learn how to make coffee,” she said, “Because everyone is going to think that you should be the one making the coffee, again, a presumption that women are doing these things or should have these roles. Well,”

TS: What a great mentor.

YH: I do not walk into any meetings right now with a noticeable pad or pen—it’s in my purse, but I don’t show it. I’m the last one to show my pen and pad. And nor do I drink or make coffee. [laughs]

TS: [laughs] That’s true.

YH: So she taught me a very healthy way to watch, but I did find out that womanhood is from the inside out, and no matter what you wore, no matter what you do in life, or even the fact that you can command men, the femininity will always be there, and it should always elude[exude?] some out from inside, not from just the outside. So it wasn't the makeup and the cologne and the perfume and all that, it was the compassion and the dedication and all those nurturing skills that are in women anyway that comes out in making decisions about people.

TS: That's a terrific way to explain, sure.

YH: I liked it.

TS: Well, now, when you had mentioned before that you think you liked school, was there a particular, like, elementary or high school—now, you had said you'd gone from one school to the other because you were selected for special achievement?

YH: It was called exceptional children, but really, it was for the gifted side, because exceptional children are those with learning disabilities, and those were accelerated learners. So I was an accelerated learner for gifted children, and they had no program that was directed toward that. Not a big enough program in Buffalo, so they grouped us all together into this one school, where one teacher who had that license could nurture us and move us on to a higher level.

TS: So this is like in the '60s?

YH: In the '60s, yes. Very much so. I didn't go to high school until '68, so it was pretty much—'67, '68—so it was like '65, '64, '63, I was eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen.

TS: Was it an integrated school that you went to?

YH: No, integration hadn't started yet, but it was—we integrated the school, so to speak. The school that I attended from kindergarten to fourth grade was predominantly black and Puerto Rican.

TS: Okay.

YH: Okay, three blocks from my home. And of course, we left at lunchtime, went home, and then came back.

TS: Do you remember the name of that school?

YH: Public School 32. It was called Bennett Park School, interesting, it was Public School 32, they now call it the Montessori School, which—I have my questions about that. But we called it Bennett Park, Public School 32. And that was in Buffalo, New York, three blocks from our home. And that was—there weren't Hispanics or Mexicans, there were



Puerto Ricans in New York. And so our neighborhood was primarily with Appalachians, who come from the mountains in Pennsylvania, blacks, and Puerto Ricans. And, understand now, in those days, the projects were set up to have a—well, it is now, but people don't use it—to have an eight year, six to eight year life span. So people moved into the projects and only stayed there long enough to do whatever they had to do to stabilize and then they bought their home. For example, one of our state judges, supreme court judges, was a law student, and he and his wife and child lived in the projects while he went to law school. And my sister babysat, and then after he did that and moved on, he bought a house. Young couples got married and moved there and saved their money and then moved out, you know, to a bigger house or whatever. Now, projects per se house the mother, the grandmother, the children, years and years and years, and the wear and tear is really, really harsh on it. Well, when I was there, I went to the school and we went there and after six or seven years, people left and moved on. So when I went to college—went to this special school, a lot of my friends moved out, and new people moved in, but I didn't go to that school, so I didn't know them. So for a while, I didn't know some of the people that even lived in the projects.

TS: Oh, I see, right.

YH: I didn't know them very well. But the school was, in fact, predominantly black and Puerto Rican, and then I went to a special school that was still predominantly black, except that one class. That one classroom, for two years, had black and whites in the classroom, but we didn't know the people in our school.

TS: Okay. So you stuck together in school.

YH: We stuck for two years.

TS: What was the name of the school?

YH: That was School 48, which no longer exists, interestingly enough. And then we went to School 68. And School 68, there were a total of four blacks in the entire school.

TS: And what year—what level were you at?

YH: I was in the seventh and eighth grade.

TS: Okay.

YH: Okay? And—it went through K[indergarten] through eight. And it was on the predominantly white side of town, and we looked out the window one day and saw these yellow buses coming down the street, and realized that that was the, I guess, first introduction of integration. We were the only students in the school, did not feel a bit difference except most folks up there were white, we were black. There were three of us in the program, and one young lady's sister.

TS: I see.

YH: And we looked at all these other blacks and said “Where did they come from? Who are they?” They had come from a different part of town and they were starting to integrate.

TS: Into the school?

YH: Into the school. And that’s when I noticed, but we were never—I was never part of the integration, in my entire life, and neither were my children. They were all—both my children went to what are called neighborhood schools, at all times. And that was something very important. And when I finished—

TS: Why was it important?

YH: [pause] I believe in neighborhood schools. I believe in equal schools, and I believe in everyone having the same quality of education, but I don’t think it’s fair for someone to take my child out of its natural neighborhood, its natural setting for learning, and move all because of a color. That’s—to me, is a contradiction of saying that we live in a world where people should be treated the same way as you should be treated, fairly. And it was very important that my children realize that their neighborhood was a neighborhood to be proud of and that can give them everything they wanted and needed as a neighborhood, and that society did not look at them as deprived, or poverty.

TS: So, make that school better, don’t say, oh, well, we can’t make it better, we’re just going to integrate something.

YH: We’re just going to move your children someplace else and see, as I told you before, earlier, I didn’t realize that I was a latchkey child until I started reading books, and I said “Is that what you saw of me, is that what you thought I was?” I mean, I was intelligent in my own neighborhood, why’d you have to move me across town because I was intelligent here? Why couldn’t you just keep it right here? No, they had to move me away. And—

TS: So what do you feel about that? I mean, do you feel like—that you had like—there’s trade-offs with that? With your personal experience?

YH: I do feel that way, because, you see, there was a young lady who had been selected before me, but she was in a grade younger than me, therefore she did not qualify to go to this other school. And so they had to come back and re-evaluate all the files, and they found me. And so she and I are best friends, I just spoke to her this morning, and she reminds me—it’s been forty years—that had she been chosen, she may have had these opportunities in her life. And even though it’s not valid now, because of our decisions and our lives roads or whatever, she still has that thought, that had I been given the opportunity, perhaps more opportunities would have been given to me to have been

moved on socially, economically, intellectually, whatever. And I think if you multiply that times those ten buildings, those eight floors, those ten families, there would have been hundreds of children who may have been thinking the exact same thing. “I have the same intelligence, but nobody moved me out of here to give me this, nobody placed it here for me to take advantage of this, and it has shaped my attitude about education.”

TS: Very interesting.

YH: Has shaped it, pretty much so.

TS: So what did you like about school, then?

YH: I liked the fact that—well, this is what I liked about the school. My father said that people can take away your home, your clothes, sometimes even try to take away your dignity. But they cannot take away what’s inside your head, so you learn as much as you can and you pick up everything you can as soon as you can, so that you can tell a fool from—[chuckling] you can tell a fool from a wise man.

And he says “Don’t you be--” he says “A fool born every day, don’t you be that fool that’s born that day. Get as much as you know, so that when you make a decision, you make the right one. But they can’t take away what you know.”

TS: So even though your father was illiterate, he was very wise.

YH: Very wise, extremely wise. He knew it would have took—again, he knew what it would take in life to survive. He knew, he just did not have those opportunities. But he knew, he was extremely bright, and I really think that a lot of young people are like my father, my sisters and brothers. If they were given the same opportunities, they would—they would just excel. But it was separate, unequal.

So I was able to—and ironically enough, I don’t know if this is part of it, but on my wedding day, my girlfriend wore black, and she cried, and she says “You were the one who got out.” And that, again, magnifies that sense of “If we only had it here, perhaps more of us could be where you are right now,” you know.

TS: Yes. Where is your girlfriend today?

YH: Can’t find her. Every year I go home—I used to go home, and unfortunately, her life is not—it’s not there, it’s a broken life. So I can’t find her. In fact, my friends have told me to stop searching.

TS: Really?

YH: Yes. And I think—I think when you deal with people thirty and forty years later, a lot of people don’t realize what makes up that person. You know, I teach in the university, and I call that your personal lens, and so I do everything I can to make sure that I’m a mentor to young people, that I go back and pay back, or that I recognize potential, because you never know what builds a person.

TS: That's true, that's so true. Well, tell me—so, okay, when you were in church that day and you saw this nice-looking woman and you said “I want to be like her, dress like her,” and your mom said “Well, go figure out, you know, where she went to school and how she got—” Tell me a little bit more about that story.

YH: Well, her name is Reverend Lula Williams, she was not a minister at the time, she was a minister's wife, which of course in many—historically, it's normally the, I would say the preacher, teacher, mortician, who are the educated individuals who are, I would say, the pillars in society and hopefully the role models, okay? So it was understandable that I would look toward the minister's wife. She reminded me of a black Jackie Onassis, her little pillbox hat, her beautiful little box suits [?] and—she spoke very well, I found out that she had gone to Bennett College. It was an all-girls school and I was boy-crazy, but if that was what it was going to take, I was willing to make the sacrifice. Not realizing that A&T State University was across the street. She was kind, very sophisticated, wore pearls, always had a necklace on, or a pin. Patient, spoke her mind, with a lot of politeness and dignity, and I wanted to be like that. Now, my mother was my role model when it came to things of the heart, but there weren't a whole lot of role models in my neighborhood to—who ventured out and came back in. Of course there were strong women all around me, but not that, so going to Bennett College was a big deal. I met Shirley Chisholm [first black woman to be elected to Congress in 1968, among other accomplishments], I met Gwendolyn Brooks [acclaimed poet], I had a chance to really see strong, educated women.

But I didn't know how to speak, and so when I walked the first day of school in college and said “I want to axe[sic] you a question,”

Dr. Bulon[?] said “Oh my goodness, she wants to axe me!” I learned you don't say “axe you a question”, you say “I want to ask you a question.” And so my background came forward, and I learned that just because a person can't pronounce a certain word or can't say something doesn't mean that they don't have the know-how, the knowledge. I found out that Mrs. Williams had—came from North Carolina, Mocksville, that she was very much a family woman, had raised three girls and a son, she—and one is a minister, the son is a minister, one's a lawyer. She was a wonderful, wonderful minister, but very strong supporter. I used all that to try to be supportive of my family, try to be supportive of other people, try to work with people, and every once in a while, I'll contact her, let her know I'm still on track.

TS: Excellent. What kind of advice did she give you, then?

YH: Be for real, be natural. Don't put on airs. It wasn't so much the verbal advice as much as watching her, being close to someone like her, being able to touch someone you admire. Sometimes, well, people say be careful about role models, because they fall from grace. I'm very pleased to say that she's human and she's never fallen out of grace, she's just grown and become stronger as a role model, and every once in a while, when I'm a little confused or I wonder how I should respond to something, I think back to personalities like her. And say “What would she do, how would she carry herself in that regard?” And

I really think that my daughter picked up most of those traits I don't recognize in myself, but apparently I had them.

TS: [laughs]

YH: But I think that's what she did, was to be real, and be honest, and being a minister's wife, she had to deal with, I thought, certain parameters. But she raised her children to be children, to be teenagers, and she realized that her husband had the calling, not her, at the time. And she supported him, and then of course she had the calling later on, and she picked that up, too. But I think Lula is the epitome of what a black female educated woman can rise to be—again, I say, from the inside out. So her advice was just to be real and be natural, be a woman.

TS: So tell me how you managed to—the other thing I was going to ask you, too, was that you said your mother had thought high school was a platform to go to college. And so, how did you treat high school as far as academics go? And also, did you have social things that you did?

YH: That's interesting that you say that. I didn't know until my daughter was in college my mother wanted to be a nurse.

TS: Is that right?

YH: And this is something—women—when women make decisions about their lives, they don't go back and talk about what they could have been or what they should have been, so unless you get in conversation with your mom or your girlfriend or your great uncle or aunt, you don't know where their dreams were, okay, so I say that to say that my mother read the paper all the time, in fact, she read for my father, of course, but she—she always felt like you needed to go to school to learn and being a high school graduate, that was something that she wanted. But her family had teachers in it, had educated people, brothers and sisters, and so she knew there was a life after high school. She didn't push it, because of money, but she encouraged it. As I said before, when I wanted to be in Junior Achievement, she made sure that I got there. My father had to drive me—my mother never drove, which—she never drove a car. In this city, that was unusual[?], you know, because you had to get everywhere through public transportation. But going back to your question, how did I treat school, high school, I had to take advantage of every single opportunity, or it wasn't going to come my way again. So when I got into high school, every time there was a chance to join something or be a part of something, I wanted to learn about it. Junior Achievement, I learned about business, and so now I have my MBA, because of that interest I had, IBM sponsored Junior Achievement at our school, and my mother said "Go to it," and it was in walking distance. In the summertime, my mother did not believe in us sitting out on the porch talking or hanging out. She did not believe in us having idle time, so I went to Vacation Bible School at the Catholic church, at the Baptist church, at the Presbyterian church, and at my church. Week after week after week, I know my rosary, I am not Catholic, hail Mary, full of grace. I know everything

because she felt like if you sat there and did nothing, you may get yourself in some trouble. And having had a child at a young age, and she having three girls, she knew that we had to stay busy. And so she kept us busy. Crafts—my mother wasn't into crafts, mother cooked, made homemade biscuits and took care of the house. But she did encourage me to get involved in clubs. I sang, I sang a lot, I love to sing. So I sang for radio at the age of eleven, twelve, and thirteen, on Saturdays at 11:30, I sang gospel.

TS: What radio did you sing for?

YH: I don't know what station it was, but I sang music for the sick and shut-in, so we sang gospel music. And I didn't realize that my sister enjoyed it until I heard my mother say "You know, Bobby's always telling people about Re[?]" —They call me Re, "About Re and her singing,"

And I said "They don't praise me," but they praised me behind my back, so to speak. But my mother was pleased with that. I sang in the choir.

TS: What's the second shut-in?

YH: The what?

TS: You said you sang—I thought you said the second shut-in?

YH: For the sick and shut-in.

TS: Oh, for the sick and shut-in. So, on the radio so that it would get to them for the—I see, I see. Very nice.

YH: It was always special music, so those who were shut-in—particularly, and that's what they called it, but of course now they have gospel music on the radio all the time. But when a person couldn't go to the church, that was sick and shut-in, they can always turn to a station.

TS: I see.

YH: And hear gospel music or any kind of music, that was to help them—keep them company and keep them connected. Now, churches have radio stations all over the place, but in those days, you know, in the '60s they did not have that. And so that was important. Of course, you didn't have as many television stations as we have right now.

TS: That's true.

YH: But I was in my youth choir, I was in the gospel choir, I was [unclear] their deacon is now, my deacon is still in the church to serve communion service. My mother was in the sisterhood, so anything she did, I pretty much went along with my mother. I learned later on that my brothers and sisters—I reminded her more of herself than any of them. I still wear hats to church, I'm the only one that does. My mother wore hats to church, I didn't

realize that. I was very active in the church, my mother's very active, my sisters are not active until late in life, and my brother—one brother. But I guess I treated school like my mother treated church. I took advantage of everything that I could get involved in, because like my father kept saying, they can't take away from you, you know. So I joined the French club and I joined the—did not join the drama club, I ran an[?] office, I was secretary treasurer of my junior class in high school.

And did not know I was popular in high school until I graduated from college and went back home, my friends kept saying "Girl, everybody knows you!"

And I said "What?" And I think it's because most of my friends did not take advantage, therefore did not know as many people.

TS: I see. What year did you graduate?

YH: I graduated from high school in June of 1971.

TS: So you went through high school during a period of really cultural turmoil.

YH: Martin Luther King had been killed, John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

TS: Robert Kennedy.

YH: Robert Kennedy was assassinated. We had riots, I remember one night I had gone to a basketball game across town with my friends, integrated school, and apparently there was a gang fight with lots of gangs in Buffalo, and we hid in a telephone booth. I don't know if anyone remembers telephone booths.

TS: Oh yeah.

YH: And there were like about, I don't know how many, but the police was rapping and hitting on the—trying to get us to get out, and we're all stuck in there for fear of them, nobody wanted to get out, everybody was stuck inside, wanted to come out. It was just horrifying, and—

TS: Just got caught.

YH: Just got caught in the wave of things, and I can understand looking at television now, how people—innocent people, innocent young people, get caught up with just the fear of running away from something, and it was nothing more than us leaving the game, the basketball game, and saying "What's going on?"

TS: Right.

YH: And they said "Run!" And we ran, and being in a residential area in the park—business area, we saw a telephone booth, so we ran in there to get away from the crowd, and was hit—smacked by the police.

TS: Do you know if there was like a precipitating event that made this happen, or do you recall that at all?

YH: More than likely, there was a gang fight after the game. We had not come out of the school yet, and we got caught in it. What I did find out, what I did learn—that my mother would not let me go out again. She said “If you go to any dances, and I find out there’s a fight, you cannot go to any more dances. You cannot go to any more games, and you must be home by eleven o’clock.” And I had a young boyfriend, I liked him, he liked me, but I told him my mother’s rule. And he was in the gang.

TS: Hmm.

YH: Well, in those days, a girl could not be in a gang—a girl could be in a gang, but a lot of young men liked girls who were good girls, even though they were bad boys.

TS: [laughs] Okay.

YH: They liked good girls, you know, they didn’t like—both people being bad, so to speak. And he would come to the dance and one of his sergeants, so to speak, and I say this because I knew about gangs, would say “It’s time to go home,” And I would say “Oh no,” And he says “No, it’s time for you to go home.” So I would be walked home, escorted home, and I would sit there at 10:30, quarter to eleven, and my mother would say “You’re home early,” And I says[sic], “Yes, I suppose the party’s breaking up,” and at eleven o’clock, there would be an announcement about a fight. And she would look at me and look at the television, and I would say “I’m home!” And of course, I was able to go to the dance the following week. So that was—

TS: So long as you were home during the fight, okay, I got it.

YH: So I was basically taken care of by people who cared about me. I was active in the Hi-Y[?] club, and I was president of the Hi-Y club, Gamma Girls.

TS: What’s the Hi-Y?

YH: Hi-Y is when the YMCA sponsored a lot of the clubs and social activities for teenagers to be off the street but be inside the Y. And the Y used to be a very active center of activity for any community. It’s almost like having a recreational center or a rec center somewhere, and so, because we’re high school, we called it the Hi-Y club, of course. And there were girls’ clubs and boys’ clubs and speakers would come in and it was a way to keep so many teenagers from just hanging out, so to speak. And my mother saw it being, again, a healthy way of me socializing but still having a curfew. And so I was active in that as well. The colors were red and white, I was president of the club, and because my mother didn’t drive and my father was pretty much a man of the streets, she had to pick



me up with my brother and take me home, and I got accustomed to having my mother always coming to pick me up from parties and dances. Well, you know, that's uncalled-for, nowadays.

TS: Right.

YH: Whoever thought of your mother being around you past the age of thirteen?

TS: How uncool is that? [laughs]

YH: But to me, that was the in thing, and to my friends, that was also the in thing. Let's back up. To my friends who seemed to survive in the inner city, where I was raised, that was the in thing. But those who did not do well, those who did not survive, those who are still there, trying to get out, I still never knew their parents. I still never saw their parents, and so you hear me talk about my mother and father a lot because I think they're the reason why I was pulled away from all of that and moved on. I went to a party, and my mom and brother was outside, and some of the guys are out there.

You know, they say "Yardley, your mother's here!" So I left, nobody laughed at me, because that's how I went to my parties.

And on the way out, someone said "Ooh, you should have seen Yardley dancing, she was over in the corner talking to some boy, you should have seen—"

And I said "That's not true, that's not true."

So Mom was well down the street, you know. And I heard one of the boys say "Man, you can't say that, because if she gets in trouble by you lying, she can't go to any more parties!" That boy ran four or five blocks. He had to.

TS: My goodness.

YH: And he said "Mrs. Nelson," he said "Yardley wasn't doing that, I was just teasing because you were outside waiting for her, I'm so sorry," and I was going to beat him up at the school the next day.

But my mother said "I know she's not like that, but thank you anyway."

TS: Well, that's terrific. That's a good story.

YH: And I still remember that, because people knew—

TS: A lot of respect for that.

YH: —that my mother took care of us, and she was always with us, and there was never a time when she didn't just go to a party or go to—anywhere, or contact a parent, and so I did that to my children. And my daughter understood that, but my son did not, because I think he was being raised around people who didn't—parents didn't check on them, so he would say "Mama, don't call people!"

And I said “Well, you’re not going.” And so he got a little testy, but he got used to the fact that Mama called. And interestingly enough, he graduated from college as an engineer and he’s a math teacher, and the two guys who he hung with who didn’t like that, they’re still trying to figure out what to do with their lives. And I still say it’s because of the parents. But I took advantage of it all.

TS: Now what do you remember about—do you remember when JFK was killed?

YH: Not as much as—

TS: You would have been about eight, I think.

YH: Right. Not as much as I remember when Martin Luther King was killed. I remember looking on television, on our black and white TV, and I remember them escorting Oswald. I remember Jack Ruby, [unclear] Ruby, and my mother had us all [unclear], and said, “Look at that,” and how he ran in front of Oswald and how we heard the gunshots. And I just watched. And they played it, of course, a few times, and my mother tried to explain what was going on. Mama never put a [race?] in the household, and she didn’t put as much politics in there either. You know, she read different—well, one newspaper, Buffalo Evening News, of course every newspaper has its own political side, but of course, you didn’t talk about the political side in those days. But that’s all I remember, someone shot the president. Well, my mother reminded me that a president had been assassinated in Buffalo, you know, and—

TS: Which one was that?

YH: And I’m trying to remember—

TS: Was that McKinley?

YH: That was McKinley, thank you, we have a statue in front of City Hall, and she said—she said “I feel so bad for Texas. I feel so bad for them,” so I take it my mother remembered when McKinley had been shot, in Buffalo—how we felt. And so she felt for them.

TS: That would have been like 1900, 1901, something around there.

YH: Had to be. And my mama said—and my mother said “I feel so bad for them.”

TS: Well, that’s very compassionate of her.

YH: Yes, yes, and that’s when I found out that another president had been, you know—and that’s when I started thinking about, not so much the person, but how did the city feel, how did the people feel to go down in history—here I go with the history—in the history books like that.

TS: Right.

YH: You know.

TS: Interesting.

YH: Yes, I found that—but when Martin Luther King was shot, I went to a school that was—I would say it was eighty-five percent Jewish.

TS: This is your high school?

YH: Yes.

TS: What was your high school called?

YH: Bennett High School. I liked Bennett, the word Bennett.

TS: [laughs] I guess so.

YH: Bennett Park Elementary, Bennett High School, Bennett College—yes. But my brother went to a historically black high school. It used to be white, and because of the redistricting, and of course, movement, economic, and the white flight to the suburban areas, homes were open in that area, so it had become predominantly black. A new mascot, new colors, new—exactly.

TS: This is where your brother went?

YH: My brother went, yes.

TS: Which one?

YH: He went to East High School—Robert.

TS: Robert, okay.

YH: My oldest sister, Lottie, went there, and they were called the East Orioles, little bird, little bird, the Orioles. And her yearbook, predominantly white, you know. And interestingly enough, years later, my brother goes to the same school, and it's ninety-five percent black.

TS: Flip-flop.

YH: Exactly. So they went to the Board of Education and said “We don't identify with this little bird.”

TS: Oh, the oriole.

YH: This oriole. “So we want to be called the East Panthers,”

TS: Ah.

YH: “We want to have a new song, new colors,” and it was accepted.

TS: About what year was that?

YH: I’m trying to think, if I graduated in ’71 and he graduated in ’72 or ‘3, so it had to be about ’69.

TS: Okay.

YH: About ’69. And they accepted it. Interestingly enough, when that school became predominantly black and recognized as a predominantly black school, it excelled in sports, people say “Well, that’s understandable,” it excelled in scholarships, it excelled in the fine arts, because like I mentioned to you earlier, if you allow a school all the opportunities it can to grow where it is, given the right ingredients, it’s going to do that. Unfortunately, though, it didn’t last long. They redistricted again, for integration’s sake, and changed that. But he went to that school. But he came over to my school, the mayor had said that no one could change—could cross over the school areas to go to another school to check on a school, to visit a school, because they were afraid of riots when Martin Luther King died. So I’m in my predominantly white school, predominantly Jewish school—we had all the Jewish holidays, you know, so we were out of school half the time. And thinking everything is fine, of course they have a food fight in the cafeteria, but that was it. I get home and find out that my brother’s in the police station. Apparently he had come to the school to check on me because there was a big riot at the predominantly black school, there was a riot, they had to close school.

TS: At his school.

YH: At his school. But the rest of our schools are still going on. And he came on our grounds, and when he came on grounds, the police picked him up for trespassing. My father didn’t believe in people getting in trouble. [chuckles]

TS: Interesting how you frame that.

YH: He didn’t believe in that, of course he didn’t, so he said “If you go to jail, stay there.” So of course, when I came home, my mother was upset.

And she says “When Robert gets home,” my father’s name, of course, “I have to tell him to go pick up Robert,” Robert the third, “I don’t know what he’s going to do.”

So I went to my room. And when he came home, he took his shoes off like he always did, and Mama told him what happened. He said “You have dinner ready?” Mama told him yes.

We ate dinner in silence, then Daddy sat down in his chair and listened to the news, Mama said “You going to pick him up, you going to get him?” Daddy didn’t say anything, he went to sleep like he always did. Around 10:30, eleven o’ clock, Mama started kicking Daddy’s leg “You better get my baby, go get my baby!” Daddy went and got up and got some water, sat back down, looked at the TV. I was in bed by then, but I wouldn’t go to sleep. I wanted to know what Daddy was going to do with my brother. So finally, he couldn’t take Mama’s mouth anymore, so around 11:30, twelve o’ clock, 12:30, I heard the door close. And Mama said “Took him long enough, took him long enough.”

Daddy said that my brother was sitting on the bench, they had never put him in the area, sitting on the bench with two other young men who hadn’t been picked up yet. And he was crying—the police say he had been crying all day, all afternoon.

TS: And how old is he at this point?

YH: My brother had to have been a sophomore.

TS: So like fifteen?

YH: Yeah, fifteen or sixteen. Yeah, because it was like ’69 and I was a junior, senior.

TS: Yeah.

YH: And Daddy said that he said “Come on, let’s go, there’s no charges, no anything,” and brought him home, and I heard Daddy say to my mother “He’s had enough punishment, let him go to bed,” and that was it, but my brother never, ever came over to my school again if there was any problems or any difficulty, he never checked on me. My mother and father said “Everyone takes care of themselves in that situation, you know where you live, go home.” But I laughed, because my father did not believe in jail. Which was a little ironic, but he didn’t believe in it.

TS: So, what—and this was the day that Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot?

YH: This was the day he was shot.

TS: And what did your family feel about that? And you, personally, what were your emotions that day? Because you had this going on with your brother at the same time, too, so it was probably mixed.

YH: We had a black student union in high school, and we had an African-American Studies teacher. So everyone gravitated towards Mrs. Anderson, to listen to her, because what were we to think, what—we were in a predominantly white school. Who do you talk to? You go back to your—not so much your roots, but your kind, you go back to your kind and you go back to the wise people in your kind, and that was Mrs. Anderson. And I wasn’t allowed to take black history, I wasn’t—

TS: By who?

YH: That's what I thought you were going to say when I say [?] talk about school. [pause] There was a young lady, her name was—now her name is Dr. Lorraine, Reverend Doctor Lorraine Peeler. But she and I had gone to the special school together for years, of course, in our fifth and sixth grade and seventh and eighth grade. But she knew there was something different about me, and she knew I didn't belong in that neighborhood, that school, I just didn't fit. I spoke like this when I was growing up. Can you imagine someone who speaks like this in the projects? [laughs] Hence, my name was "White Girl."

TS: What was your name?

YH: White Girl.

TS: Oh, okay.

YH: Because I didn't sound like the rest of them.

TS: Right.

YH: She says "You don't need to take that," she says "Because you're going off to college and you're going to go out in the world and you're going to know enough, you don't need to take that. The rest of us need to take it, to find out what's going on, but you don't need it," so when it was time to set up our schedule, she set my schedule up for school. As much as I was intelligent and bright and knew where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do, that type of detail didn't interest me, because in spite of what was going to be given to me, I knew where I was going to go, I was going to Bennett College.

TS: Didn't matter so much what classes you were going to take.

YH: Didn't matter, I was going to Bennett College. In my high school yearbook, it says under my name "Bennett College". So I knew automatically, I'm going to Bennett College. But she pretty much looked at my schedule and say "No, you need to take the fifth year of French," you know, or "No, you need to take the advanced honor class in English, no," like that.

And I would say "Everybody's hanging out in Mrs. Anderson's class,"

And she would say "I know, but you don't hang out with them, you hang out with Sherring Cornmeal[??], and you hang out with So-and-So Kobalsky[?], and you hang out with Theresa, you know," I hung out with all the Jewish children, and so consequently, she knew I didn't belong with them, she knew it. Now, not to say that we weren't all black, but all black aren't all black. And so she knew that my world was much bigger than that area.

TS: I see.

YH: But we all went—I went there anyway, to Mrs. Anderson, to listen to her. And you asked what did we think?

TS: No, what did you think, not that—what you thought.

YH: What they thought—what I thought?

TS: Yeah, it's your interview.

YH: I thought—[laughs] Thank you. I thought that [pause]—I thought that that was just one more act from angry whites who did not want blacks to know, to move, to be anything. And he had touched a nerve and had to be stopped, and that's when I realized—passion, now. That's when I realized you have to go underground, don't let people know your agenda, or they'll stop you. Don't let people know what you're really thinking, so they'll stop you. So.

TS: You have to be covert? Hmm, interesting. Tough thing to realize, especially at that age, huh?

YH: Well [sounding emotional]—passion.

TS: That's a good thing.

YH: I think—

TS: Yeah. [recording paused] Okay. You ready? So how was it that you felt?

YH: I felt that I had to be undercover, so I did not wear an afro a lot, or dreadlocks, or anything that was going to identify me as a separate entity, and I think that's what caused me to move forward, so I think that's what it taught me. To stay covert.

TS: And so it maybe grounded you in a certain way.

YH: It did.

TS: A resolve, I suppose.

YH: It pretty much did, it pretty much took care of that window dressing, or the militancy, or the vocalness. What I thought and what I felt was never how I presented myself. What I did was never advertised. Stay quiet for fear that I would be the next one.

TS: So you didn't want to have barriers put in your way by people's knowledge of what goals you wanted to achieve.

YH: Exactly, exactly. And the more people knew what you were thinking, the more they knew how to set up barriers for you. And until it became necessary, I thought it'd be best if I built up my repertoire, if I built myself up, trying to become somewhat immune, before I was attacked. So I stayed under the radar. Martyrs are dead.

TS: Yes.

YH: And heroes are normally injured or hurt. And you have to be strong enough for the next battle, but you have to be alive.

TS: That's right.

YH: So I guess that's the soldier part of me, too, didn't realize it was there, but that's pretty much an attitude I took, where—they come after you when you speak the truth. Or when you speak your heart, people come after you. You know. And so having the dream is great, living the dream is hard. And verbalizing the dream is dangerous.

TS: Yeah, but you had a dream to go to Bennett College, and you get there.

YH: And I kept it in my circle.

TS: That's right.

YH: Because—for one thing, my circle was small, being young, but I think I kept it in my circle because that was that preparatory age that I was in, and when you are young you set the foundation of who you are and what you are, as I said before, and so I kept that. And so the circle was my parents and my church and there. But even at Bennett College, people sensed that I was a bit different. About three months ago, a young lady on Facebook told me—a graduate from Bennett College, she said “I resisted knowing you, I resisted trying to be close to you, because you knew where you wanted to go and I—it was confusing to have someone like that around me, when I didn't know what I wanted to be or where I wanted to go. Now, I've wasted all this time, when I could have gone to you and talked to you about where were you going, and gone with you.” You know.

TS: Interesting. Seems like there's a lot of people who wanted to be on your coattails.

YH: Very much so, that I didn't realize. And I think the main thing was that I was more definitive in my direction than others, than young teenagers were, I was more definitive. But the more I meshed with another world—other worlds, then the more I had to pull back in my definition. When I was young, again, Martin Luther King dealt with—and phrases like “Say it loud, being black and you're proud”, all of that, but when I was young, I started realizing that if you're identified for a certain cause or whatever, you had to continually defend yourself, and then other people moved away from you because you



were controversial. And I didn't have enough role models as it was, and I'm forging a new frontier.

TS: That's right.

YH: I didn't need to have a tag or a label on that, so I think that Martin Luther King's death taught me to lay low, keep moving, but lay low. And that's what I did.

TS: It's an interesting lesson. So tell me about Bennett College. So you put—you knew you were going to go there, but how did you get this scholarship?

YH: It was a combination of my, of course, my SAT, which in my day, you only took it one time. You didn't take it three and four times, so I didn't even realize [laughing]—I never realized you had to take it so many times to pass it. I'm like "What happened to education? It was supposed to be easy!" But it was a combination of my involvement in the community, it couldn't have been a lot of academics, it was my academic potential, I think, because out of five hundred and fifteen, I was number, like, 232.

TS: Middle of the pack.

YH: But again—right—I was in the upper fifty percent, but again, I was in a school where academics was a way of life, and it's not a stereotype to say that number five hundred and fifteen went to college.

TS: I see.

YH: You see, so—

TS: Yes.

YH: It was a very—

TS: The bar was set high.

YH: Very, very, very high.

TS: I see.

YH: And it was also—I believe the—they looked at your IQ, they looked at your SAT, your grade point average, and how well rounded you were in the community, because I was offered a scholarship by the National Endowment of Humanities, four-year scholarship, to receive my degree without books, so to speak, it was called interdisciplinary studies, it was a humanities degree, and twenty-one people, women, were chosen.

TS: For the nation?

YH: In the nation.

TS: Wow.

YH: And in Bennett's pool, of course, and it was pretty much funded, but it was written by a doctor, I told you, Dr. Helen Trobian[?], very strong white older woman, part of the WACs, and it allowed me to think, who would think of a class called Synergetic Strategies?

TS: [chuckles]

YH: You know, the only other school that had this program was the University of Hawai'i. It taught me how to be a master—a jack of all trades, but a master of none. But I took it a step further, because I wanted to be an English teacher. I took it a step further because I wanted to get a commission from the air force. And so they modeled a curriculum for me to do all of that and I'm grateful to them, grateful. I love Bennett College, I love it with all my heart, an all-girls school to teach you womanhood. There were men going to classes, consortium with A&T, but I didn't see too many of them. We had our curfew, we wore our hats and had our gloves. I loved my hats, I still have my tams in the trunk in the garage. I have my gloves, and I still wear gloves, and I still wear hats to church. We had our curfew, I did not care. People thought, coming from, as they called it, New York—I was from Buffalo, [unclear] New York—

TS: [laughs]

YH: —that we would fight and buck it. My mother gave me a curfew and so I lived with it. I had to get a special extension, though, in my freshman year, because *Gone With the Wind* was being played, downtown Greensboro theatre, I had never seen it. My mother wrote a letter to the president of the college and said it was very important to her that I saw it, her Northern girl going down to the South, of course, and she wanted me to get a feel for it—*Gone With the Wind*, she had talked about it. They gave permission, so I was able to come in at twelve thirty that night. I think the most important thing I learned at Bennett College was that there were strong, dynamic black women, who showed me that there was a world outside my own, and it was okay to look out there. And I loved it. My mother dropped me off the first day of school, and she said something very, very important to me.

She says "You don't have to be here, you know. You can always come home." She says "If things don't do well here, you can always come home, but you need to think about what you're coming home to. The projects, inner city, gangs, Buffalo with a lot of programs versus products, factories are starting to close down." I knew what she was saying to me. Of course I was welcome to come home, to what? So I took advantage of everything I could at Bennett College, and so I graduated with a bachelor's of arts and sciences, in interdisciplinary studies with a concentration in English education, special emphasis on military science, ROTC, distinguished grad.

TS: [chuckles]

YH: Graduated seventh in my graduating class, out of a hundred and forty seven, and I graduated first in ROTC. And—

TS: Well, tell me how—why it was that you decided to go into the ROTC in the first place, and what was it that, you know, put that into your mind?

YH: The Vietnam conflict.

TS: Really?

YH: Didn't know enough about it. Young enough to be militant about anything and everything, of course, you know how you have [unclear] with a cause. But my friends were being drafted, and they weren't coming home in a healthy state. Congress had passed a law that women could join the military and stay in past pregnancy for a career, officers, and recruiters from ROTC at A&T State University came over to Bennett College. And being the outspoken woman that I am, and in the safe environment of Bennett College, of course, inside the walls of—being able to have the efficacy to speak out, I start loud talking about what I thought the military was all about, how our young men were being killed, for what cause, what purpose?

TS: So this is what you're saying to the recruiters?

YH: To the recruiter, this very wise man said "You know, maybe you should join the military."

Of course, I laughed at that.

He says "Better yet, take a class, just take one class in military science, so that you'll be able to know the facts. You like knowing the facts, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

He said "Well, you don't have all of them right now."

I resented that.

TS: Oh, he challenged you good. [laughs]

YH: And so I took a class. And another class. And another class. And before I knew it, he asked me, did I want to go to summer camp. "What does that entail?"

Well, I went to summer camp, and when I came back, that's when he said "You have to make a decision about staying in anymore, because at this point, we have to swear you in. We'll pay you some money to come to classes in the military, but we'll have to swear you in, and you'll be committed."

And by then I was hooked.

TS: But what was it that was drawing you to these classes, even?

YH: Knowledge.

TS: What kind of knowledge were you getting?

YH: I was learning about a world that I did not know about, a certain society that was affecting my society, and I didn't have all the facts to it. I liked the fact that there was an absoluteness about rules and regulation. I liked the fact that they couldn't change my pay in the military because I was female, or that I was black, and of course, because of all the racial situations in the community and the world, I liked the fact that there was someplace where there was some level of equality. I like the fact that I could be taken care of, like my mother and father took care of me, and still see the world. I got my physicals on time, I got my shots on time. I've got a chance to see the world, and still got paid. I liked all that. It fit me, the military—I didn't join the military, I found out the military joined me. And so that which I am right now is only an enhancement of what the military gave me, but I was like this beforehand, and people saw it. And I figured that it would help me move faster, quicker, and I said "That's the best way I could have grown up, is to have the government as my babysitter," and as most people say, if not me, then who? If not me, then who? Someone was getting all this government money, and I could get it. I didn't know all the nuances about being a female officer and the officer part of it, I just knew there was equality there. It was worldwide, and I learned all kinds of—I learned about Mynot, I learned secrets, I learned about Pearl Harbor—I mean, in great detail, from the military side. I learned about Air Force One—how cool that was? And the uniform, I liked—I did like blue, I'm tired of it now.

TS: [laughs]

YH: But I liked it, and so all those things were hooks for me. Not the men. And after talking to my advisor, Dr. Trobian[?], it was definitely not the men.

TS: What do you mean by that, not the men?

YH: It was not to go find a husband.

TS: Oh, I see, okay.

YH: And it was not because there were so many young men there.

TS: I see.

YH: Being at Bennett College, it makes you a little bit desensitized about men. When a man walks on our campus and walks into our dormitory, it's one to a hundred and thirty something women. And that one woman at the reception says "May I help you?" And that man has to identify a woman, "I'd like to page such-and-such," There's no competition. If he didn't call your name, he didn't want to see you, and so there's some

thick skin that has to be developed, being at that particular college. As well, there was a boldness about numbers, so when there's nine of us in the parlor and this young man walks in, we can very easily say "Hello,"

TS: [laughs]

YH: And they're all by themselves. "How are you doing?" And you start building a personality of "You're just a man, a man, and I don't have to impress you, you have to impress me," and so in the military, it was the same. I didn't need to have makeup on or wear these spike heels or be ignorant or giggle at the wrong—it was a different kind of "You have to impress me," you have to know how to do these things, you had to be able to do these things, you had to be physically fit, male or female. And I liked all that, I liked that, and because of my, I guess, my intelligence level, it took a lot to impress me. The men at that level, the way they were thinking and—it was stimulating to the brain. So I enjoyed the company, and that's why I went in. During summer camp, a young man asked me a very strong question. He was from the South, Deep South, and I was his flight commander, and he would not listen to me.

And finally, in his frustration, he said "Do you want to be treated like a soldier or do you want to be treated like a girl?"

And I didn't know how to answer that at first, and I said "I think I can be both of them," and I didn't realize how strong that statement was until later on in my military life, but I thought I could be both of them, and I know for a fact I can, and I give that information to my daughter now. [audio file 1 ends, audio file 2 begins]

TS: And what rank is she going to be pinning on—

YH: She'll be—this spring, April, May timeframe, she will pin on major. She's also an ROTC graduate from Clemson, and she just received her meritorious service award last—two weeks ago, and she's in missiles, and she has two fantastically wonderful children who love her to death, and she cannot wait to take off her uniform and be Mommy. But she can stand tall—I don't know if I brought you the pamphlet of her. She can stand tall with the rest of them as an acting commander, as a commander of her unit, does a great job.

TS: We'll have to get her in on this collection. That'll be wonderful.

YH: She's fantastic, she's fantastic. But I think that's—I think that's what Bennett did. Bennett helped me grow up, helped me mature, and being in the ROTC program helped me see a bigger world than what even Bennett was giving me, and it just deepened—deepened my personality more so. That—I really think it prepared me to deal with the hard knocks in life. I really do.

TS: Well, when we talked earlier about, you know, your mother and your father, like "Oh, yeah, okay, fine, go on in the air force," and your one brother was a little bit skeptical. What about your friends, what did they think?

YH: My name was Nelson, and so you know they had Dream of Jeannie, okay, Major Nelson [a main character on the TV show *I Dream of Jeannie*].

TS: [laughs] Okay.

YH: And of course I was a cadet major at some time, you know. They thought it was odd, there were five of us, five cadets on campus, and this was the first class ever to have—first time ever to have ROTC cadets at Bennett College, going back and forth to campus or whatever. So there were days when I would be in uniform, on Thursdays, which was parade day, and I would come back on campus late, couldn't change my clothes before the cafeteria closed, and so of course I ran in there in my uniform. And of course, there would be times when I couldn't find my hat, because someone took it, and I can't go outside without my hat, or my headgear.

TS: Were they messing with you?

YH: Messing with me. And I think they were because this was new. I was an oddity. There were three of us who finally got our commission, and I really think that they didn't know what to do with us, or place us, we were just oddities. "That's just what she does," or "That's Yardley, that's Nora[?], that's Shirley,"

TS: They didn't know any women that had been in the military, anything like that, so they didn't have any context.

YH: Their uncles, their brothers, they had no reference point for how—where to put us, you know? It was always as if I was a star on this pamphlet, and they had a circle for me, and they tried to put me in this star, but I couldn't fit in that little peg.

TS: I see.

YH: And because they had no reference point of a female being in uniform, they just sort of watched and looked, and sometimes played with us. However, about a year after I was in the military, I received a letter from a Bennett Belle, they called them, a graduate, who had graduated a year before me, who asked me "What was it like being in the military?" because she was thinking of getting in. And then about two years later, I received another letter from someone else, to ask how did I like it, because she was interested and thought maybe she might want to get in, and I think more and more people started contacting me about it, out of curiosity, because their world was starting to expose them to the military, their cousin, their girlfriend, a buddy of them, and so they start asking more questions about it, or they start thinking, maybe I should try that. But at the time, this was something new.

But please remember, in high school, I was different anyway. People knew that I was going to do something different. In college—and sometimes you find your circle in college, versus you find your circle in high school, I found a few other people who were like me.

TS: I see.

YH: And then of course in the military, and so when I talk about my friends—one of my childhood friends lives in Greensboro, now, from Buffalo to Greensboro, and she never came to see me. I went home, whatever, but she never came to see me.

TS: Oh, you mean, from Buffalo to here?

YH: From Buffalo to here. I'm in the military, she never came to the base.

TS: Oh, right.

YH: Where one of my girlfriends came, she's in Arizona, and they just kind of looked around, and because I try to keep my home as civilian as possible, again—

TS: While you're in the military.

YH: While I'm in the military, they couldn't feel a big difference.

TS: I see.

YH: They couldn't. My daughter felt it when I would go through the gate, of course, and they salute me, and after a while I noticed my little daughter would be saluting back to them. That was noticeable. Or when they saw me go to base, and my friends would say "Well, hello, ma'am."

And they would go "They called you ma'am!" And they would note—but it was still a novelty. It was very much a novelty. Now, what did my family say? That's an interesting question I want to answer. I was the only officer, and my brothers were all enlisted. Totally different world, and one day, not my oldest brother, my two younger brothers were home the same time as I came home to see my mother. Another oddity, all three of us being together.

TS: And you're all in the service.

YH: And we're all in the service. And of course, [chuckles] they were on one side of the room and I was on the other, just sitting down, of course, but it got to be a point of very obvious, they looking at me and I'm looking at them, and a comment was made, and one of them said "Are you trying to pull rank in Mama's house?"

TS: [chuckles]

YH: And I started laughing, and I said "Only if you feel it." Of course, my mother had us go to three different corners at that point.

TS: Did you have a uniform on?

YH: No, but officers did not have to. Officer's uniform is always there, it never changes, and I find even though I'm retired, it's still—it's still there, you know.

TS: Right, right.

YH: Where the enlisted is not. And so, there are moments when I can feel the difference in rank. My mother was concerned one day about my baby brother, Terence, couldn't find him, couldn't locate him, didn't know whether he was on a mission or whatever, you know.

TS: This is the one that went in the Marines.

YH: In the Marines, because sometimes when they're on the ships, they don't contact anyone for a while or whatever, and he was on his way to Grenada. But—so we didn't know when he came back, we couldn't find him. And she could not stand not knowing where we were. I appreciate that feeling now that my daughter's in the military, see, and she had three of us.

And she called me and said "Could you find him for me?"

"Sure, mama."

Well, I called the unit, called the post, I contacted his commanding—I would say, his commanding NCO. Mistake "This is Captain—

TS: [laughter] [unclear]

YH: "—looking for my, you know"

And of course, within twenty minutes, he was on the phone. "Why are you calling me?"

I says "Mama says you need to call her, right now, you are not to go a month without talking to Mama."

"Do you know what happened when they found out you were an officer?"

TS: [laughing]

YH: And he gave me the rundown of how they—

TS: It's [unclear] for him.

YH: Exactly. And of course, they called him in later on and told him that maybe he should think about the officers' corps and since he already has an officer, and he said "Never come back to—never call me again!" So there are times when I was not conscious of the power of the rank, and again, I say that to you, in saying that when I went in, I had no role models. And I had no one to prepare me, and so I didn't realize the weight, or the influence, you know, so I think because of that, first-timers sometimes make mistakes or errors, or we step over lines.

TS: I think that we all step over lines. [chuckling]



YH: Chappie James, when I met General Chappie James for the first time, he said “How do you feel being an air training officer?”  
 And I said “It’s lonely,”  
 And he said “Well,” he said “Being the first and being the only are the two loneliest positions that you’re going to have in your life,” so when things happen, I think about that. I say, it’s okay, because there’ll be more behind. And that’s what it’s been for being in the military. I was the first black female to walk across the Terrazzo of the Air Force Academy, never in history will it happen again, and I’ll tell you, it feels so good to go to Colorado—which I’m going this week.

TS: Oh, are you?

YH: Yes, and see so many minority, Asian, Hispanic, blacks, walking across as cadets, knowing full well, I did that first, and look at all of you. I’m not by myself anymore. Or to even deal with being a graduate of a college, my niece has her doctorate degree, and my daughter’s working on her PhD, and my nieces are getting their master’s degree, and there was a time I was the only one with a college degree, and I just sit back and I say “You know, Chappie James, I’m not by myself anymore.” So, looking at the military and seeing so many women involved, and so many—I don’t think of what my friends say, I think about what so many of them are doing, and what the women are doing, and they’re all relatives, we’re all kin.

TS: So you were a role model for many. And still are.

YH: Pretty much. And still are, and still are, because I still get phone calls, and I still get emails, and I’m still a mentor, an air force mentor, for young officers, young female officers who are trying to figure out their way and what to do. And of course I have my daughter.

TS: That’s right.

YH: But you know, being in the military is not a nine to five job, it’s a lifetime job, and on the brochure, like here it says “For your own sake tomorrow,” it’s for all the tomorrows that people are looking at, because I smile when people don’t stand up and pledge allegiance to the flag, and I say “Well,” first of all, I tell them, after it’s all said and done, I say “I would appreciate if you recognized the fact that while you sleep soundly, I was out there for you, and if this one gesture can be a way of saying ‘thank you’, then just stand up.” And they just look at me, the students will look at me at the school, you know, or I’ll say “That’s my bread and butter, people, I wish you would think about it,” and they would stare. And I think the more personal contact that we have with the civilian world, that men and women have been, or are, I think the more conscious our young people will have[be?] that it’s not just the white man’s world or the men’s world or just their world, but it’s all of our world, intermingled, then our tomorrow will be saved, you know?

TS: Yes. Well, let's talk a little bit about the details of when you were in the air force, if you don't mind. Or do you need to take a little break? [phone rings] It sounds like we do, yes. [recording paused] We took a short break there and we're back, and—well, Dr. Hunter, tell me a little bit how you—when you decided to go and join the air force, tell me what it was like the first time you put on your uniform with your commission—what were you, a second lieutenant?

YH: Second lieutenant. Well, when—of course, you know, they teach you how to wear the uniform, and they talk to you about wearing makeup, and green makeup with your fatigues and blue makeup—but when you put on the uniform for the first time and sign in, I signed in, twelve o' clock noon, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1975, at Keesler [Air Force Base, Mississippi], it was a funny feeling, because driving in, I had to wear my uniform of course, the first time at the front gate, saluted me, and like, this is new, and there were so many, there were so many of us, of course, at the training base, that we were all—

TS: Oh, there's a picture, okay.

YH: We were all giddy together.

TS: Where are you at in this picture?

YH: Oh. [laughs]

TS: [unclear]

YH: We were all giddy together—

TS: Look at how young you are here.

YH: Yeah, sixteen weeks of air traffic control school in Mississippi, where the tide doesn't go in and out, it goes up and down. This is—yeah, it doesn't go in and out, it goes up and down. And it was—I think it was a proud feeling, but I think the biggest thing is that there's a swelling of the heart, that you're being patriotic, that you're part of the soldier unit, not so much the teaching unit, but the soldier unit of the world. They didn't talk about a state and no one talks to you about what city you're from. They talk in jobs, positions, how you use—there's a joke about if you wanted to issue you a spouse, we would give it to you, we would just go ahead—and so I liked that feeling, of when I'd put the uniform on, that people looked at your ribbons, your rank, how straight you were, your gig line [alignment of shirt, belt buckle, and trouser fly], that preciseness, and everyone looked the same, except for the rank. Everyone did different jobs, but there was a pride in the morning, you know, when you heard reveille, and there's a pride in the evening, at five o' clock, when the entire base just stopped, it just stopped, for a flag to go down. It gave certain symbols new meaning. Eagle, stripes, stars, uniforms, headgear, even the way you walked, you know. Eye contact, the swinging of the arms, by your leave, all that when you put the uniform on. And of course, the joke that goes along with

the fact that officers even wear their rank on their pajamas, you know. The separation of the officers club and the enlisted club, and as years moved on—because of finance, economics, the merger of our ranks club.

TS: Today, right?

YH: Yes, that separation was very distinct, and I didn't know whether, and I still don't know whether it's there for the right reasons. But I do know that there's logic behind the fact that familiarity does breed contempt, and it's very difficult for you to lead people who may take personal offense to you correcting them. And I think that part of wearing a uniform and having a rank has always stayed with me, to the point that I keep a very definitive line between people that I work with and people that I work for, or people who work for me. I keep it very clear, to make sure that there's always room for critical or crucial conversations, if need be, without compromising myself. And I've had to learn that the easy way and the hard way. So the uniform was an education, for me. How long have you been in? Well, check all my ribbons, and find out, you know, what do the hashmarks mean when you see army? I don't know. What's the rat one mean? I don't know. You have to learn all that.

TS: Right.

YH: But I do know that it was a society that I was very proud to be part of. [phone rings]  
[recording paused]

TS: Well, tell me, was there anything—when you trained, since you went to ROTC, you had to do some physical things, and then when you went in the—did you have to go through a basic training or anything like that?

YH: Okay, this is—I'm showing you now, but yes, this is a picture of my basic training. This is my basic training unit at Maxwell, and these were all the individuals who were in my flight. And we had to go through—I believe we went through six weeks? We went through six weeks of training, similar to the—no, more like three weeks of training, similar to what an enlisted person would go through, of course, an enlisted person trained us. So he would always tell us that officers did not sweat the way enlisted—we glowed, you know, we just glowed. And he would say it in such a manner that he was proud that he sweat. He was proud that he sweat. This is not—this is a training flight, at Maxwell Air Force Base, and for ROTC graduates—

TS: Co-ed.

YH: Yes, even—it was co-ed. They stayed in one dorm room, we stayed in another dorm area, but it's co-ed, the flight is always co-ed. And the young man that I was telling you about who asked me about being—either being a female or—

TS: Or a soldier.

YH: That's a little Southern young man right there.

TS: Oh, I see.

YH: And he just did not understand why women wanted to be in.

TS: We've got one, two, three, four, five, six women, and the rest are all men.

YH: Now, her first name is—how you say—her last name, her name is—how you say it—Nancy Yardley.

TS: Oh, is that right?

YH: And my name is Yardley Nelson. So when we were simulating our names, you know, our code names, and I was Yankee November, and she was November Yankee. So we had to be very careful to stay away from one another, not to be too close, because it would confuse them.

TS: Right, you would confuse them, I can see.

YH: But we went through our basic training, we got up in the morning, and of course we did our run at four thirty in the morning.

TS: Well, was there anything particularly physically difficult for you in this training?

YH: Interestingly enough, basic training wasn't. I was physically fit, I was quite a runner, I have strong upper body strength, I take it from washing all the kitchen walls and ceilings that my mother had me do, okay, but no, there was nothing difficult. It was difficult for a few people, and of course, that's when the men started making comments about whether women could handle certain things or could not handle certain things. Because a woman's balance line is lower than a man's, we have to move—we have to position ourselves differently, and it's only because of our role in life. We're childbearing, so we have to have our balance a little bit lower, to hold the baby, but it effected how we managed to hold and pick things up, of course, in the military. So once we understood how to balance our body, how to situate things, we could do the same things they could. But if—when it comes to running or if we had to deal with the arms, you know, the arm stretch—

TS: Chin-ups and such.

YH: All that, it was the same. Sit-ups, all those, we did the same, and we tried not to ask for a special push-up stance or anything, or special chin-up stance, we tried to do the same thing. As far as I'm concerned, the men were wimps the same way that women were wimps, so it was a nice range there. Most women were physical fit, even the ones who

didn't look like they were going to be physically fit, they were physically fit, they could run the distance.

TS: How far did you have to run?

YH: Well, you had to run a mile—had to run an eight minute mile, okay, we ran a mile and a half, we had to run an eight minute mile, had to be able to—we tried to do, I forgot how many sit-ups at a time. Air Force Academy, I'm more familiar with those numbers. But the air force, in training, we had to be able to do, I think it was a hundred—a hundred sit-ups.

TS: Sit-ups?

YH: Yes. We had to be able to carry sixty pounds, sixty to eighty pounds, and of course, if you don't want to carry it, don't pack it, because nobody's going to carry your knapsack but you, so you learn how to not carry a lot of things. I think the difficulty was with hygiene. Girls not liking to smell, or wanting to brush their teeth. Some people were more involved with makeup than others, so some of the vanity things irritated some of the men.

TS: Oh, really? Okay.

YH: Because they wanted—like I said, they wanted you to be a soldier. They didn't want you to be a girl, and when you became a girl, all the stereotypes of being a girl, their sister, their mom, whatever, it surfaced. Weak, crybabies, that you whined a lot, you weren't strong enough to handle certain things, and always wanting someone else to help you. And so the discussion was always about—when I was in basic training, what's going to happen in the real world when I have to turn around and help you out?

TS: This is within this unit, that you were having—

YH: Within it. And this is where we processed a lot of that. What's going to happen? So we had to make sure that we could address that, you know, by not being that way, you know. We're not going to fall behind, well, there's moments when people did fall behind, and so we just reconfigured our flight where the slow people were in the middle.

TS: Move them along.

YH: Move them along. And we made that part of the mindset, not so much of male-female, but who else is slow, put him up there too, he's slow, we pass him! And so as long as there was always a male in the same profile as a female, the men didn't say anything, you know.

TS: I see.

YH: So, the big fear was losing our femininity, and trying to be one of the guys, and in some cases, a lot of the young ladies did. They were more tomboyish or thought they could be

a little more rugged, so they can blend in, where the men were looking for them just to pull their weight, or prove that they couldn't pull their weight.

TS: Right. I see. So you had a little bit of gender issues. Did you have any racial issues, at all?

YH: Not when it came to the base. Not when it came to the unit. Like I said, the equality issue was intact there. The race came outside the base.

TS: At Maxwell Air Force Base?

YH: We went to—

TS: It's Alabama, right?

YH: A few of us went to a beach, and of course, I couldn't drive, so I was in the back reading a book.

And I popped my head up just at the time we were driving past a police car, and he followed us, and so the girls in the front said "Yardley, go ahead and lay back and read your book."

I said "Why, where you going?"

And they said "We got a police car following us, and we know why." And everything got quiet.

And I said "Why don't we stop and get something to eat?"

And one of the girls says "Not here, we're not, we've got to keep on going."

And he followed us until we got to the county line. And so, situations like that became apparent to the point that we didn't care whether you have a uniform on or not a uniform. You're black or you're white, that's how we[sic] going to treat you. But reading books about what happened to other people, Chappie James was kicked out of a restaurant in Florida, and he was a one-star general. He was beat up as a soldier. It made me remember, and think that things still existed, uniform didn't matter. But—and also, when I went to Chicago, I was told—recruiting for the Air Force Academy—I was told not to wear my uniform, because at that time, there was a lot of problems with military in the airport, and people were protesting. You know how airports were years ago, I don't know if you're young [old?] enough to remember that, where they actually had telephones and Hari Krishna and protests and all that, okay. Well, we couldn't wear our uniforms. Well, that wasn't race, but it was just military. So there were a few race issues outside. At Keesler Air Force Base, my first base, we're given a list of restricted restaurants and hotels and places—they knew they were restricted.

TS: Restricted to everyone?

YH: No, just to blacks, and there was a list, there were like twenty-eight, twenty-nine on one page. And these were all the places—

TS: And what year are we talking about here?

YH: At this point, we're talking 1975.

TS: Okay.

YH: And we couldn't go to them. We couldn't go to them because these businessmen did not support the Equal Opportunity Clause, so that if you—

TS: Civil Rights Act of 1964.

YH: [unclear] 1964, exactly right.

TS: Ten years later, they're still—

YH: And they would not, they didn't care. And so they didn't want blacks in there, and so we could not convince them, until finally they realized that money was green and they weren't getting any of the money, then they finally opened up a little more. And of course, as more military people retired and stayed in the area and had businesses, got rid of—then the flight, and of course, that changed the complexion again.

TS: The demographics changed.

YH: The demographics changed, and of course, again when the economy changes, everybody wants everybody's money, so they turn and look a different way and whatever. But we were told not to go to those places, because they weren't—the phrase was, they weren't endorsed or supported by policies that the military supported, you know, that's how it was said.

TS: I see.

YH: You know. So being in the military had its benefits, but the reality of the world was still there.

TS: What'd you think about it at the time? Being restricted from certain places?

YH: Well, it was—what did I think of it. Basically, I didn't think of it, except the fact that—that was just the way it was. I didn't have any thoughts, per se, except that I thought it was a crying shame that people were still ignorant in those days, but here we are in 2010 and people are still ignorant, so it's a constant, you know. If—I feel now, and I guess I can say the same thing then, I feel like it's a situation of the Hatfield and McCoys. You have no idea what you're fighting and arguing about, because you've been doing it for so long, you don't even know how to stop doing it. And you don't even realize there's no rationale for it, you know. Until your daughter brings someone home or your son brings someone home, you see there? And all of a sudden, you don't talk about that. But the main thing is that it's a Hatfield-McCoy situation, where that's the way of

the world and sour grapes and get over it. But at the time, they were the masses. Now, they're more—it's still the masses, but not so prevalent. It's still going on.

TS: Yeah. Well, then, how did you—when you first decided you were going to join the air force, what was your—because I know you're goal-oriented, I can tell. Did you have—did you say “I'm going to stay in for a career, I'm going to do it for six years,” what did you have in mind?

YH: I'll be very honest with you. I didn't have a thing in mind because it was not part of the grand scheme of things. I was going to go into college and become a teacher, become a professor, marry my professional man, have a three-story house, PTA mom, bake cupcakes, active in the church, and travel. The end.

TS: [chuckling] Okay.

YH: And then I joined the military, and I had no idea what it was going to lead me, where it was going to lead me, and so—

TS: Did that make you nervous?

YH: No, it made me blind to the big picture. I was very naïve to the dynamics around me. Caused me to step on some landmines that—based on decisions. So I don't know, I don't know where to place all that, except the fact that I was pretty much just kind of—found some places, said “This is good, I like this, I see people moving up slowly,” but there wasn't a lot of—I mean, women, I mean, at the academy, they had us talk to a lot of female officers and general officers, colonels and stuff, but most of them were in the army and the hospital, you know, or in the medical field. They weren't frontline service women. They weren't hardcore maintenance women. They weren't doing what I was doing, they were mostly nurses and officers or army people in the medical corps, so—and they were white. So it was—I didn't have a lot to go on. Okay, here's a path, or there's a light for that trail, because I'm at the end of that light, so do it. So I didn't have a goal, didn't have a place. I just figured I was going to ride it as long as it lasts. I did not realize what I wanted to do. One day—and I didn't have a driver's license.

TS: Yeah, I'm guessing that, because you said you didn't drive, okay.

YH: I was at Keesler Air Force Base, air traffic control school. Still not thinking—thinking I was going to finish four years, marry my college sweetheart, transfer to Fort Bragg, Pope Air Force Base—he lived in Fayetteville, and I was going to teach and move on, like I said.

Well, I was in Keesler, I had a ride with a friend of mine, air traffic control school, and she said “I have to stop someplace, can you get up earlier,” Earlier than five o' clock? “Because I need to stop by this place.”

I said “Sure.” So I go with her. I say “Where are we going?”

She says “I heard about this recruitment, I'm going to the Air Force Academy,”



I said “You plan on leaving air traffic control and going there?”

She said “I don’t know,” she said, “but I want to put an application, see what’s going on.”

I said “Okay, I’ll go with you, because I have no way to get back to school and we’re exempt if you,” If the women go there, you’re exempt to be late anyway. So I went with her, her name was Rebecca. Went with Rebecca, Rebecca Ritchie[?], Ohio farm girl. She became my best friend. I went with her to this big auditorium, and they had this presentation, I’m sort of reading my book, doing crossword puzzles, about picking women to train—the first class of women at the Air Force Academy.

And they showed a PowerPoint presentation, and they passed out these application forms and so of course I give one to her and I keep on going, and she goes “Fill one out.”

And I go “Girl, you’re out of your brain, I’m not filling that thing out [unclear], I’m just figuring out the Black folk scheme [unclear],” [laughs] [unclear] Jet Magazine, I don’t know, because I’m still out of my element, but I know there’s something more than what I want to do. She talked me into filling the form out, so I fill it out, you know, I figure, okay, they want to know how many of us filled out, maybe that’ll cover that I came here, so I filled it out. And they called my name for the interview.

TS: In this—just after?

YH: Well, we were all there, and yes, about a couple weeks later, they called us and told us to come to [unclear], so we go there, and—

TS: Did they call your friend, too?

YH: They called Rebecca’s name too, and I found they called another young lady’s name, Irene Graf, G-R-A-F, called her name, and she was also in air traffic control. So they called all three of our names, and we went there. Did not know Irene as well, but I knew—she was in a different class, but I knew Rebecca, because she was in class with me. And so, we go in, and I interview. And they talked to me about who I am and where I come from and different things, and I’m talking to them, and had I heard about the Air Force Academy, of course I had, you know. Yada yada. Then, ironically enough, we get a letter. And it says that they would like for us—we get it on, like, the day we graduate from air traffic control school.

TS: That’s interesting.

YH: And I was told that I was going to a base in Indiana, and this is how they said it. “You’re going to be trained in air traffic control at a base in Indiana, I feel sad for you because there’s a senior master sergeant—chief master sergeant who doesn’t like blacks, and he has never, ever passed anyone, air traffic control,” because, see, at the time, air traffic control was one of the few career fields where the enlisted trained the officer, and then the officer was in charge. But they trained the officers in the training process. And I

fought this equality bit, so of course I wanted to try air traffic control, because “equality”, you know, so. “Are we doing the same job as everybody else?” Not knowing any better.

And I said “If you know he’s going to wash me out, and you know he doesn’t like blacks, let alone females in the military, why are you sending me there?” Woe is me. Well, when I received my certificate, I received a letter clipped to it, and the letter says “Congratulations, you’ve been selected to go to the Air Force Academy to train to first class, and they would like for you to come out in January,” I’m like “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you.”

TS: Someone’s looking out for you.

YH: So, unbeknownst to me, I had moved myself again to an area of opportunity. Rebecca received the same letter, and so did Irene. So we get on this beautiful plane, first class—when they had door prizes [?], and you actually had alcohol, I mean—

TS: On the plane?

YH: And food, everything. And we went there to visit in January. We went there in January, January 7<sup>th</sup>, as a matter of fact, and—

[comments about recorder redacted]

And started our tour there. So, did I have a goal or a plan? I didn’t have one then. When I got to the Air Force Academy, I did not realize the magnitude of my job. I didn’t realize that—these were some of the girls I was with.

TS: This is a picture—this is for the tape. So who—can you name who these people are in this picture?

YH: Well, this is Paula, and this is—she’s the tallest one, and she had beautiful long hair, that had to be cut, of course. And this is Susan, Susan is lazy. Susan Wright[?]. Susan said the best thing about being lazy is that you will do it right the first time, because you did not want to do it again the second time. And so—

TS: I have actually never heard that before. [chuckles]

YH: And so Susan did things right the first time.

TS: Okay.

YH: Susan had beautiful long hair, and they chose to let her keep her long hair as an experiment to see if women can go through basic training with long hair. And I’m looking at this one, and this one is a young lady who—I’ll put this way. You know when you join something and you find out it’s not your cup of tea, and you realize that this is not who you are? Well, when she went to the program, she realized that she didn’t like the training of the Air Force Academy, and she didn’t like the way people were trained there, and she didn’t agree with it, and she couldn’t do it, and she wasn’t physically fit for

that, or—and she—I think she may have been mentally set, but she didn't set her mental sights on that. And so out of fifteen air training officers that were chosen by the United States Air Force from all over the world, three of them could not see themselves doing it. Correction: two of them could not see themselves doing it, and one elected to stop. That was Becky, Rebecca. So this one, Dawn, did not go in.

TS: And this is you, here.

YH: That's me, right there in the middle. I know, just ran through it. And of course, being the only black, they had to figure out what to do with my hair.

TS: Right.

YH: And of course, they had to figure out "What do black people look like in the military?"

TS: Right.

YH: But we went there in January, met the commander, and we got our base and everything. He asked me "Do you know why you were chosen?"

TS: Right. And so—I just want to, for the tape, I want to make sure that people understand that you're selected to help train the first class of women that are going to be able to go through the Air Force Academy. And that would have been in 1976.

YH: That would have been in 1976, and this was January of 1976 right now. And we flew there to be trained from January to May to—

TS: Prepare.

YH: Like, we were cadets—to prepare, so when they came in in June, we would be their upper-class female cadre, along with a male cadre.

TS: I see.

YH: That would give this climate that, that's how the school is set up.

TS: Because otherwise, there weren't really any—

YH: Upper-class females, and we would be the ones saying "You can do it, I did it, you can do it," and they would hear that, and following you, they would become sophomores, and they would say to their freshmen "You can do it, I've done it, you can do it," but they had no women to do that. When the Air Force Academy first opened, the air force chose people or servicemen from the other services to act as an upper class cadre to start the process, so they trained the first class in '59, they trained the class, and as they became

upperclassmen, they went back and told their underclassmen “You can do it, we’ve done it.”

Well, they repeated when Congress said “We will have women in the Air Force Academy,” air force said, “How do we go about bringing the women in? We’ll do it the same way we brought the men in, and we’ll have women there.”

West Point said “We don’t want them there anyway, and we’re not going to do anything to make it any easier, and if they want to come here, they’re going to come on in, the way—” Of course, that superintendent was fired, of course, and a new one came in, because of the attitude, whatever, that he generated from this group. But that’s how they came in. Annapolis [Naval Academy] had the same attitude, but they brought in more women in their staff and their cadre area, so they had more women around them. But the Air Force Academy was the only military school that actually brought in their own and trained their own, and so I was trained with them.

And what happened, we got there the first day, fun. We’re all officers, they cannot call us by our rank, so we had to be called air training officers. We cannot be called Lieutenant Nelson.

TS: Right.

YH: And all of us wore these—and this is the nameplate. This nameplate, on our blues, so that people wouldn’t call us Lieutenant—Lieutenant Whatever. Because—

TS: Did you wear your rank?

YH: We wore our rank, but we could not be called by our rank, because that would cause a psychological difference between the cadets and the officers, because they called the others by their rank as well, in training.

TS: It was something to be earned, sort of, right.

YH: Exactly. And because we wanted our cadets to call us—to treat us like basics, like—they couldn’t call us ma’am. They couldn’t say Lieutenant, ma’am, you know, and so, they called us ATO [air training officer].

TS: I see.

YH: ATO Nelson, you know [speaks in exaggerated deep voice] “Get on your phonebooth,” you know, “ATO [unclear]” all this. So you went through that training.

Well, what was interesting is that we came in like “Hello, how you doing, so-and-so, hi, you remember me?” And that night, we left things alone, thinking tomorrow we’ll start our orientation. The room was a mess. At 4:20 in the morning, we hear this boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom “Wake up, get up,”

And we are like “What in the world?”

TS: [chuckling]

YH: Well, the gung-ho, [unclear] Smack, her name was Beth, now Beth Goosby[?], but she was the youngest air training officer, we called her Smack because the youngest cadets were called smacks. Beth, like, she was all ready, gung-ho, and I sit there going “Where’s my sneakers, my shoes,” and we run out, and finally we get ourselves in order in the hallway, you know. And we’re looking around like “What is this?” We find out that’s the first day of basic training. The cadets were ready for us, we weren’t ready for the cadets. And so you run around the Terrazzo, of course, earning your breakfast, and we start out—so when that’s over, we get back to our room and said “Oh, so it’s going to be like this.” We took a deep breath and we jumped right in. Now, please understand that there were mixed feelings at the Air Force Academy, the same way there were mixed feelings at West Point and at Annapolis. However, the air force tried their best to minimize as much as they could, but there were attitudes. Please understand that the cadets had fathers who were Air Force Academy grads. They had uncles, they had cousins, they had military families, three and four generations, who talked about this big change for years, how dare this one woman file a lawsuit against the Air Force Academy.

Where my thought says “How dare you actually believe that my tax money is paying for a private institution that my daughter can’t go to?”

So there was—and I’m certain some of the wives of these academy grads, of these ringknockers [Slang term for graduates of military academies who draw attention to their class rings, e.g. by knocking it on a table. Can also apply to non-military.]—did I say that sharply?—that they may have thoughts too, but they [unclear]. So we picked up some of that, so there were times when we went to an officers’ meeting and they would say “Room, ten hut!” We all got up, and they said, “Be seated, officers, be seated. You too, ATOs.” As if we weren’t officers.

TS: Right.

YH: Or there were times where we were ignored, or we would walk from information, and we would hear cadets, even our old fellow officers, saying “Go home, go home” off the Terrazzo. And we would go back to our room and it would break our hearts. But that’s what you have to do if you’re going to walk roads untaken, you know. You have to just force through and say “There’s a light at the end of the tunnel, there really is, and we’re here for a purpose.” But there were cadets there who believed in us, and believed there was a reason for it, and they understood, and they enjoyed training with us. Except the class of ’79. The class of ’79 felt they were the last class with balls, not recognizing the fact that they had men coming in with the class of ’80 as well. And of course, they had to deal with that when they got there. And so they had a stronger attitude, because they did not, as a group, with a passion. But there were cadets who were nice, like the class of ’70—I would say the class of ’78. No, I would say it was actually the freshman class behind, or there at the time, was class of ’78, who put doughnuts on our pillows, but they weren’t allowed in our room in the first place, but [unclear]—how I got that doughnut, but it was nice of them. Or the class of ’79 who took our privacy walls down and we woke up and there were no walls that separated us from the men, so we all just stood there looking at each other in the morning. The men ran, we had our housecoats on. But

there were times when they would do things like that. There were funny times, too, when we had to go to the bathroom, but there were no women's bathrooms in the academic room. So we confiscated a bathroom, stood watch, and we went to the bathroom. Then the men realized they had to—but that's how I got to the Air Force Academy, it was by a fluke. But when I got there, saw my picture in the paper, interviewed by people—

TS: Is that that one clip, that newspaper clip that you had?

YH: No, this is not the clip, this one is just a clip—it was sewn to this, but this is a clip about being—

TS: Oh, ROTC.

YH: This is the one saying that I had graduated from ROTC, but I do have a clip of us being there, it's in the Denver Post. And then they used to ask questions, what do the ATOs do during their off time? We did the same thing as anyone else, you know, wash our hair, get our nails done, we go to the movies. But I realized they were more of a novelty, and people were watching us and seeing what we're doing. And it was at that time when we had classes about leadership and femininity, and that's when it formalized a little bit more, becoming aware of how do we teach our cadets how to be leaders, how to stay being women. How to command the men, but yet be commanding of their own womanhood. And the mission didn't become public for us. The mission became personal and private, for those who came behind us. So we ignored society. We were there to do our job, and we had an assignment to do, and I believe we did it well, because when we were called back, thirty years later, we were called back. Cadets—not the cadets, they were now officers. They were asked to go get the bags of jewelry for us, necklaces, and take it to one of the air training officers, and tell a story. And there were three that were there at the time that kept fighting over a bag for me. And so they all held on to the handle and came to me to tell me a couple stories. And you know, when you're the eldest, or the upperclassmen, you remember thinking from that perspective. But when you're the underclassmen looking at the upperclassmen, there's so many little things that the upperclassmen took for granted that they held onto.

TS: What were one of those things that they told you, do you remember?

YH: One young lady told me that she liked the fact that I was able to have a sense of humor. She says "I was so afraid of you," and she said "Particularly when you told me that tomorrow morning, you wanted to see your face in my boots."

TS: [chuckles]

YH: She said "I cried all night, because how can a black person see their face in combat boots?" And she said "I didn't realize then, that all you were saying was 'Make 'em shine'," and she said "And when I came out and you looked at my boots and you smiled

at them and walked away,” she says “I thought you were pleased, but then you said ‘I can see my teeth, and that’s sufficient for me,’”

TS: [laughs]

YH: And she cracked up. And she said “I did it, I did it,” and they kidded and said “You were up all night with those boots, all night with those boots.”

I always went through my patrol and I would say “Good night, ladies,” close the door, “Good night, ladies,” close the door. Well, one night, no smile—I was not big on smiles at the time, but that’s why they thought it was cool, but one night, they decided they wanted to say good night to me first. And they said “You say it so quick,” they would call me ATO Nelson, they said “Good night, ladies, good night, ladies.”

So what they did was they hung this big sheet, and when you opened the door, the sheet came toward, and it said “Good night, ATO Nelson”, and I said “Good ni—” and they thought I was going to scream. And I said “[very firmly] Good night, ladies. Clean up the mess.”

TS: [laughs]

YH: And they said “We thought we had you for a moment, but you never lost it!” And I thought that was kind of nice. There was one conversation, though, that I had with an ATO, that I had with a cadet, and that was interesting.

TS: This—was this thirty years later, or at the time?

YH: This was at the time, but you made me think of it. Her father was a chief master sergeant, and she was going to be an officer, and she didn’t care for the way people talked about the officership and the enlistedship. And she argued a lot, and she wanted to leave. And was nothing more than she not understanding how to balance her role with her father’s role, a little bit similar to my relationship with my brothers being enlisted, and me being an officer. Being black, and it being in the ‘70s, many of the white commanders had difficulty picking up the verbiage or the communication to talk to another black female. Which is why I was there, and I’ll tell you that in a second, but—so they cleared the hallway, and told me that I had three hours to talk to her.

It was a combination of a come to Jesus talk, get yourself together, and a compassionate talk of “Yo girl, what’s going on?” That white cadets—that white ATOs could not do. She could not relate to them. And I found it interesting to hear her talk, and that’s what—how do we help them? She was crying, how does she respect her father, and she’s outranking him? What does she do when she goes home and sees him, the way we talk about enlisted? It wasn’t demeaning, it was knowing our role in the leadership of individuals, in the commanding of other people, but she couldn’t put it back in place from her daddy. We had a long talk. She’s a doctor now. [laughs] She finished and she did her tour, and she’s a doctor now. But I would say that I think that conversation wasn’t so much the female part as much as it was one that a male or female could have said to her

from the leadership part. But in the '70s, having a crucial conversation across the race was very difficult, for primarily, both sides, you know.

I want to say this, I had been there for two months, and the commander called me in. Commander McCarthy, his name was McCarthy. He was in charge of the air training officers. And he asked me "So you know why you were hired?"

And I said—being arrogant, "Because I'm good," [unclear]

But he said "Because you don't wear an afro," he says, "You don't have the stereotype that will turn the poster child, the poster look off as far as what a black female officer would look like," he says, "And you know how to speak, which says that you're articulate and you're very educated, so that's what the public wants to see," he said "You hold your own, physically," he said "However, there's something about you that says that you're very militant, and our young girls need to hear that," and I had thought I had worked real hard at keeping myself below the radar.

TS: All this time.

YH: All this time. And maybe I had, but he was very insightful, how he chose us and what he chose us for, and I really feel that every female officer was chosen for a reason. Paula was afraid of heights. She's the tallest one there, you know.

TS: [chuckles]

YH: She could be looked upon as being the silly-dilly blond, Susan could be.

TS: The lazy one.

YH: The lazy one. Very efficient. Very thorough. Always in trouble. And so I really feel like, going to the academy was a turning point for me, and I wanted to stay in. Didn't know what it entailed, but I wanted to stay in.

TS: This experience was a turning point, that you had at the academy. How long were you there?

YH: We were there for three—I was there for three years. What happened was, after two years, we were like juniors at the academy, so we told them to let us go. We were supposed to have been there a four-year tour. But after the first year, the young cadets did so well with us bringing the freshman class in that after we brought the next class in, our freshmen were now juniors, so we would be seniors, so to speak. And we told them "We're not needed anymore,"

TS: And you didn't want to be the seniors—

YH: No!

TS: —because they needed to be.



YH: Exactly.

TS: I get that.

YH: We didn't need that, we didn't want that, we wanted to fade out. And so we slowly started taking positions in the military—we wanted to go back out into the air force, but we also wanted them to have space to grow, and so, two of the air training officers went into the flying group, to be in the second class of women to fly. And others just kept—we just slowly—that summer, we slowly moved out. So when the upperclassmen came back, they didn't see us, they were now going into their junior year and they had the senior year all to themselves, without us being there.

Now, I was on campus because I was a minority affairs recruiter, and so I went out to recruit minority students, and what better person to recruit minority females than another minority female from the air force until they had somebody of their own? So I saw them, but I did not want to—we didn't want to be there. Also, the scars of being—of not being accepted, the scars of being isolated from our own officer counterpart, the scars from all that was taking its toll on us, and we wanted to cut that tie, cut it. And I think at that point, I wanted nothing else to do with the Air Force Academy, or with air force, really. I got married, I was in the military, I got back into military movement and everything, but unfortunately I married an Air Force Academy grad, so that didn't work out either. But I think that the whole idea of us moving on was a healthy move for us. So by the time they were seniors, it was understandable they would have forgotten us, and they went on out into the world—it was understandable they would have forgotten, but they hadn't, they just hadn't gotten back together to talk about it. And so when they became majors and colonels, watching their fellow female ringknockers come out and they talked, they said “Well, don't you know? What do you mean, you don't know?” And that's when general officers and colonels who were the class of '80, the ladies of '80, said “No, this is not how it's supposed to be,” and last year, they dedicated a beautiful painting—glass window with our faces on it, with our images and our names across it inside the academic building. And next year, we hope they'll finally place our names on the [unclear] union building beside the men. You see how long it still has taken society—military society, to put our names beside the very men who did the exact same thing? We never received a military service medal the way they received it. We received a commendation, because the men said we were just doing our job. But our male counterparts received an MSM [military service medal]. So it was quite an interesting experience. I'm still very proud of being part of it, but I think only from the appreciation of the female cadets, do I feel the appreciation there.

TS: Do you think, though, that—because you said that it was fairly recently when you got—so, for a number of years, you were a little resentful, maybe?

YH: A number, yes, from 1977 to 19—to 2003 or 4, something like this? Very much so.

TS: Yeah.

YH: My daughter didn't even know. You know, she saw my nameplate, you know, like "Mommy, what's this?" She would hear about things in ROTC, and she knew her father was an Air Force Academy grad, she knew he was in commercials for recruiting, and then when she was in ROTC, she heard about the Air Force Academy and the history of the women at the Air Force Academy, one and one, "My mother, my mother was an air training officer!"

TS: She put it together, then. But you never talked about it?

YH: They said "What?" I talked about it to the point—that was one of my assignments in the air force, and that's when Mommy met Daddy and moved on.

TS: That's it.

YH: You know. And you know—you know, when children start growing up, and they start saying to themselves "You know, my father played basketball, and look, he's in the yearbook. I didn't know he was the most valuable player!" That type of feeling, you know.

TS: I see.

YH: And so it's like, my mother was in the military and I joined the ROTC, she—my father—wait a minute, that's my mother's picture right there, that's my mother! So consequently, she would say, "She's in that booklet," or whatever. And so that's when they would say "Yeah, right." But with a name like Yardley, it was very hard to deny. And that's when Stephanie started saying "Mommy, so and so,"

And then when she got into the military, people would say—but particularly when she's in Colorado at the Air Force Academy, they would say "Isn't your mother Captain Yardley, you know,"

She goes "Yeah,"

"Oh! I was in service with your mom," or "How is your mom doing?" or "Isn't your father So-and-so?"

"Yes," and then she realized—and this is another thing—I have a network of people who know me before I even know them and I have a role that's given to me by my mother and my father, you know. And that's when she started recognizing, so I—my father—my mother was ill, my mother was ill, and so I could not go to Colorado when they dedicated the window. And so she went in my stead.

TS: Oh, fantastic.

YH: And she said she couldn't believe it, the female officers. Because, you see, one, Terry Gobowski[?], is a two-star general, more than five—four foot eleven or whatever, and her father, two-star general. And "How's Yardley doing?"

And she goes "Yes ma'am".

TS: [laughs]

YH: That type—so that’s when I became more of a reality to my daughter. She’s always admired me, and that has humbled me a lot. She’s always been fascinated by this world, the military world, and I had to ask her over and over again “Are you certain you really want to be in the military, or do you want to follow your mother’s footsteps? Because I do not recruit for an all-girls college,” which I used to do, “For the military,” which I used to do, you know. I do not do that. And I said “So I want to make sure it’s what you want. I will advocate for it.”

And she always tells people “No, I’m not here because of my mother, she’s asked me numerous times, do I know what I’m doing,” she says “I want to be a soldier, I like the things about the military, my mother and my father were excited about the military, they enjoyed it, and I enjoy it too.” So she’s in on her own, and I think she’s enjoying it very much. We talk about the morality of warfare, which is a very important concept to me, when I talk about being in the military.

TS: Well, I was going to ask you how you reconciled your feelings initially about Vietnam and the classes you went to and then joining. So that might be a good time to talk about it, and then the morality issue.

YH: We’re in Vietnam for a reason, and I learned what the reasons were, and I also learned one very important thing. Civilians can’t fight a war. And if less civilians got involved, they would have won the war. But because Congress decided they wanted to get involved and because civilians got involved, instead of allowing the military to do their job, you know—also, and I hate to say this, but—I don’t hate to say it, just may not sound as pretty. There’s no democracy in the military, you know. I’m glad that we have a human rights proclamation, and I’m glad we have the Geneva Convention. But I’ll be very honest with you. Better you than me. And whatever means it’s going to take for it to be you versus me, I’m for it. So I go with the phrase “nuke ‘em ‘til they glow”. And I love the philosophy of second strike capability. My mother taught me that. Never start a fight, never bully anybody. Never push people around, but if they so much as touch you, or cross the boundary, that’s it. My father said “Never let a person walk away injured, they will come after you. Never force someone to lose face, they will come after you, so finish it while you can.” That may seem strong and mean and cruel, but as a soldier, I understood why we had Vietnam. I feel bad, though, that civilians got so involved that they could not take care of home when the soldiers came back. If they had concentrated on taking care of the soldiers when they came back, without being angry about people who actually wanted to go over and fight—and some may not because of draft—then I think many of our wartime vets would have been better taken care of.

TS: So you mean the reception they got from the public?

YH: It wasn’t the reception they got from the military. It had to be from the public. So why are we so angry with the military when it was the public who’d actually treated these military veterans the way they did? You know, we have all of these little—[stand with the?]

troops right now. Save the troop. Where were they when Vietnam came—you know, where were they? Still being flower children and dealing with who's black and who's white and who's right. If they had just taken care of Johnny when he came marching home, then we wouldn't have so many angry veterans now, who say "I wonder why I did it to come home to this."

So I don't—I understand, so when—when a friend of mine came home and he argued, I just listened to him. And all I could say was "How were you treated when you came home? Because I know you ate three meals a day, I know you got your shots, you got your physical, you got everything that was given to you by the military. How were you treated when you came home? And I'm talking about your neighborhood. About the community," you know, I says[sic], "When you tell me they treated you bad, don't tell me the military treated you bad," you know. Now, I feel bad about the draft, but when I joined the military, I accept the fact that there's a draft. But I played my part in that draft. I was part of that draft, I volunteered. And I tell people "You volunteer to die, you volunteer to die for your principles, it's not what you want to do, and don't commit suicide. Be strong, mentally and physically, pull back, be able to fight another day. But you volunteer to be a soldier, and sometimes soldiers don't come back. So my daughter, I tell her every time, "My heart goes out to you, but if you're called to go, don't go to Canada, no one told you to go in. So you have to fight the fight," you know. And now my daughter—my son is asking about going in. And I tell him "You need to know why you're there." So I'm resigned to the fact that if it weren't for the military, I would not sleep well at night. Weren't for the police, I would not sleep well at night. And when I teach in school, I teach them about chaos and order, and I never call the police paw-paws or poo-poops, whatever they call them nowadays. And I was taught to respect them, regardless of—

TS: Po-po, I think.

YH: That's it, too, see there? I never got into that. I never wanted to have that language, because I always felt that if we didn't have order, we have chaos. So I resigned to the fact that there was a reason for it. Pearl Harbor? Hmm, I'll leave that, I want to live, you know.

TS: [laughing] What do you mean by that?

YH: But, that—the attack on Gaddafi? [pause] There—my children's father lead that attack. And it's only been a few years that we've been able to advertise that he was in that fleet of ships, we lost a best friend. But I believe in soldiers, and I believe in war, and I believe in the military, I believe in the right to bear arms. [audio file 2 ends, audio file 3 begins] And I also believe in educating people so that you don't have to do those things. So I've resigned to that.

TS: That seems like a switch from when you were, you know, seventeen.

YH: Being more informed.

TS: You think that's what it was?

YH: I think being more informed—you're seventeen, you're looking for a cause or a reason. Also, you deal with more things from the emotion and passion. As you get older, you start—you have a little bit more behind you, you have in front of you as well, but you also have the facts, like that recruiter told me. You need to have the facts. Now, some people don't keep—some people leave, like I told you.

TS: Right.

YH: And they disagree. I have had my friends disagree with me.

TS: What about something like what happened at Kent State?

YH: Unfortunately, everybody is not trained to maintain control of themselves. Their adrenaline—this adrenaline rush. People are provoked. Soldiers can be afraid. They can jump the gun. And unfortunately, there's a repercussion of that. Which is worse than when civilians jump the gun. I feel bad about Kent State. But here it is—when there's an issue, there are people for the cause of both sides. When they clash, something's going to happen. Everybody—we can discuss all day long about the magnitude of different things or how it happened, but—I don't get into one side or the other. As a soldier, it's not my job to be on one side or—as a soldier, it's my job to be where I'm called and do what has to be done and make sure that I come home. Let the political people—here it goes, I go back to it. But let the political people take care of the political discussions and debates, but—

TS: Well, of course you said, the civilians don't actually know how to deal with it all of the time, you said.

YH: That's right, but when the president—see, this is why we have so many conflicts. The Korean conflict, the Vietnam conflict, they were not declared wars. When you have a war, step away and let the soldiers fight. But when you have a conflict, it will go on for years and years and years in the halls of Congress. And our soldiers will be dying while you're finishing your sentences. So, who's really allowing us to take care of business, the safe congressmen, who are making laws to increase their pay, increase their time there, and—right now, I'm not talking about anything on either side. You know, or the soldier, who only has a few seconds to make a decision of whether it's do or die. So—

TS: So what do you think about these two conflicts we're in right now, in Iraq and Afghanistan?

YH: Oh, gosh. Well, if Bush didn't have such a strong interest in his oil and his family and the Republican party, what they have over there, we wouldn't be in this right now, but of course, that's neither here nor there. We're here now—

TS: But that—the soldiers are over there fighting, right?

YH: We're here now—

TS: Like you said.

YH: And unfortunately, this is what happens. Right now, what has happened is that you've walked into a—the president, Congress, everything—they've walked into a house full of mess. Full of mess, and just because one person has decided to pick up the vacuum cleaner versus a broom, everybody wants to now start talking about how to clean the house. Well, it's a mess, and nobody wants to talk about who made the mess, because unfortunately, the mess has been made. And nobody wants to go back to that, they want to talk about who's going to clean up the mess. I don't know.

TS: So you mean, it's on President Obama's shoulders right now—

YH: It's on his shoulders, and no matter who would have been president, it would have been on his shoulders. So much easier to put it on his shoulders right now and say he's doing all this, because no one is really hollering about the issues. They're mudslinging each other, it's personality, it's—it's—there's no issue, there are no issues being talked, and even though they're saying he's not doing things, he's still dealing with issues. He's not dealing with your personality and their personality and you're not right for the people and let's have our own tea party—he's not—he's still trying to do what he says he's trying to do and he can't quite do it all—by himself—but he's doing it. Whether I agree or disagree, somebody has to sit in the Oval Office, and that was the people's choice, and so when I look—I listen to television and I say “How dare you, how dare you state that because things didn't go your way, you actually think that's not the people's choice, because it didn't go your way,” so anytime it doesn't go the way the majority feel it should go, then it's not the people's choice. But if it goes the way they want it to go, then it's the people's choice.

TS: It's all in their perspective.

YH: And unfortunately, soldiers are listening to the civilians [unclear] and the conversation is “Do you actually believe that America is this ignorant and this dumb, that we actually—“  
And when they call for surveys, I tell them, I say “Excuse me, I'm a military veteran, I don't get into your politics, don't you get into our wars,” and I hang up.

TS: [laughs]

YH: Because I still hold that.

TS: Okay.

YH: If I'm to believe in the—if I'm to die, defending the principles of the United States, I can't get into the politics of it all. And I haven't taken that uniform off to be a total civilian, I don't think any veteran has, or they can be, really. That's why they stay quiet about that, and if I'm to support my daughter or anyone else about what they're doing, I have to say "You have a boss. If he says go, you go, and if he doesn't say go, you don't go," so it's kind of difficult for me to sit around. And my husband is twenty-eight years retired, I'm married now thirty-something years—we sit around and say "We don't get into that, because we've been trained to—ours is not to question why, ours is whether to do or die."

TS: Focus on the mission, right?

YH: Right. And if the people think this is how it should be, this is how it should be until we have a position—until we're in a position to change it, which is called election, and make a very educated decision about that, you know, because more than likely, what's going to happen is that even though people—there's going to be a change in positions, they won't talk about moving forward. You will hear them talk about what used to be, what someone else did, and now I've got to do something else. What someone else did, but now—never moving forward. Because they're always going to make an excuse, of because of whatever Obama did, they can't do this now. Or now that he—can't do this now. Or, we've got to get rid of him, because he did this—and no one's going to truly make a decision, and I think unfortunately, we need to have a decisive leader, and—I believe in the electoral college, I believe in voting. One vote, and that's all we have. And so I believe as a soldier, as a veteran, we need to maintain the principles of our country, and having lived around in other places and listened to the international voice, the voice is saying that for the first time, America is not living in a hypocritical state. We're not hypocritical, we actually talk about, this is the—a land where everybody has an opportunity. A society where people have choices, you're not in a caste system. But the moment we practice it, our America goes in an uproar, and so I get emails and texts from my friends in Europe that I still keep in contact with, you know.

And they say "You're still being hypocritical over there, do you see what happened?" [chuckling]

You know, like "I'm not coming to visit you this summer!" you know? Because even during the election, a comment was made for the first time, our country is trying to—and I'm not saying it's going to be successful. And I know there may not be a second term, and I'm not—and I wasn't all for this election or this president, I was not. If Clinton hadn't act a fool, that she hadn't gotten into mudraking, I may have leaned on her. You know what I'm saying? Because it got below the belt, I lost the appreciation. I still admire her, but I lost the appreciation. And I said "Maybe there's a possibility that it's just one time, I mean, it's a possibility, you know." But I think as soldiers, we need to recognize our lines, and we're getting more veterans and civilians because of all this happening, and you don't hear a lot of the veterans talking. You hear a lot of the people who didn't do a doggone thing, and let their mommas and daddies send them to school with a check. You talk about [unclear] financial aid? You talk about—he's in every man, and that's the part, whether he's purple, green, or yellow, the president's like every man,

he's been pulled[?], you know, he comes from a broken family, he educated himself. He's trying to raise his children, his wife is trying to do all she can to be like my mom, teach as she goes along, every single day, you know. But I think, going back to where we are in this parameter, I think that we have to recognize the fact that we have a constitution, we have a way of life, we have a way of voting, and we need to start talking about accepting that, because if people don't like the way a jury decides, then all of a sudden, the jury system's wrong.

TS: It's almost as though you're saying like, we need to give them the time to try to do the job the way—

YH: We need to recognize the fact that if the system is working—if the system is supposed to work itself out, stop challenging it the moment you're on the opposite side.

TS: Right.

YH: You just suck it up. I never seen a man so angry than I have with the incumbent, what's his little name? I forgot the little guy's name that ran for president.

TS: Against President Obama?

YH: Yes.

TS: Oh, McCain?

YH: McCain. Sour grapes. I never seen a man so terribly angry and offended. And he would have been so beautifully moving forward, than lying in sour grapes. But that's political.

TS: [laughs] Well, let me ask you a couple more things about your service. So you left the Air Force Academy and what happened next, where'd you go?

YH: I left the Air Force Academy, I married, and—let's see, five, six, seven, eight—in 1978, I married, and left the Academy and went back into the service like the other air training officers did, and went to Mountain Home, Idaho. At the time, my husband was a wizzo[?], top gun, for—

TS: Okay. What'd he fly?

YH: F-111s. And he was a weapons system officer, '76 grad. And I said "Don't they make potatoes in Idaho?" Because like most, I would say, East Coast, northern civilians who have never had exposure to military, the other side of the Mississippi River was something new. In geography books, we'd have to travel over there. And I had been over there already in Colorado, now I'm going to Idaho. Cried for twenty-seven days. And I had a job there! But that's the change, I've noticed a change, and I enjoyed it. I was the first—call them madam vice[?], and dining out, five months pregnant.



TS: How was that?

YH: Well, they never had a uniform, never had pregnant people pregnant females, so they didn't have the maternity uniform for the mess, and so I had to make my own.

TS: Oh, you did?

YH: I had to make my own, a beautiful white top that hung, of course, maternity—plain with white pearls, and a black skirt. And my skirt had the slit on the opposite side than the other women. I had no jacket to wear, and I was madam vice, and I could not drink the wine, I had ginger ale. And that was a wonderful experience, but I was pregnant, and I realized they didn't have a lot of things for pregnant officers. I had to learn how to wear—they had no pregnant camis[?], no camis, and finally they started coming out with them, with the little ties on the side, as you saw more pregnant women on the flight line. And they finally had—they had the pregnant blues, and we looked like little penguins, blue penguins running around. And a lot of men would ask us when we were planning on leaving, when were we planning on getting out.

TS: What—in what capacity were these men asking you? Were they supervisors, or—

YH: They would say “When you due?”  
I says “Well, I’m due in November,”

TS: Oh, just walking around.

YH: They say “Are you getting out, when are you getting out?”  
And I would say “They passed a law that says that I can stay in.”  
“You mean you’re staying in with the baby?”  
And so that mindset hadn’t really hit the trenches.

TS: Right.

YH: Until more pregnant women start being seen and the conversation started opening up. And at that point, I realized that even though you have policies up top, when they start swirling down, that’s when the mindset starts hitting, the same with the Air Force Academy. You may pass a law or pass a rule and try to get a program in, but you still have to deal with the trenches, which goes back to the political part about all of this happening up there, but hasn’t hit the trenches yet. Or it may have hit the trenches, but nobody speaks for me. So I enjoyed being at Mountain Home Air Force Base, didn’t realize that there was an air force base in Mountain Home.

TS: I hadn’t actually, until you had said it earlier.

YH: It's a tac—used to be a tac base, tactical air command. And I enjoyed the experience. I left there and went to Edward—I'm sorry, Edwards Air Force Base, California.

TS: Oh, Edwards, okay.

YH: And this is interesting. When I went to Edwards Air Force Base in California, it was a major position, but I was a captain at the time.

And when I went to talk to the commander, he said "Do you know why you're here?" People ask me that a lot, I don't know why. "Do you know why you're here?"

And I says "No, I—my career officer told me there was an opening here, and I'm here," and so I'm going here, and my husband was still in Idaho, going to a special school, and so we were separated.

He said "You trained my daughter at the Air Force Academy, ta-da!"

TS: How about that.

YH: I had trained Susan Conway[Connolly?], and General Conway[Connolly?] said "She talked about you so much that when I told her that your name was on the list, she said I had to have you." And that's when I met a very easy-going general officer, white male, who had a professional wife who did not play the traditional role of the officer's wife at the officer's club. She had a job, she was quite happy, and the vice president played that role. And I felt better, because I was worried about the traditional orientation I had about being an officer's wife and going to the officer's wives' clubs meeting and having to work. And they had meetings in the morning and the evening, to take care of those who worked. And I said to myself "The traditional military is changing, it's accepting women being professional, all because the commanders' wives are saying 'Uh-uh,'" and I knew women were starting to move and groove in the military, not just among the officers' corps, but among the officers' wives' corps as well.

TS: Interesting.

YH: And that was positive for my daughter. I knew that she could be a mom and be an officer, you know. Not so much for me, I saw that happening, but I was an officer, and a mom like she was, but I was so close to living it that I didn't feel the appreciation for it, I just knew it was happening. She hears it from me before it even happens, now. I can tell her what to look forward to.

TS: But did you have—it sounds like in some ways, that you did have people who were looking out for you, in ways maybe you didn't see at the time, like you've got—what about this General, you know, Conway, you get an assignment because—that sort of thing?

YH: Well, now, understand now, the military is a micro society within a larger, okay, mega society. And so he knew of me because of air training officer, and that's nice. Taking care of me could have been a benefit, but I didn't recognize it.

With my daughter, when she says “Mommy, I’m doing so and so,”  
I say “Well, Stephanie, wait. Think about this, and if you do this and this,”  
And she says “Oh, well, I might as well—” And so—

TS: So you didn’t have anybody to say—

YH: Her movements are more strategic than mine.

TS: So you didn’t have anybody saying “Yardley, you need to, like, go to this school, get this training, go—” Things like that, you didn’t have anybody—no mentors helping you in that way, so it was just kind of hit and miss. That sounds interesting, I mean—I see.

YH: Exactly. So I think, had I had that, perhaps life may have been a little bit different. But without that, a lot of air training officers, even, just didn’t. Just didn’t. I mentioned to you that even Terry Grabowski[?]'s father, two-star general—Terry’s a two-star general. I mentioned to you that she retired, Paula retired as a colonel, where Susan got out as a major, and the two young ladies that I went to ROTC with and graduated, one came out captain—no, didn’t make it that far. She just left out, and I have no idea what happened to the other one, but I heard she left after first lieutenant, four years, or three years. Okay? So I really think, had there been a strong network, but I don’t have regrets about that, because somewhere in the world, there were many more pockets of women thinking the same thing I’m thinking, trying their best to hang in there, and some did. But now, in 2010, they’re not pockets, they’re Betty H. Carter Women’s Veterans Historical Project, they’re Air Force Academy, air training officer reunions. There’s the Military Women’s Historical Museum in D.C. They’re not pockets anymore. So all I see myself is being one of the many stones that was paving the way for my daughter. I’m not a martyr. She thinks I’m a hero. I’ll be her hero. [chuckling] But I do feel like I’m significant, which is why I’m sitting here with you now. I do feel like I’m significant, and that’s all I wanted to be in the world, is significant.

TS: Well, and you say, when you look back at many of the things that you did, and being part of the first group of women to help lay that foundation for the women at the Academy, that’s significant, that’s—

YH: That was significant, and then going to different bases, seeing some of the young cadets, well, as officers, it was like I had thrown out a spray of seeds in the world, and as I went to different places, I kept seeing these seeds sprout up, or they would say “Aren’t you an ATO?”

And I would say “Yes,”

“I recognized your name, Yardley, you know,”

And I would say “Yes,”

Well, they’ll say “So-and-so went to the academy when you were there,”

I’d say “Oh, really? I remember her,”

And, so—and going back to Colorado, we felt the same way, we kept saying “Look at all of our little babies, look at our children,”

TS: At the reunion that you went to?

YH: But I don't think that I hold onto the Academy as strongly as just one—as the act, it was one of the beginning acts for me, so it lays there, but I think all of us have a purpose, and I'm pleased that I have a historical purpose with the Air Force Academy. I have a personal purpose with my daughter, but I think I have a bigger purpose, I have a societal purpose, because now I understand and believe in the need for our greatest resource to be totally committed to defending the country, and that means women. I don't think women should ever, in your entire life, be exempt from the responsibility of protecting and being protected by society. So I believe in what the Saudis do. Everybody should serve one year of some type of training that will make them aware of their place and their purpose in maintaining the society, not take it for granted. Just think of how many young boys could get back on track, or be on track. How many women could find their inner self. One year. Think of how many of us would have what they call—we wouldn't have to call it wartime. A crisis mission, and our own civilian mission.

TS: Now, you went to England, right?

YH: Yes.

TS: Now, was that—I guess we should say how you had your service years split up a little. Was that before?

YH: I was on active duty when we went to England. I went to RAF Mildenhall. I was there during the—

TS: Lakenheath and Mildenhall?

YH: I was at Mildenhall, he was at Lakenheath.

TS: Okay.

YH: And we had gone through a marital split, and I was working with public affairs at the time, and I found out that we had attacked or bombed Gaddafi, and they called me up about three o' clock in the morning. I had a nanny taking care of the children. Of course, you know, two military members, you have to have somebody, because as they say, when the balloon goes up and everybody jumps in their car to go back to the base, guess who's at home? The children! So I had to have a nanny, a live-in nanny, Mary Poppins, to take care of the children. I was called around three thirty, four o' clock in the morning, public affairs, I worked in, personnel.

They said "Captain Hoise[?]," at the time, my name was Hoise, they said "We need you to come in, we just got a notice that we've attacked Gaddafi and we're going to have some fallout, we need you to come in."

"I said "Okay, I'll be in in thirty minutes."

And they said “Wait, got to tell you something. We lost a ship.” Military calls their planes ships, even though we know that navy calls their planes ships, we call ours ships too. “We lost a ship.”

I said “Okay,” I said “Did we get them back?”

They said “No, it was down, we don’t know where it is, we think they have them.”

I said “Okay,” and it was like a pregnant pause.

He said “I need to tell you now that your husband was in the fleet.”

I said “Okay, is there something I should know before I go, before I come to you?”

He says “No, we can’t find—we don’t know which one, and we don’t know where.”

So I had the responsibility of waking up my daughter, who at the time was four and a half, five years old, I believe. March, April—she was five. And say to her “Mommy has to go to work.” Now, please understand that England is a wartime country, and so the children are more international than we are, and when they look at the news, they’re not looking at the news for just what happened last—last night down the street, around the corner, they’re looking at the news, what happened in the other world, so their conversation is more international, so my daughter says—this is what she says. I said “Someone bombed Gaddafi,”

And she says “Did they hurt him?”

And I says “No,”

And she says “He’s not a nice man, Mommy,”

“No, he’s not a nice man,” I says, “But I don’t know what happened, I have to tell you later, I’m going to work,” I said, “But I have to tell you something real important,” I said, “Daddy was flying, and we don’t know where he is right now.”

She says “Is he dead?”

“I don’t know yet,” This is what I’m telling you, morality of warfare, I have to teach my child death early. I have to teach—soldiers have to teach their children and their spouses death early. I was not in the military, wasn’t married one year, when my husband called me—I’m diverting.

TS: It’s okay.

YH: He called me and said “I want you to go out and stand on the porch, right now.” He said “I want you to stand there,” he says, “I’ll be there in thirty minutes.”

I said “Okay,” I went to sit on the porch. Nothing was going on. Five minutes, ten minutes, it’s quiet. About twenty minutes later, four cars pulled up down the street. They came down the street, they made the left-hand turn, went past my house, and I’m on base housing. One, two—three houses down, across the street, they pulled up. There were two children playing in the yard. The wife was on one of those little lawn chairs or whatever. I’m in Idaho. They pull up, and the minister, pastor, comes out of one of the cars. And the commander comes out. They’re all in blue. She picks up her child, walks in the room, in the house, pull the blinds down, and they all walk in. I don’t know what’s going on, I’ve just seen what happens.

So my husband comes up to me, he pulls up, then, afterwards, you know. And he said “Did you see those cars come down the street?”

And I said “Yes,” I says, “And they all went inside the house,” I said “Is it what I think it is?”

He says “Yes, and I need for you to remember that,” he says, “Because if anything, anything, ever happens, you won’t be by yourself.”

It was devastating! Devastating. She knew—the soldier’s wife, she knew [pause]—

TS: Was that in any way a comfort to you to know that, or—or not.

YH: [emotional] I think it was. But I think the part that bothers me most is that the civilian world doesn’t realize the dimensions of a soldier’s life. They think it’s parades, airshow, we get food cheaper. VA hospital. Pension. They don’t realize this small world loses so many people so fast, and they don’t appreciate that when they talk about [unclear] our boys and killing them. Violent death, or funerals. They don’t seem to realize that it takes a lot of a person to wear that uniform. It’s not just fancy. It really means that we did something. Every rank meant we tried something, and every time those cars go by, we lose somebody. I had to teach my daughter that death was real.

TS: So she knew to ask that question.

YH: And she knew—yes, she knew—

TS: At five.

YH: At a young age. When I went off, I made an agreement with her father—I’m back, talking—I made an agreement with her father, that if anything ever happened, he was to call me and tell me it wasn’t him. Well, I went off, and about five or six o’ clock, I was there, and we get news pieces and they’ve already been sanitized with black and then we have a—

TS: You mean redacted?

YH: They’ve already been edited, we call them sanitized.

TS: Okay. [laughter] Sorry. You’re PR, I forgot.

YH: [laughing] Sanitized. And then there’s areas in yellow, and then there’s areas in red. Now, the red is to help us understand the areas in yellow. I’m sorry. And we’re talking to PR. So about twelve thirty, quarter to one, I get a call.

“It wasn’t me.”

“Where are you?”

“We’re in debriefing, we can’t come out.” They had taken everyone and placed them—apparently, the planes had landed. And they’d taken them and landed them, but I

couldn't even call the children to tell them it wasn't them. So my daughter had to go to school—

TS: It's like nine hours later, right?

YH: Yes. She had to go to school and she's bombarded, because at this point here at Lakenheath and Mildenhall, the country, England, is in—they don't know whether to like us or not like us, you've brought this to our little island, we're almost at war again, and what's going to happen to us and we're not even on these bases, but it's an American base—they don't know what to do.

TS: This is '86, right?

YH: Yes. And I live in the community, I live what they call off the economy, so my neighbors are British, okay? Two things. I go home to take care of my children, first of all, to see if they're okay, before I wash up, change clothes, and go back.

My daughter says "Mommy," she says "Did you know a little girl was killed?"

I said "I heard a little girl was killed, she was two years old," I says, "I heard. She's as old as Baby," that's my son.

She says "Is Daddy dead yet?"

TS: Huh.

YH: "No, Daddy's not dead. Daddy's in a hotel, he's okay now,"

She says "Who died?"

"I don't know who died, but somebody died." I said "What did you tell the school?"

Well, the nanny said they had bombarded poor Stephanie when she got there. "Where is your father?" you know, "Are you okay? Where's your father, is your father flying?" And they're talking from care and concern, but they're asking questions.

Stephanie: "My daddy's at work, I haven't seen him. My daddy's at work. Yes, he flies a plane, but he's at work. I haven't seen him. My daddy's at work," was all she would say the entire time. Bless her heart. So when I get back to work, I was told to report to the hotel. Now, this is the part that people don't seem to understand when it comes to the military. Who talks to these soldiers when they come back from a trip like that? Who talks to our veterans about their ordeal? This is why—this is why it's so wonderful for us, it's purging, it's revealing for us, you open up not wounds, but memories that we need to pour out, like a breath of fresh air to move on, because we've been holding them a little [sidle?] so long, that this is a great project for this.

I have to hold him in my arms for almost fourteen hours to listen to him talk about losing his friend, doing what he has to do, following his orders, dealing with death, asking about the children, getting it all out so when he goes out to the public, he gives the public a stance of confidence that everything is fine. They don't see the hell those soldiers go through, they don't see that. And I think—sometimes the public should see it. But the wives see it, the children see it, of these Vietnam vets coming back, and who do they purge to? Who do they have to purge and give this to? And when society doesn't

accept them, or allow them to open up and talk, it's understandable they blow up. They don't have any place to trigger this information, and I'ma[sic] tell you, we're not trained to be in peacetime. That's not our training, we're trained to die. We are. So when there's chaos and we deal with it, we have to get all of it out to deal with peace, we really do. And it was an eye-opener, and I kept thinking, this is what people don't see. They just see [sings]—you know, the marching, the parades, the flags and whatever. And so when people don't stand up to salute the flag, and people don't believe and this and that, I just—I very proudly say “Go someplace else, or would you please do it for those who we've lost, or whatever,” you know, because it's very difficult. And when he called his daughter and she said “Daddy, a little girl died,” how do you tell your daughter that you are the one who targeted that house, and that was your shot for top gun? Shot. He did it, because he's good at his job, but never to be rewarded for ten, fifteen years.

TS: You know, I—I remember when we bombed Libya, because I was on a MAC flight—

YH: We won't even use that country's name, go ahead. [chuckles]

TS: I noticed that. But I was on a MAC flight from the East Coast, going over the Atlantic, on my way to Germany. And they announced on the plane that we had attacked—Gaddafi.

YH: [chuckles]

TS: And the interesting thing for me, I remember that—I remember that it was '86 in the spring. Was it April?

YH: April.

TS: And that there were cheers, but mostly by the men.

YH: Thank you.

TS: And not by the women. And I just remember thinking, just—I was sad.

YH: Yes.

TS: And to hear your personal story, just really touches me, because I'll never forget that moment when they announced it, and the reactions, and the different reactions.

YH: It was hard, and every Thursday at four o' clock, a little bit after five, I guess, I would go next door and I would have—her name was Gillian, or Jillian, we called her Gill. And she would have tea with me, you know, and she was my British ambassador and I was her American ambassador, I guess. We would talk about the different things, and of course she would play Scrabble with the British dictionary, so I would lose.

TS: [laughs]



YH: But this time, she came to my house and said “We can’t have tea this week,” she said “There’s something going on at my house, and we haven’t gotten it resolved. There’s been so much in the news, and so much happening, and we’re split, and it’s best that you don’t come over right now.” She goes “I’ll let you know when it’s a good time,” It wasn’t a good time for almost three weeks. And I had lost a friend for a while.

TS: When you really needed one, too.

YH: Yes. And it was—and there weren’t that many officers, female officers, still, on the bases, there really weren’t.

TS: So, small, tiny—tiny base, there, too.

YH: Oh, my god, because he and I were called Kewpie dolls, you know, we were the only Black female—Black officers, so we were known on both bases. And he was on the Lakenheath and I was on the Mildenhall, so, you know, it was—we were like little Kewpie dolls, you know. So glad when two other couples came and kind of made the light a little bit dimmer on us. But what was interesting was that the community was up in arms, and my daughter was feeling all of this at school, and my son was still too young to pick it up. But my daughter’s feeling all this at school, and it was very, very difficult, but she called her dad and she talked and she goes “Daddy, you know, they have [unclear], and he would start crying, but just to listen to him talk, not so much whether he did it right or wrong, that wasn’t the issue. As I told you, we follow our orders. It was the whole compassion and feel of loss of life. Whether it’s on the other side or on your side. You have to resolve the fact that there’s going to be a loss of life, you know. And then on top of that, the young man—and I wanted to tell you his name, I just forgot [unclear], but anyway, just before that, we had had a party, and they were all at our house, and so the navigator—Martinus, I think it was Martinus, he was the wizzo, the one that they were dragging through the street. He had just left our home, and so it’s very difficult, and it makes us pull back at the support team we have right there on the base. Of course, I had to, because this person was there.

I remember when a friend of mine told me, she was a colonel, her husband was an F111 flyer. She said “Have the good times with your mate, enjoy all the times,” she says “Deal with the arguments, but don’t let ‘em leave upset too much. Enjoy the time you have with them,” she says “Because they go up in the air and sometimes they don’t come down the right way.” Well, she lost—both their names were Jean[?], interestingly enough, her name was Jean, his name was Jean. Jean lost Jean, and I went to the funeral, and she said “You know, we had a picnic before he left for Las Vegas—” they have this, it was called Maple Leaf, their exercises. And she says “We had a picnic, because he said he wasn’t going to be home for the Fourth of July, so we had a picnic early,” she said, “Just he and the two children,” Dachshund, dogs.

TS: [laughs]

YH: Because if you're career, you know it's going to be difficult to raise children, sometimes, when you're both career.

TS: That's right.

YH: And she says "And he kissed me and said 'I'll see you later,'" and she says "And we didn't get a chance to see each other later," she says "But we had a good time 'til the end."

And I kept thinking "How can you say this, it's—" for my civilian life, this person is gone, but I learned as a military person, they can be gone the next day.

They can be gone whenever, and my husband said at the time, he says, "You know, we have wartime heroes and we have peacetime heroes." He says, "Now, peacetime heroes, we lose in preparation for the war, but they're still heroes, and so when a friend of mine goes or leaves or—I say 'goes' because I'll see them again, or leaves because of a tragic situation, I call them my peacetime heroes, you know,"

Lost a young lady, Michelle, in a plane crash. She was practicing. Peacetime heroes.

TS: You have Michelle in this picture?

YH: No, Michelle was one of the people that was with us.

TS: She was an ATO?

YH: No, she was not. She was one of those female officers that needed some training in survival training, and at the Air Force Academy, you go through a SERE [Survival Evasion Resistance Escape] training, of survival, POW compound, those type of things, which I don't really talk about like that. But we go through a POW compound training of how to respond as a prisoner of war. And we go through an escape, rescue, recovery type job training, where we live out in a tent and we try to—we really don't hide that well, I guess, they know where we are, but we're trying to evade the so-called enemy, and we have to figure out how to build our beds and stuff inside a little area, alcove area, so we eat [lurps?], you know, and all kinds of things. So she was one of those who had to go through the training, so she had to go through and she went through with us, the same as Sally Ride went through with us, too. Interestingly enough, yes, Sally Ride went through with us. She still had that fuzzy hair that she had, too.

TS: [chuckles]

YH: But Sally Ride also went through training with us as well, because Sally Ride was in the astronaut program, yadda yadda. Okay, she was awesome.

TS: [unclear]

YH: And so these are names that people come across as they're doing things, and I got an email—well, not an email, a call, at the time, that told us that Michelle had passed, and I thought about what my husband had said, my ex-husband, that we have peacetime heroes. And I don't think the civilian world sometime realize how many peacetime heroes we have.

TS: Training death.

YH: This is the part about being a veteran that nobody wants to talk about. They want to hear about the parades or how was it over there. Most veterans don't tell you how it was, and I know young soldiers with stripes on their shoulders sometimes talk about being in the yard or being on the yard and all this, you know. But they keep a few things to themselves. They keep things to themselves like being afraid in Vietnam to get your orders and know you're leaving in four days. And they won't leave the tent for fear that something's going to happen to them before, so when they become a single digit midget, as they call it, they don't want to go anywhere, they don't want to do anything, you know.

TS: Don't jinx it.

YH: Don't wanna jinx it for fear that they may get into either a fight or a hassle or a bomb or something, but they don't wanna jinx it, they're too close, you know.

TS: Right.

YH: And then unfortunately, like in one situation, having their barracks bombed, they never made it anyway.

TS: Right.

YH: [pause] It's not all shiny, you know.

TS: Right, it's not just the shiny penny.

YH: No. But you know, there's not too many women who talks about it, though. It's the men who will talk about the planes and the clubs and stuff, and it's the women who stay quiet and do their job. I think that as more and more men and women talk as veterans and whatever, you'll have better support groups, but not with just the women.

TS: Right.

YH: Because, again, we don't discuss it. We feel it, we don't discuss it. My daughter has to deal with a young man who, unfortunately, he went AWOL, and they got him back, and she went to talk with him. And it was the hardest conversation to try to help him understand, she says, because "I understand his side, Mommy, and I understand my side, but I'm his commander, and I can only listen to him because I know what has to be," you

know. Or go, like I had to do, go to a home and talk to a mother when her, you know, when her husband committed suicide. He couldn't take the pressure anymore. Who packs up his stuff? Or when the flag goes up, or I say the balloon goes up, and a young woman doesn't even know how to balance her checkbook or know what's going on because the soldier didn't even say anything, so now we have all these lost dependents on the base, you know. So it's a lot of maintenance, but we are a micro society. I say are—we were. [laughs] A micro society. Talking like this puts me back into the mindset of being in the military and having been part of the Child Advocacy program for—and the Spouse Abuse program, and the commissary committee, and I worked in drug and alcohol abuse and social actions. It made me very mindful of the human side of how the base is run, and how things are managing, where my daughter is more operational, in missiles.

TS: Right.

YH: When you press the button over here, the missile goes over there. She said "That may sound easy, but what would happen if you pressed the button and nothing happened?" She says "And that's why I have to go through all these scenarios to make sure that everything is ready and it goes the right place." Because I don't think you realize—well, you may have been in. I remember one time when there was a short, there was—somewhere along the line, the wires crossed or something, and it gave off a reading that—who was it. That a missile was coming our way, and we had so much time to make a decision whether that was a faulty reading or a real reading.

And I was in squadron officers' school, and I don't know what happened or why, whatever, all I know is they stopped the lecture, and they said "All rated personnel, go to the red[?] room now," [claps hands] Everybody jumped up. Nobody said "What happened, what's going on," they just ran to—all rated, that means the airplanes are going, and if they call the airplane flyers, something's wrong.

TS: Something's happened.

YH: Because in the air force, the only people that go off to war are the folks who fly the planes. And they got up and they gave them a briefing and we just sat there like this. "We're support!" [chuckles] But it's—sometimes it's a hairpin decision on what you can do, what you can't do, so she says, we've got to make sure it works right, because we may kill a lot of people making that mistake or not pressing fast enough.

TS: Well, it's interesting, with your daughter in that position, because I remember when there was a lot of controversy about having women in missile sites, and.

YH: You're right, about having them in—down there in the silos so long, and [audio file 3 ends, audio file 4 begins]

TS: [recording check redacted] This is Therese Strohmer, and today is November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010. I am back in Elon, North Carolina, with Dr. Yardley Hunter, and this is a second part of an oral history interview for the Women's Veterans Historical Project at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Thank you for having me back.

YH: Thank you for having me.

TS: I know we were talking—when we last left off, you were in England and your husband at that time had just been part of the mission that went to the unnamed country that you—[chuckles]

YH: Unnamed place. [laughing]

TS: Libya, and bombed, and been part of that. And so, we were kind of closing down about that, and you had some choices to make, I guess, because—you want to talk about those?

YH: Yes, I mentioned that it was a very trying experience, but even though he and I were separating and going separate ways at the time, as his military spouse at that moment, I had the opportunity to experience the realities of warfare, and I tried to be as compassionate as I could, listening to him deal with the humanity that he had to deal with. And his responsibility and his call of duty, and I found that to be—I found that to be very, very [unclear]—what a lot of people don't know, what goes on inside the heart of the soldiers who return, and why they should recognize, no matter whether they agree or disagree on why someone's someplace, or why someone did something, recognize that they're going through their own war and storms and there should be some support there. When I left Mildenhall and—following my divorce, I moved back into the States and—as a single parent trying to balance, and it's interesting because one would think that being a single parent, you—the military would be great, because it has child facilities[?], you have your job, and you have all this security, but interestingly enough, from my perspective, it was not being a single parent but being a mom. And I no longer have the live-in nanny to take care of the two military family, because when the balloon goes up, and we both get into our cars and drive off, the nanny was there. Well, when the balloon goes up, there's no one there for my children, and no one leaving but me, and I wanted to always be there for them. And so I had to think of another alternative, and so, came back to the States, I balanced my civilian life for eighteen months, picked up my MBA, they went to live with their father, at that time my ex-husband, in Germany. They learned a culture, they learned a language, they had the love and support of their dad—still exposed to military. And then I established a home for them here in North Carolina, interestingly enough, right here in Greensboro.

TS: Okay.

YH: Where there was a support system. Because I wanted to give them a family. Military had been my choice. Military had been something that had called to me. Life was there, and I gave them that, and so I owed it to them to give them the stability with that life. But I yearned to go back to the military, so that was—[both talking at once]

TS: Before you get back to the military, let's talk about this.

YH: I missed it.

TS: But why—what was it you missed about it?

YH: First of all, I missed the camaraderie, I missed the—I missed the world. It was a—people say that the military is like a subculture within a larger culture, but if you're part of that, that is your world. And I like the order of that world. I feel—right now, get up, early in the morning, and by nine, ten, eleven o' clock, I have done somebody else's full day activity. I like that. But it wasn't appreciated in the civilian world [chuckling], and so I walked around not talking to anybody, probably ten, eleven, twelve o' clock in the morning, because the world wasn't awake. And I like that, I like the sense of order. And I liked—I don't know how to say this part. I like the intrinsic pride, the swelling of the heart when I saw the flag. And I liked the look that people had in their eyes when the flag went up in the morning. There were people around me who knew what it meant, and I wanted to be in that fraternity again. When I read the news, there was a world out there, people were doing things, and I wanted to do those things with them again, and although I realize in doing that, I had to repackage myself, because of politics and programs not allowing me to go in, shall I say laterally[?], for my officer rank. I had—and because I had been passed over, I had to repackage myself. I was ready for even that, it wasn't a matter of rank, it wasn't a matter of my pride. It was a matter of the longing, it was a matter of reconnecting to something I liked, so the order, the pride, the look in the eye, the sound of the—the noise of the plane going by, you know, I'm air force. I wanted to share it, I wasn't—it's like, I'm not finished with it.

TS: I see.

YH: I'm not finished, and even though people retire, some people—and you remember this, some people, you know, come by for coffee and talk with you after they retire, and there are days when you want to say “Go home, go fishing,” “Here comes George again, you know, six weeks and he's still coming by,” I didn't want that. I wanted to leave on my terms and I wanted to have my fill. And so that's what I did, I went back in to have my fill my way. And so I found the Air National Guard to be a way in which I could have a little bit of both worlds and give my children and giving to myself, without neglecting my children, and not neglecting myself.

TS: And how old were your children at this time?

YH: My son was just going into first grade, and my daughter was going into the fifth grade, so she was—probably say they were six and nine at that time, and they knew the military, their world was the military, their father was the military, their mom was the military, and interestingly enough, even though they knew they lived in a house in the community and they went to a school in the community, my daughter did not unpack all her boxes—and she's in fifth grade—all her boxes for about two years, because she thought we were TDY [temporary duty]! [laughter]

TS: [unclear] And move again, right?

- YH: And move again. And she said “Are we staying here?”  
 And I said “Yes,” and when I saw her unpacking the boxes, she thought maybe we should unpack some more, and that’s when she actually realized we were actually going to live here.
- TS: This is the daughter that’s—
- YH: This is the daughter now that is now in the air force [unclear] that was pinned major, that was Stephanie. She actually thought—and that’s how ingrained our life was with accepting whatever the military had to offer to us, that we were going to get up and move. I’ve always said “If you give me two weeks, I can be gone, if you give me one week, I can be gone, but somebody better pack up the stuff and come with me, because I’m gone,” and I like that. I get anxious even now. I—
- TS: I think you were saying before that you’re like—you’ve been here for how long, now?
- YH: It’s been going on eleven years, and my goodness, who can live in one place this long? I keep threatening my husband that I’m going to take a job—like I start looking at a job in Japan, and my friends say “But your husband!”  
 “He can manage, he can manage!”  
 And I know that the civilian life doesn’t allow for the support systems for management all the time, but if I were military I would quickly say “He can manage” and maybe he could manage, but military, in my case, is a subculture of a bigger culture, and at this point, I’m in the bigger culture, and so I have to, quote “act accordingly” with the reality of picking up and leaving when I need to leave. As a veteran, you can always blame the military, and I use the word blame very loosely. You say, they move you. As a civilian, you have to account for the fact that you took it upon yourself to cause discord or cause some upset to the natural norm of things.  
 I want to digress with it, because I made a comment about blaming. I went away a couple of weeks ago to Colorado to see my daughter for Halloween, my grandchildren, trick or treat. And on the way back, there was a young man in uniform. I’m in Colorado, I should see them.  
 And I said “On your way back to Iraq?”  
 He says “Yes ma’am.”  
 I said “How long have you been home?”  
 He says “I was home for ten days, I was home for ten days. My wife had a baby, and the baby’s ten days old today.”  
 I said “Congratulations!”  
 He says “Yes,” he says “Could you believe it, the military has the nerve to send me back, my child is only ten days old, and the military has the nerve to send me back. I don’t agree, do you?”  
 I said “Yes, I do agree,”
- TS: He asked the wrong person! [laughter]

YH: I said “This is a volunteer force, bucko, no one asked you to sign that dotted line, so you take your butt back and you take care of yourself. Have a good, happy Veteran’s Day.”  
And he just stared at me.

TS: I bet he did.

YH: And I said to myself, hey, [young people don’t want to stay and watch them put their uniform on?]. As I go back to, my children understood at a very young age that this is what this family is all about, and they accepted it. My daughter did. My son was still young, trying to figure out, and interestingly enough, he was not anti-military, he just didn’t see it for him. But just last year, he contacted me and asked me would I help him join the military or get involved with the Guard, because he said he needed to have more out of life than what he was getting, and all of us were talking about how satisfying it had been being part of this subculture called the military.

TS: Dr. Hunter, what do you think there is about that draw to the military that you’re talking about right now?

YH: It’s that sense of purpose, it’s a sense of “I need to know that I’m here for a reason, I need to know that I make a difference in the world.” There are so many avenues that you can choose in the civilian world, that you might find fulfillment. But if you’re searching, or if you can’t identify, you don’t know which one to choose and you only have so many years in your life to pick those choices—in the military, they give you berths, I call them. You may call them tours, if you want, or assignments, but they give you berths of assignments, and you have a task to do, and you know your job, it’s a focused job, and you—you get rewarded with your [unclear], you get acknowledged by your staff, then you have this cheering of a group of people who are all doing the same thing you’re doing, it’s immediate. And then there’s that going for you, and you go out for another challenge. Each time you do that, you feel a sense of purpose, a sense of “I’m somebody, I’ve done something good, and it made a difference.” I don’t think our young people are finding themselves quick enough in career fields or in areas that they sense that they’re making a difference in the world, or that they’re important in the world. And my son is one who wants to have that—he feels it from all of us, and he wants that too, so it’s the feeling of belonging to a group that knows exactly which direction you’re going, and the military does.

TS: Do you think that also it might have something to do with whether you’re an airman or whether you’re a captain or whether you’re a general?

YH: No. You’re all in boots[?]

TS: You’re all—

YH: When you’re in formation on that parade ground, and you walk in there, it doesn’t matter what you are. And understand in the air force, we send our officers off to war. And the



rest of—and the enlisted stay there, stay still, okay? And so, I don't think so. I think it's—like I mentioned, it's the pride of being—belonging to a very focused and very real fraternity that has an international impact. Not a North Carolina impact, not even a United States impact. It has an international impact, this one small grain of me called Airman So-and-So can identify with that one other grain So-and-So in Guam. And I can also identify in Germany. Every time I look at the television, I can identify every other uniform there, because I'm one of you. We don't talk about majority and minority of race, we talk about a uniform that breaks the barriers of race, it breaks the barriers of gender. It's awesome. I belong to a sorority, you know. It's international, it's awesome. I belong to the military force. It's international, it's awesome. I belong to the human race, and I said that [unclear]. You see? You think of all the things that build you up and make you feel good, make you feel worthwhile, and there's nothing more important than a human being feeling that they have a worth in the world, because with so much control going on, you like to have a little piece of that control, and the military gives you a piece. It says "For this stripe, we give you this job to do, and for this stripe, we give you another job to do," and you keep on, and "For this rank on your shoulder, we give you a direction to lead others, and for this next rank, we give you a wider area," and so slowly, you start leading, but everybody's going the same direction.

I think my son—[discussion about phone redacted] I think it is a belonging, and it crosses over the ranks. Now, when you deal with the ranks, now you deal with a different belonging level. You do, because it's a lot like—there's nothing greater than going to the officers' club and hanging with all the officers and seeing all the officers, that was wonderful, but when I had to move out of the officers' rank, and by the way, my permanent grade is captain, for retirement, I'm very pleased to say. When I moved out into the enlisted ranks, I saw and experienced the same pride. And so I can tell you from both sides that it has nothing to do with the rank, it's that pride of belonging, you know. And he's got a point now, that he says it really doesn't matter, rank. What matters to him is that he wants to feel like his life has a purpose.

And so I continually tell him, "Your life has a purpose, but unfortunately, it may end up in a very committed death. And I need to have you understand the reality of warfare, because this is what has to be."

And I think I get that not just from being in the military, but from attitudes of my mother saying "When you do something, you know there's always two sides to it. And so, know both sides." So when my brother, for example, is in Beirut in the bombing, and the newspeople came to her house because they had a "local boy", so to speak, and they wanted to interview her, and she said "I'm not here," she says "I'm not in the military, my son is, so all I can tell you is that apparently he believes in what he is doing, because he went off to do it, and since he believes it, I believe it too. And so if I've lost my son, I've lost him doing something he wanted to do, and if he comes home to me, then he comes home still having done something he wanted to do." And to me, that's the biggest tribute my mother could give to me and to my brothers about us taking that role, so I want to have that same attitude for my children, because you can't run. You signed on the dotted line, know what you're doing—but when you sign, it's awesome, it's awesome.

TS: Well, let's talk about when you went into the Air National Guard.

YH: Well—

TS: What year are we talking about?

YH: We're talking about December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1989. 1980—I want to say 1988.

TS: [unclear]

YH: It was '88 because I came out ten years later, almost eleven, and I wish it had been twelve for the pay grade—did I say that? Yes, because it was twenty one years, eleven months, and fifteen days. And I'm saying "Give me two more weeks, please!" Nope. I think that—when I went in, I went in because I wanted to finish. I wanted to retire from the military, and I also wanted to belong. So when I went in, I went into a communications unit. I was what they call a weekend warrior, so I was teaching during the week and I just got in my car and drove to Charlotte and I did my job, and I graded papers Saturday night. I wasn't one of those young people that went out. And then I came back. And for a good while, people didn't realize, in the civilian world, that I was in the Guard, okay? And I didn't want to realize it for a while, because moving—it's interesting, moving from being part of the service, enlisted, to being an officer, it's very, very different from shifting from being an officer and putting stripes on. I believe in the adage that officers wear their stripes to bed. They're on their pajamas. And so the transition was a little bit difficult for me, mentally, because I was in the enlisted corps, where you receive more [unclear] orders. But my mentality and my training had been toward being in the officers' corps, where you gave those orders. And so I had to immerse myself into understanding the mission, and like I said, my job. And that helped me find my place in dealing with the situation. And of course, I got promoted, because understandably—and it's not because enlisted are not intelligent, it's not because officers are more intelligent, I believe that I did because I knew that in order to move forward, I had to do what was required like anybody else, whatever corps it was. I had a lot of resentment about people who actually believed that if you enlisted and you're moving and you're strong and doing so-and-so, you should be an officer. [makes scoffing noise] I—I have difficulty, and at the Air National Guard, I learned to admire and respect both sides of the corps, and my husband, the command chief master sergeant of the state of North Carolina, of the Air National Guard—

TS: What's his name?

YH: His name is Stephen Hunter, and he is also a senior executive with Innova[?], and so he didn't want the rank, because he wanted his corporate life. So he got the highest rank you can give in North Carolina, though, all because it was in him. And I think officer or enlisted, if it's in you, that doesn't mean that because you have that drive on one side, you should be on the other side. Because I saw some pretty dynamic, strong enlisted, who helped other enlisted become more professional, and also who raised quite a few officers along the line.

TS: Isn't that true.

YH: Yes, so as a veteran, I've watched young troops grow. I've watched officers pitter-patter through life, because I had been in the real world called the military, and I [unclear] thought the Air National Guard was not the real world, until I was called to active duty.

TS: And when did that happen?

YH: During Desert Shield.

TS: So what happened there?

YH: I'm going to communicate—and I understand—I also know how the civilian world reacted to it, too.

TS: Reacted to what?

YH: To finding up that I was in the military.

TS: Oh, okay. Well, tell me about that, yeah.

YH: Well, when Desert Shield came up, we realized the first stream of people were communications and medical.

TS: Right.

YH: Okay, and as we all know in the military, if you do in fact want to gain dominance, then you cut the supply off, you know, and you cut the communication. And so our communication people went out and I was in a communication unit. Ironically enough, though, I was transferring to look for a job, so I was being interviewed for a job. And somewhere along the line, the conversation—I tried to stay away from it, but the comment came up about being available.

And he said "Would you be available to come to work on Tuesday, I'm interested in you coming to work for me."

And I said "Can we make that on Wednesday, can I come on Wednesday?"

And he says "Why?"

And I said "Because I just received orders to be on standby,"

And my future supervisor leaned back from his table. He says "You're in the military?"

And everything about the positive, like, the "I want you", whatever it was, the light went out in his eyes. And I said "Yes, I'm in the Air National Guard,"

And he said "Well, the Air National Guard is starting to pull out," he says "The hospitals are losing a lot of the medical corps, and people didn't realize they were in the Guard," and he says "There's two of my young teachers are leaving as well, and you're telling me you're being called and you want a job?"

And I says "Well, I still have to come back to get a job."

He says “But if you’re called out,”

I said “I’m on standby, I won’t know ‘til Tuesday if I’m going to be one of them to leave out or not.”

He says “Well, why don’t you come see me on Tuesday. If you’re still here, then we can talk.” And I realized then that he wasn’t about to hire me. He knew that he would be locked in, with the Sailors’ Soldiers’ Act [Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Civil Relief Act] with all the repercussions of holding my job and me not being there and not having someone permanent. He didn’t want to go through that transition again. And I multiplied him by a hundred, and I’m just talking about maybe my own city, and when you do a hundred again, a hundred—I realized that people all over the state were realizing that the Air National Guards were in numbers, in their businesses, in their hospitals, everywhere, and we had to be called, and we were being called out, because there was not a ready force of volunteers—a selective service process anymore, the government pulled the Air National Guard, and because they were the most experienced soldiers around. And the young troops were not experienced, having dealt with Vietnam, that was their—that was their force, you know. And so for the Desert Shield, the military’s force was the Reserve and the Guard, for their experience, you know. And I knew that if they called me, that my children would not have support, and so I held my breath. And I found out later on that a lot of people were holding their breath as well. Well, I got my call, and because I wasn’t direct into radio operations, I was an admin in radio operations, they didn’t need admin at the time. They needed someone to set the satellites up. Even though my wartime job was casualty, developing a triage, they still had enough there, so they said they would not need me.

So I called him up and I had my job, and he made it clear, he said “They had called you, you would not have gotten this job.” He was being very honest, and he took care of me very well. My records, my evaluations, my—all the paperwork, smooth transition back into teaching. But he was very, very honest, and I really feel that there are some people who did not get jobs all because they belonged to the military. Well, a long time ago, everybody wanted to hire a vet. Well, didn’t happen with Desert Shield or Desert Storm or anything else, particularly with the Air National Guard.

TS: How did you feel about that, though? I mean, knowing that he wouldn’t have hired you had you been deployed, but offering you the job when you weren’t. I mean, how did—I mean, that had to strike you in some way.

YH: Well, to be honest with you, I understood exactly how he felt. Again, having been an officer and realizing the importance of manpower and realizing the importance of having people that you need to have to do your—again, transference of knowledge and the process in which you’re doing, earlier we talked about that. I knew, but when it touched my—as I say, when he stepped on my toe, because it was me, I resented that. Because it was like, how dare you, I’m being penalized for being a vet. I mean, I’m penalized for being a soldier. You want to wave your flags, then you want to have Memorial Day and you want to have Veteran’s Day, but you don’t want to give me a job, and all I’m trying to do is make sure you sleep peacefully while I stay up all night worrying about my back, you know. I was very resentful. And when the next month came for the Air National

Guard to get together, there remained discussions like that around the base, about who left, and they wondered about their job, or the conversations people had. And there were many more people like myself who were resentful. But then scared, because with each wave, more and more people were out. I very quickly—and I'm not ashamed to say this—I very quickly moved out of that job into another job that would give me more security of staying home and I think I did that because of being a single parent, because my girlfriend was not a single parent, she—she left, and she was gone for nine months, and her baby was three months old.

TS: When she left?

YH: When she left. And she left with her husband who was the father of that child and the stepfather of her other child, and so what a quandary of emotions there in taking care of this child and my child. It was interesting because they were so upset about trying to get the right numbers, I remember that doing an exercise, a comment was made that we didn't have enough people for a certain deployment task, and there was a young lieutenant who was pregnant. And there was a joke about "We'll have to process her birth, for the sake of paperwork, to get this by there[?]." But that's how—how needed we were. It was a light statement, we joked about it, but that's how needed we were as manpower. But the civilian world weren't compassionate about the fact that we were trying our best to get the numbers to protect them, and they were trying to cause all kinds of dismay in making us feel good about leaving, to the point that—multiply what I did by a hundred. We were even fighting to move ourselves away from being chosen so that we could maintain security. So I can imagine there was a lot of similar mixed feelings and resentment coming on.

TS: What about—you touched on something, too, that is controversial even, I would say, within the military, with women, single mothers, or even just dependent children. Even, maybe, you know, they're married and they have, you know, both parents are in the military, and you know, you explained before on the last tape that you have to have a plan and all that, you know. But there is a lot of controversy about the role that women play in—or not the role, but what happens to those children when their mothers are called to war.

YH: There's a—there should be more classes for socialization of the military, to deal with that. I think when women joined the military, they sort of inherently understand that there's going to be—or there needs to be some arrangements done. And I want to say that men logically understand that, but when it happens to their wife, and their family, or their unit, then it gets personal, and that's when the resentment comes out. If you look at the records, I think you'll find that there were many more single parent men than single parent women, because most of the women have their mothers to take their children, where men didn't have that opportunity when they had maybe a civilian or an overseas wife, and they divorced or whatever, and now they have the security of the [unclear] car, the child care center, shift work, someone else's wife can take care of my children, whatever. And I was on the child advocacy board in the military, which meant that I dealt

with child abuse and child neglect, and single parent issues. And I know overseas, we had talked to quite a few about that issue, and I spoke to more men than women, because men didn't know how to deal with the back-up or the support system, and their tech sergeant, master sergeant, or chief [unclear] would say "Okay, now you've worked so and so, so you can take care of your son, such and such," but as I was saying, when the balloon went up, that understanding was gone, and they were stuck with "Well, you better do something." But men didn't have the knowledge of the avenues to take care of them, and there were some cases, of course, where we had to go into some of the homes because the men had left their children with four or five bottles in the bed, or we heard children crying, or they thought the babysitter came but they never checked on things or something. And while they may have not dealt so much with the word "neglect", we knew it was neglect, but family services just picked it up and took care of it and dealt with it without the civilian world being aware of it.

TS: Right.

YH: When it came to single parenting, though, there was a regulation that talked about if you became a single parent in the military, then you had the option of staying in the military. But if you came into the military already a single parent, you would have to transfer power of attorney of your children to somebody else, and this pretty much discouraged a lot of single parents from coming in. They didn't understand that it was a way of protecting them and the children. They felt, emotionally, it was a way of them—of losing their children, and they didn't understand what they called special power of attorney, because that's not what that was. They could not use that, it was only for certain times. It had to be asked for—power of attorney, transfer of responsibility.

TS: Was it guardianship transfer, too? [both talking at once]

YH: It was guardianship transfer—it's still there.

TS: Is it?

YH: Well, I can't say that right now—

TS: But it was when you got out.

YH: But it was when I got out, okay, when I got out in '98, that's exactly what it was. And I don't know whether, with so many women, like we talked about earlier, going up the ranks, looking at the regulations, saying "This is obsolete, this is not fair, this is not right," but it was for men and women.

TS: Right.

YH: If you were, in fact, a single parent, you had to show some legal proof of guardianship, which meant that a lot of times, I would tell—and I was an air force recruiter, so I was

aware of a lot of the rules, I would say “Give your guardianship to your, you know, to your mother, so that she can have the children,” and unfortunately, when you have estranged families, they didn’t do that, or they wouldn’t do that for a reason. You know, wasn’t because they had a happy home or whatever. And so it was very difficult, but it did cut down—this is the thing—it did cut down on the number of family issues or children issues or family support issues that had to be dealt with by the military, because please understand, after the Vietnam conflict, a lot of people felt that the family had been neglected, and so family services took a forefront, and the military became more humane, with more women coming in. And I say humane by saying that they had stronger family support programs, they had stronger support families, and everything seemed to move to “We want to make sure that we’re not the big bad wolf, we’re not hurting you.” And it’s all because of the rules of bringing women in, because you bring women in, you bring nurturing in, and when you bring nurturing in, society does not want you to hurt those women. Case in point: everybody wondered what America was going to do when they saw the first woman, dead woman, on TV. Soldier.

TS: Right.

YH: No one said much about when Johnny come marching home. They saw the pictures, they saw the movies, and so they were desensitized to those type of things.

TS: Right.

YH: But when they saw the female POW, when they saw the female dead, when they saw the women in the society, the spouses, the—all the leaders, even some of our politicians, I remember the argument, screaming and hollering how the military is becoming very dispassionate about dealing with women. And of course, dealing with women in the missile silos, that was another side of the coin.

TS: Right.

YH: I think it became a major issue of family, single parenting, and how to handle that nurturing aspect that the female gender was bringing in, and they weren’t the only one to bring it in, but they were raising it to the surface for attention. I think that’s what it was.

TS: And when you were on the—was it a committee, is that what you said?

YH: I was on the child advocacy board, yes.

TS: Did you find—I mean, how was that? Did you see multiple problems, I mean, was it what you expected to see?

YH: No, I saw mostly situations where the military member brought a spouse into the—I would say our subculture, and did not take care of them, and did not take care of the child, and did not—so the base had to have some kind of spouse abuse, child advocacy

program to speak on behalf of those civilians, okay. So there was a leveling ground for military. Interestingly enough, though, most of the time, we protected the military from the spouses, because interestingly enough, when things happened, domestic disturbances happened, or when children—not necessarily abused, and not necessarily badly neglected, but there were perceptions of it, and someone had to be the advocate, it was the spouse that we had to try to figure out how to support, because we can put airmen back in the barracks for separation. But when the wife is sitting there on the front porch with a pair of shears cutting up his clothes and the children are sitting back crying, and you can't get in the house, and she has beat the daylights out of him—

TS: Is this an example that you remember?

YH: Exactly, a real one, then I had to say “Mrs. Johnston, I need the children, I’m sorry [unclear], it is not going to happen, I’m sick of that, those two aren’t even my children,” and I came in here and he’s running at the club and—and he’s bleeding, whatever, we have to get him out. We can deal with him, he’s military. But how do we take care of those children, and who takes them, and who comes out three o’ clock in the morning like I did to go into the homes that—I remember [unclear] I said so-and-so. You know, those types of things. So we dealt with domestic disturbance [phone rings], we dealt with family issues—[answering machine message, recording paused]

TS: Okay, we stopped for just a moment there, and you were talking about your advocacy for children and dependents, but sometimes you were protecting the military person.

YH: And oftentimes I am, though, I think because the military had changed its complexion so much from just being a predominantly all-male force to being a force with air force women as well as of course dealing with the military spouses. A lot of the programs in the military started becoming a little bit more attentive to child advocacy, children, and to spouses and to the civilian spouses, but I think primarily it was in response to the military women, like, what do we do? I really feel it was. It had to be, because if you tell me I can come in and have children, I’m going to get married like—you got married, so to speak, you know, the males got married, and I’m going to have some issues like the males. And so the military had to start dealing with social issues, not just social actions of race or drug and alcohol abuse, things like that.

TS: Family.

YH: But family issues, and that’s when, really—I mean, family services have their own buildings now, I mean, and they have their own—it used to be the base commander’s wife handled that part, and the wing commander’s wife handled the operation and the social and all that stuff. Now it’s gotten so that every commander’s wife takes—and I know, because I used to be a commander’s wife—every commander’s wife takes turns doing something or being part of something to make sure that there’s a family program or a family representative. And I think I saw more and more women getting on the board and getting on the committees, and less and less men, not that they didn’t see it being



important, but their comment was “You know more about what’s needed in the families than we do.” And that’s why I say that men weren’t prepared for a lot of things, and to justify the fact that more men were being a little more abusive with their decision-making of taking care of their children as a single parent than women were. [phone rings]  
[unclear, recording probably paused]

TS: Okay. So one thing I would like to ask you about, since you were on—and you spoke to this a little bit, about being an officer and active and then you’re enlisted in—

YH: In the Guard.

TS: In the Guard. And you talked a little bit about the differences between that, but can you speak to more about, maybe, what kind of pressures were put on you in ways as—being an enlisted, that weren’t—as an officer. And the officer, too.

YH: Well, interestingly enough, and this is where the [unclear] part, this is where the actual stereotype of officers and enlisted comes to play, I guess. There’s a stronger closeness in the enlisted force than there is in the officers’ corps.

TS: A closer—it’s closer?

YH: More close-knit, and I feel it’s because there’s more of them, for one thing, more enlisted than officers. And there’s more doing the same thing, and so that unity is stronger, and so it’s more obvious. However, I really feel that the enlisted, I mean the officers, they underestimate the intelligence level of the enlisted. And I’m not going to say I for one did, but as an officer, sitting around with other officers, talking about the corps, and this, whatever—we actually thought that we were the elite country club individuals, and that we had the college education and that we were the ones—and they told me this in training, in ROTC, everything. But when I moved over to the enlisted, I found a lot of very strong, educated, diverse—and maybe this is something of the Air National Guard, not just enlisted force, too. Diverse, career people who just opt to do their duty—again, I say “do their duty”, as—make a place or a point, a purpose for themselves, and then go back into the civilian world. When I went on active duty, enlisted—

TS: Right.

YH: It was during the summer, during my training, I still found the closeness among the enlisted, but not among the officers. I found there was less cutthroat situations among the enlisted, because they had to take a test to get the stripe.

TS: Right.

YH: They had to have a skills test, they had to be able to go to the interview—and they couldn’t do cutthroat, they had to know what they knew. They had to show what they knew. And I began to resent some of the officers, [TS laughs] because all they had to do

was be single [unclear], and creative writers, and they moved up the ranks. And it bothered me at that point. It was funny, it didn't bother me when I was in the group, but it bothered me when I was out of the group. It didn't seem to bother the enlisted, though, because they really weren't concerned about the officers. Officers came and left. They were the unit, and the only person they cared about was the chief. That's it. Hail to the chief.

TS: Hail to the chief, right.

YH: That's it, and I was taught very early as an officer that when you got on the base, you found yourself a strong chief, and held on to his stripes, and he will raise you. And if you got on the opposite side of the enlisted corps as an officer, you might as well kiss yourself goodbye, because they were there and they were a constant. And I think that was the most prevalent statement that separated the officers from the enlisted. Stay away from them, because they can hurt you, they can hurt you. Well, if you're an officer who's arrogant, think you know everything, try to give orders to grown people instead of recognizing the fact that there's a leadership level of respect on both sides, then yes, you will get yourself hurt. And I don't want to get into the idea of friendly fire, because we're not in the army, okay?

TS: [laughs] Okay.

YH: And you understand where I'm going, people, but I think the biggest thing is that I did notice a big difference in there, and now, being permanent officer, I have a very strong respect and regard for enlisted staff. They're deeper, they're more committed, they're the backbone, they're the foundation, they're the history, and they are the future. Officers are—I will call them—they are the program managers of moving troops around, but they really don't do the job, and they need to understand that part. Not that they should be humbled, but they should give a stronger respect for the corps than what's given to them, and they shouldn't be just [unclear]—it should be something that you're just patronizing them, it should be very sincere. And so, at this point, I would like to say that I think every officer needs to experience six to nine months of wearing the stripes. And the reason why I say that, because there was—there were some general officers who did that. There were general officers who put on enlisted uniform, airmen, and hung around the unit. An airman doesn't know who the general officer—what they look like.

TS: Sure.

YH: And we had a few, and I'm not calling you generals by name, but you know who you are. You would come to the base, and you wanted to know your unit. You wanted to know your people, and so you went to the chow hall and had—and you claimed you're TDY, and you claimed that, you know—and you listened, you learned. I like that, I think you were wonderful doing that, because you didn't allow the officers' corps to screen your perceptions. And you allowed the young people to come and talk to you and they didn't

even know it was you. And you heard real information. There's a TV program about that now. [Probably refers to the TV show "Undercover Boss"?]

TS: Is that right?

YH: But it did happen in the military. I commend them doing that.

TS: Well, that's interesting, because I remember that when we were—you know, when the bigwigs came to visit, you always painted—

YH: Cleaned up.

TS: Cleaned up.

YH: Special inspection.

TS: Exactly, special inspection, brought out all the goodies.

YH: Buffet[?]. Where did that—where did that come from? You know, I was asking for those brooms the other day and we didn't have any, now we have six of them, they all look like they new. Or, did you know we had a table like this?

TS: That's right, that's right. [chuckling]

YH: Who put that bulletin board up? Is that what our last TDY was like? I hadn't seen those pictures, I didn't know. [unclear] And I will tell you, the enlisted resented that. They resented that because even though everything was pretty and polished and all, they didn't get a chance to talk to the general officers. He shook four to eight hands[?], and—

TS: Another quarter?

YH: That's exactly right, took them straight to there, and you felt this breeze come across you, and they still have their shift work. And unfortunately, general officers did not go to the night duty, to those who worked at night, and God bless the airman who worked at night. You're security police on the flight line, nobody thought about you when it was cold, who gave you some hot chocolate? Nobody. You know, the airman who's still fixing up the planes that [fallen off?] on one night, nobody came out to ask if you were okay. But I know that there were quite a few—I know one, one, right now, I know one general officer, female, who did that.

TS: Is that right?

YH: General Marcelite Harris. She did it, she was—

TS: What did she do?

YH: General Harris was a maintenance—she was one of the few maintenance officers, female, who had been in Vietnam, she had seen action. She went out at night, she went to visit, she hung out at different hours. She was very relaxed about what was going on with the airmen, she called them in, she just talked to them, she called them by their names, and their ranks. She made them sit down and relax and talk. She—she showed them the humane side to leadership, and I think in return they gave her their best. And when I was her exec, she had just pinned on colonel, and when she came to work that day, she said “Take this jacket, because doggone it,” she said, “These birds are upside down.”

TS: [laughs]

YH: She said “They go on something and I was putting them on,” she said “And I was taking my [unclear] and helping my little girl, too, and I couldn’t do both and so the birds had to wait.” She was a mother. And President Obama just appointed her into a very important position, so if you looked up Marcelite Harris and her appointment, you’ll know all the details there. [General Harris was appointed serve as a member of the Board of Visitors of the United States Air Force Academy.] But I worked for her, and so I do know, and I have shared bread, with a female leader who epitomizes the humane side that was brought to the military by women. I’m not saying that men didn’t have it already, I’m saying I saw an example of how it was given by a women with all the attributes of a strong leader as well. If a man does that, that’s fine, but for me, in the ‘70s, I needed to see the visual woman, I needed my own female role models, and so I highlighted her [unclear] as my female role model, because when I look in the mirror, I don’t see a man. I see a woman, and I have to know what leadership looks like from a woman, not from a man.

TS: From the woman in the church—

YH: From the woman in the church—

TS: What was her name again?

YH: Her name was Reverend Lula Williams. From the woman in the church to the woman in the uniform, I always looked at women because I really feel that a man has to—a man looks at another man, a boy looks at a man, and says “That’s me and I can do that, I should be that, I’m going to emulate that, I can model that.” A woman is no different. And so from a young child to a grown woman, I’ve had to search for women, and most of the women I’ve found have been very strong, dynamic women, and I’ve found them in the military as well.

TS: Would you say—I don’t remember if we talked about mentoring, last time. Did we talk about that at all?

YH: No, we didn’t talk about mentoring. I belong to a mentoring program. It’s called Air Force Mentoring.

TS: Currently?

YH: Currently.

TS: Is that right? What do you do in that?

YH: Oh, they assign me young lieutenants—young officers. Female officers, who are—who have questions, and they need answers, or they need someone for a sounding board to talk about different things. And sometimes they'll email me a lot, and sometimes they don't, but the most important phrase is "I'm here", okay, "I'm here. And I've been there."

And so, every once in a while, Air Force Mentoring contacts me and says "We have women who are looking for mentors who have been in the military or who have experienced something similar to that, can we use you, we know what your background is, whatever."

And I would say "No," and then I would say "Yes."

TS: [chuckles]

YH: Now, the "no" is because the world is so busy.

TS: Right.

YH: But the "yes" is because there's still so few of us that we can't afford—Ruby Dee was on TV last night, Ruby Dee.

TS: Ruby Dee?

YH: A civilian. But she says that she realizes that when you take the trail of being a leader, or even a legend, to the [lake?], to the [lake?] part, you have to have the [lake?] to walk the walk, to hold people up, to support—because there's so many people coming behind you, that you have to accept your responsibility. You have to accept the commitment, you have to accept the fact that you have to keep on leading. So even though I'm retired, and even though I moved to another aspect of the road not taken, there are still young people out there, young women out there who are saying "Is this for me? Am I the only one feeling this way? I'm not in a career field that I thought it would be, is there another route? Who do I talk to?" And men don't know how to answer them, or they don't see men as being a relevant reference point for them, because like we talked about, when I saw that first female, I also saw that minister. He wasn't my reference point, she was. When I saw my general officers, you know—because I was personally involved with General Connolly, I trained his daughter, he gave me a job based on me training his daughter. That wasn't my reference point, Marcelite Harris was. You know. Because I needed to see me. I needed to see the female in me, I needed to see the lady in me, I needed to see the leader in me. Because, understand that when people evaluate women, they use different words. I'm assertive, but that's not the word that's used for me, it's used for him. My word being called—I'm pushy, you know. I'm committed. That's his

word. My word means that I'm hardheaded, you know, I'm single-focused. I need to hear or see or listen or watch this woman do all the things that others do, and I say "That's assertive, that's focused, that's committed, that's so-and-so," and they say "That's a soldier, that's her," without even saying "that's her" first. You know. And she had made the rank to the point that apparently somebody else was calling her those same things and gave her the rank. And if they gave her the rank and she earned the rank and she was doing all this, I want to emulate that in hopes that they give me the rank. And it didn't matter that I didn't make the rank, I'ma tell you right now, it didn't matter that I didn't make the rank. I epitomized those attributes that I saw that I identified with her.

TS: Right.

YH: And I still do that. I still do that.

TS: And when you were in the military, you—either when you were in the Air National Guard or in the [U.S.] Air Force, and you saw people who you wanted to emulate, did you—how did you—did some approach you, or did you approach them? Or did you watch silently?

YH: When it comes to the mentoring, when people mentored me, most of the time, you watch silently. You do. For one thing, if you're in awe of someone, you yearn to touch them to see if they're real, you know that. And then if you have the opportunity to get close to them, then you try to be closer and move in their circle. But if you can't do that, then the only thing you can do is calm yourself. We use the word "emulate". We try to model ourselves based on what the person's like. So I did not see—I did not see strong officer role models, and see, because I was an officer, it was kind of hard for me to see an officer role model unless you were really doing something important in the guard. But I did not experience strong officer leadership, female officer leadership, in the Air National Guard. It was a man's world. I did see strong female enlisted leadership, like I mentioned, because of the numbers there. When they notice certain things in me, they recognize qualities in me, and it didn't matter what rank we were, because we're all stripes. Different level stripes, we're all stripes. But I did see mentoring. I saw the senior enlisted females [pause] embrace—

TS: I was just going to say, that's got to be the word you're going to say. She's putting her arms around herself. [laughter]

YH: Embrace the airmen, and help each other along. I did see that. They ate lunch together, they talked about things together, they talked about what the next step was going to be. And they had the same kind of conversations that the men were having on the golf courses, and the men were having at their table at the club. I know, because in some cases, I was with those men, sitting there listening, and they didn't think I was what they considered—so they were talking to each other, and I was the invisible woman, okay?

TS: Was this when you were in the command—

YH: When I was [unclear]. So I really feel that the mentoring goes both ways. I think as a woman, as a female, I seek mentors, and then as a female I also need to respect being a mentor. So I talk to young women, like the young lady who had a civilian husband. Well, how does she deal with that? Or she wonders, how can someone truly balance a family and marriage and a career?

And I said “Good question, let’s talk about some ideas and options,”

And she said “I’m so glad that I have at least a chance to bounce some things off of you. I think what I want to do is—what do you think of that?”

I said “Well, what do you think of this, and how are you going to feel, so-and-so?”

And she went back and forth, and for three or four months, she didn’t—I didn’t hear from her. And then one month, about four or five months later, she says “Hey, I’m still in,” she says, “And he accepted the fact that this is my dilemma, and I need to do so-and-so, and interestingly enough, once I was able to explain to him what I really wanted from the military, he understood how important it was for me. Thanks for helping me get all the fog out of my mind.” Now, I felt good, because I went back and pulled someone—I’m not there, but yes I am. And interestingly enough, technology makes that possible.

TS: You said you did a lot of it by email, right?

YH: It was by email. Exactly. When I was in, we didn’t have email, and so when they said that General Jeanne Holm is coming, ohhh. [unclear]

TS: Oh, when did you get to see her?

YH: Air Force Academy. Here it is, here it is, here’s the cycle, here’s the cycle. When the general officers, female, realize that we were there, they said they need us. They don’t know that we’re out here, they don’t realize that this is where they need to start looking. But they also need someone to talk to. So we had a round table of general officers, and Jeanne Holm was one of them. Whoa.

TS: Well, how was that? Tell me about that, I’m actually interested in that. [unclear]

YH: It was awesome, because, I’m going to tell you—here is my analogy.

TS: She’s the first general—woman general in the air force.

YH: [high-pitched excited noises]

TS: [unclear]

YH: And I sat beside her. [laughter] I wasn’t in her inner circle, but I was in her physical circle. It was—and I say the word “awesome” for lack of a word. But here it is. When

you are at a—I'm going to say a bus station. And you see four or five people sitting at that—nine o' clock, in those seats. And at nine thirty, they're gone, and so of course are those seats. And then at two o' clock, some more—you say to yourself, there's always people sitting in those seats, but they don't know about the people who have sat there before them, or who's going to sit there after them. That's what it feels like right now, I've gone full circle, because Jeanne Holm and other general officers came to us because they said we needed them, they said they remembered when they were young and there was no one for them, and they wanted to give back and allow us to talk about stuff. They relaxed and they laughed and joked, they talked about the barracks, they talked about the uniform change, they talked about how they had to keep—and excuse me, men—they had to keep changing their bra for the uniforms, you know, because your bra size or your name plate—and we laughed, because we kept saying, you know, as silly as it sounds, we go through this too, we have to change things—

TS: Yeah, having your name tag in an awkward angle because of the way your bra is shaped. [laughing]

YH: Basic things like that, hygiene, marriage, wanting to get out and wanting to stay in, staying in. They talked about those things, and I absorbed it all. I absorbed it all in saying, there are people out there like me and I could be like them. As an air training officer, I did that to the cadets.

TS: That's right.

YH: So they know. And—but the distance was so—we didn't go back to them. But some did. And so when we talked with Jeanne Holm, she said to us, and granted, this was 1976, I know, it was 19—because we got there January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1976, and all of these experiences happened with these officers up to June, when the first cadets came in. They said “We thought it might be a good idea to come down here and talk with you, and see how things are going, and perhaps give you some insight about women in the military, because all of you are lieutenants, and even though you're at different levels and whatever, you really don't know what it's going to be like—”

TS: You were pretty green at that position of being an officer, yeah.

YH: Now, I have a feeling—this is me, right now. I have a feeling somewhere there was a conversation of ‘Hey Jeanne, what are you doing March so-and-so and so-and-so?’

“Why?”

“Because we thought maybe we would go down to the Academy and talk to some of those air training officers, you know, first time they've ever had women down at the military academy, and they're young, and you know what it was like, girl.”

“I remember. Why don't we call so-and-so and so-and-so and go on down there and just have a gathering with them, because I have a feeling that right now, they need somebody to talk to.” And my heart is swelling now, because I really feel, even though I don't know all that was said, I know the feeling. And it was such a feeling of “I'm so



glad you're here! I didn't realize there were so many of you out there, I thought I was all by myself!" And there was one ATO whose father was a general officer, so her circle was a little bit more exposed.

TS: Right.

YH: But even so, to have them in your midst, it was powerful. Now, understand that I met Chappie James. He hugged me, said "Come here," this big bear of a man. He said "It's a little bit hard, here, isn't it?" And he said "The loneliest position is going to be being the first and being the only," he said "And right now, ATO Nelson, you're the first, and you're the only." He says "It gets lonely right here." He says "I know." And I'm talking to a man who has been—was beaten up as a general officer in Florida, because of race or whatever. The Tuskegee airmen. But he knew not the gender part, but just the position I was in, so there was a completeness there with a little piece of puzzle out. But when I met Jeanne Holm, there were no parts missing. There were no parts missing. And so it was such a completeness of "You truly, truly, truly, truly understand where I am and where I need to go, and you're helping me clear this fog in my mind." So who am I to say that I can't be a mentor? Who am I to say that I don't have time to pull back? They had time in the '70s for me. I'll always have time for young airmen and officers, you know, and I'm going to be partial to the females.

TS: [unclear] made that circle.

YH: It's full circle.

TS: And you didn't tell me last time you met Jeanne Holm!

YH: Well, interestingly enough, even when you talk about the mentoring part, you know. And that's when it really pops in, and the mentoring part came after I left. But it popped back there when you made the comment about—yes, I mean, even Sally Ride, we met, and she went through the SERE training with us, because there were no women going through the SERE training, it was a bunch of men, and who was she going to have to share her makeup?

TS: [chuckles]

YH: You know, anyway. But the main thing was, women were coming through in the military, and they were coming through, not in droves, and so when they reach a certain level, the air training officer right there at that level, for them to say "Well, they're doing it, why don't you join them?" Or "They're doing it, why don't you talk with them?" So we're at a perfect spot of being a catalyst for change, but also people help us with the change as well, mentors like—and to be honest with you, they were like five—four or five general female officers, colonels, whatever. But Jeanne was the one that spoke the most, with the biggest smile, with the biggest shine for me. And I did not find that shine, that gleam, that glory, again until I saw Marcelite Harris.

TS: Is that right?

YH: And Marcelite came to the Air Force Academy two years after I was there, so she was not the first black female at the [unclear], I was. So it was good to see her there as an air training officer, but the main thing was, when she moved to be in maintenance, I became her exec, and interestingly enough, I have a feeling she asked for me. And so it feels nice to have those types of connections, because I say “Oh, so this is how the good old boy system works, huh? Yeah, we’ve got people in the thick of it now. Attagirl.”

TS: In that position, yeah.

YH: And I’m not saying that that’s terrible, I’m not saying that it’s wonderful. I’m saying that it’s becoming more balanced with recognition of men knowing men, women knowing women, and understanding that they can recognize—I like to say quality, or people, or whatever. But it’s a balance, because I don’t have to compete with the men and the women for that man to recognize me. I can compete against the men and the women for my position, but now I also have women and men to make myself known. And so it widens the sector for men and women to be recognized, to be mentored, to share in the leadership, to be treated correctly. And understand, too, that the male leaders had to learn how to speak to—I taught communication between the sexes to commanding officers who didn’t know how to speak, and seeing another commanding officer, like Jeanne Holm and listening to her talk to other people and just watching, I learned certain earmarks of communication of how they talked to each other.

And I said, they’re no different than I am. Their respect for one another—and they say women are catty. No, no, they’re not. They’re very supportive of one another. They’re very real with one another. And if they are competent, mature, and focused, they’re very supportive of one another. And I saw that there, and the air training officers gave it to each other there, and now I’m here to give it to the mentoring program.

TS: Well, before we started the tape, we were talking a little bit and you were explaining how your mother was saying that the military didn’t necessarily make you who you are.

YH: [laughs]

TS: Want to talk about that? Because that’s one of the questions I actually ask most of the women that I interview. Did it change you, or did you change it, I guess?

YH: I believe that I think I changed it, I think. Initially, the military, the air force used my standards for upper body strength. It was Yardley Nelson Hunter’s standards, none of the other ATOs, because I had very strong shoulders[?] [both talking at once] But I think that—I think, on another note, I was always one who believed that there should be a natural order for things. The military didn’t do that. I always felt that what’s right is what’s right and what’s wrong is wrong. As a young child, and after dealing with life[?],—easy to do. But when I had myself—the military had procedures. I said “That’s what you’re supposed to—that’s how you’re supposed to live. With procedures.” Military

had a way of doing things. They had operating instructions. That's the way you should live, because I was telling you, a long time ago, write it down, if you follow it the same way, it's going to give you the same results.

If you keep on changing—and so when I told my mom I joined the military, she said “Well, with all that organization stuff you're always telling us, you'll fit right in.” And sure enough, I didn't question it. Get up four thirty and run to my breakfast? Sure, there had to be a reason. [unclear] the food must have been good. And I was physically fit, so I had a rationale for everything. So I accepted the military initially very easily, briefly. But when I came out of military, I found that people blamed my personality and my ways on the military once they heard I was in the military.

And I kept saying “Wait a minute, I didn't join the military, the military joined me.” But that's a very high concept for people to understand, because from basic training on, the military is supposed to mold you. I got out because the military couldn't mold me any other way than what I am right now, that's the bottom line. I do what I do and I justify it to one person, and it's not—and it's not the person who walks on earth. And so when it got to a point that I outgrew—not the military, but concepts and ideas about—the phrase was “Always believe that life should be run in numbers”[?]. But when the divorce happened and numbers didn't work, one, two, three, four, five, six, and it got to be four, seven, nine, I had to move away to recombine my numbers. I thought that's just a temporary—

TS: Things got out of sync.

YH: Yeah, I like your phrase, I'll use that one. Things got—I couldn't put them back in sync. So I had to move out, and once that happened, I moved back in in sync, but whatever conditions possible. And so people said “Well, you accept things too easily.” No, there's a reason why things happen. If you don't like the reason, then don't walk that road. Walk the other roads you like. Why do you do things to make it hard for yourself? Why do you bring conflict on yourself? Why don't you make, you know—why don't you make peace out of chaos? What is—calm out of chaos, what is your problem? And my mother would say “That's not the military, you have to believe me.”

TS: [laughs]

YH: “It's not, she's always that way.” And my comment is, if you knew that Christmas is coming, then why are you becoming hysterical in December? December comes every twelve months, what is your issue? Right now, we have gifts in our home, because Christmas is coming. You know—

TS: It's only November, I have time. [laughs]

YH: And—and people think that. Unfortunately, the word “casualty”, I use quite a bit, and I guess the phrase—we're talking about children today, and [unclear] said “What about so-and-so?”

And I says “What is her achievement level?”

And she says “Extremely low.”

I said “Unfortunately, she’ll be a casualty.” And the look is—no, I’m not saying that she’s going to hurt herself, and I said “But we’re going to have to push her to grow, she will not be able to succeed this year, she will succeed maybe next year, but she can grow and move from this point to that point.” And then I would lean back and say “You know, in war,” and this is where people say I’m militant, “You know, in war, we do war plans. There’s only a twenty-five, thirty percent casualty rate that we accept.” [laughing] And they look at me, and I say, “Well, the military is my reference point, what’s the issue here?” And so I think in that regard, the military helped me with maintaining a certain reference point of sanity.

TS: Yeah.

YH: And I had it before, but then I found out there was a subculture that acted out every single day. And I said “Okay.” And so when I raised my children, I say “I disagree with what you’re saying, but because you argued it so logically and I have no alter[nate?] argument about it, I have to accept it.”

They’d say “Well, so, we can—”

“Yes, because I can’t argue against it, it’s a logical process. I don’t like it, but you argued it very well.” And so when I look at my children, we look at movies, we look at things, and they’ll say “Well, that’s the way it is. It’s logical.” I think from that degree, people think that I’ve been brainwashed by the military, but I really haven’t. I think what happened is that I understand reasons why we have to do things, because they have to do things. And I’m hoping that because I do have a humane streak—it hurts me that we do have to do certain things, and it does hurt me. And I like to think that because every soldier has a humane streak, that—and I multiply myself by one hundred, again, that our military force has a strong humane streak, but we also have the reality that it has to be what it has to be and we have to do it. So civilians, take your hearts and take your tears and move it aside until we take care of something, and then come back. But when you don’t allow the military to do things the way it has to be done, then you make the pain—

TS: The mission of war, really.

YH: You may—well, you make the pain of the mission of war linger longer. It’s almost like—to me, dealing with the military conflict is like dealing with a very wounded animal, okay? You don’t allow the animal to suffer. You don’t allow someone in pain to suffer. You know, if they’re going to hurt me, I’d rather hurt you first—and I hate to say that phrase, but it is with great pain that I say that to you. And that’s when civilians say “Ah, you’re talking military, to say you’d rather hurt me than—” Better me than—rather me[?] than mean, you know.

TS: Unpredictable, too. You have to have control of that situation.

YH: You have to.

TS: If someone is in pain and irrational, you don’t know what to expect.

YH: Challenging the principles of which I live, challenging my beliefs and morals of how I live in this free country, you are sick, far as I'm concerned. As a soldier, you are sick. Country—don't come and place your values on me. Don't do that to me, and don't place them on those who are too weak to protect themselves, because after a while, you'll come after me eventually. So I'd like to stop you, please, I'd like you not to do that, please. There's a thousand of us saying "please", that's called show of force. But if you're so irrational, and so adamant about putting yourself on me, first, then I'm going to show you what second-stripe[?] capability is all about. I think I live that way, I think I relate to my children that way, I relate to my husband that way, do not look at me as being gullible or weak. I'm just trying to be as diplomatic as possible.

TS: [laughs] "I have second-stripe capability."

YH: And so I think one of the [advantages?] that the military gave me some great terms to use—

TS: Yeah, they did.

YH: To describe myself, because, you know, I think because of that—and I use them all the time, people think that I'm militant. I am not, I am not.

TS: Well, how about thinking of yourself as a pioneer, in the military within the air force? What about that?

YH: I'm reluctant to use that term on myself, to call myself that, even though I know that's what I've been. There's a certain amount of confident arrogance that I have about that word, that I know—

TS: Is there a different word you'd choose?

YH: I did my duty, I did my job.

TS: But sometimes there has to be a first, in doing those duties, in doing your duty and doing your job—

YH: [unclear]

TS: And you were the first.

YH: I think—we were pioneers, we were. We forged ahead on—in an area that had never been forged before. And as we forged ahead, we started seeing sparks of daylight. We still don't see it all, no, but I still think I'm still travelling there, in the mentoring part of things, but as I keep moving as a pioneer, I can feel more and more women behind me, beside me, with me. Not in front of me, because what was, was.

TS: [unclear]

YH: I wasn't about them now[?].

TS: Yeah.

YH: I would love to ask them now, but that's just like you going back to talk to your mom after you become a mother. She did what? Well, I'm doing it now, so I guess it's possible, because she did it, so.

TS: I see, I see.

YH: You see?

TS: I understand it, yeah.

YH: So there's more numbers here in 2010 than there were in the year 2000, than there was in 1999, or in 1975 when I came in. There's more numbers here. And so I'm less alone. I see more blue on TV, I see more blue on—yes, because I remember—I can actually say, I remember when.

TS: One of the interesting things from the first interview that—you know, the first part of this interview, a couple weeks ago, that you said, and I didn't really get a chance to follow up on it, but I've been thinking about it, was—we were talking about your time in the—as being a first. And you made the point that—but that's not all it was, that's not all I did.

YH: [chuckles]

TS: And you didn't really get a chance to talk about that in any kind of detail. And so I don't want to like, project anything onto you, but I, you know, what did you mean by that? Do you remember saying that?

YH: I think I was—yes, because I think I felt a little humble, as much as I'm proud of what I've done, and like you said, being the pioneer. And to a certain degree, that was not all I did, but I like to think that there were many—many more facets to being there than just that. That was my role, my job, but there were so many experiences that just—it's like a rock into the water, that just rippled out to other things. But that was my primary role, and—to be a pioneer, to put footsteps in the, I would say, make the mold, so that someone can step in them. However, I want to feel that I was much broader than that, you know. I don't want to think that that was all I was good for, so I moved—because we talked about—they were perfect, and I think that I want to be a little more—I wanted to broaden myself more. But I also knew when to be there, when to leave, when it was time to leave. I think all of us were a bit humble, and also, we didn't know—we didn't really—I didn't even—the magnitude of what Jeanne Holm did.

TS: Yeah.

YH: Because you can look back and you can see, but she knew, and not only—well, now that we’re talking, I think they came to cushion—well, here it is, this revelation I’m getting right now, they came to cushion it by saying:

“Do you realize?”

“No, we—they don’t realize it.”

“Do you know—”

“No, Jeanne, they don’t realize it, they don’t, we need to go there and help them out. They don’t see it. Because they’re not with us here, they’re not at the same place we are.”

And I’m certain the conversation was something like “Those young ladies don’t really realize just what they’re doing to history, and they’re alone down there. We need to let them know that we know they’re there, and that we can talk with them.” I mean, just think, I’m a second lieutenant, and I’m talking to a—I can call her name like she’s here. It left such an impression on me.

TS: Yeah, I can see it in your eyes, you just light right up.

YH: Right, the fact that she pulled—she went back and pulled me toward her. Not the rank, not the promotion, not the endorsement. Emotionally, she mainly pulled toward, saying “They don’t know.” And that connection, I think, is something—I honestly think it was something that they felt we needed—but I’m a tell you something, I felt that they may have needed too.

TS: I think you’re right.

YH: I think they may have needed, too, because they—she could sit right here like I’m sitting here, and say “Look at all the people behind me, beside me, and I don’t see that many in front of me.” You know, and I think now, my daughter, she saw me in front of her. So she sees Marcelite Harris in front of her. She read about Jeanne Holm in front of her. See, and so now she says “Oh, mama, there’s so many of us.” When I went to see her, between the time I hit the parking lot and the actual building, I met seven female veterans.

TS: This last week?

YH: Seven. Two were officers. The rest were enlisted. And then walked in and there was a two-star general going “Hey, everybody, everybody want something to eat? I’ve baked this such-and-such.” Two-star general. And she goes “Oh, hi, General so-and-so. I had some last week.” To my daughter, it meant nothing to her. This was natural. This was the way the world should be, seeing men and women as leaders, seeing them talking and conversing. One was on her way overseas until, what—eighteen months. And she was leaving her two children with her husband.

She says “Yeah, I’m leaving tonight.” You know.

I sat there and just looked at them like “Stephanie.”

TS: Where was it that you were visiting?

YH: I was visiting Peterson Field, in Colorado. My daughter works in a building where you cannot even take your cell phone and it's very secure. And this is her new assignment for her, she's in missiles, okay, and she does operations and plans and everything. And she had just made—just received a meritorious service ribbon, of which, by the way, we still reserve not to give a commendation but a meritorious service—okay.

TS: [laughs] Back to the academy?

YH: Back to—that's right. And I went to visit her, and I went there to see her new office. And so, in the—I guess in the walk, the river[?] walk, just an everyday experience for my daughter, she said hello and conversed with seven females that were—none of them were lower than a master sergeant. They saluted her, she saluted them, a male colonel walked by, the major saluted, he just kept on talking, his mind was somewhere—they just looked at each other and said "His mind was on something else, let's keep on going." And if it was a normal day of seeing all these female veterans, conversations about going—being deployed was a normal conversation. It wasn't a normal conversation for me. When I was—when I was pregnant, people were asking me when was I getting out.

TS: Right.

YH: That was not the conversation there. What a difference, what a difference it makes. And I'm not old.

TS: [chuckles] Well, that was just thirty-four years ago.

YH: See there? So you say to yourself, what were the ripple of changes? Jeanne Holm knew there were a ripple of changes when she came back and saw me. She knew. I knew the ripple of changes when I went and saw the cadets when they were all colonels and majors and captains and civilians. My daughter can feel a few waves. I wonder, I wonder what the feeling is going to be like in 2030, in 2030, when my granddaughter has the option of going in the military or not going in the military, because she'll be at that age. She's only five right now. So—and I use the word, I'm in awe, now that you've put this in perspective, here, I'm in awe of the—remember you talked about those different cards[?] going behind the story?

TS: Yeah, right.

YH: That's what has been created now.

TS: Well, we didn't put that on tape, though, so for those—[laughter] Why don't you describe that, because you could use that for any of that, almost, right?



YH: When [unclear]—when you're looking at something at face value, remember that it's not truly face value, because there's something behind it, there's a story behind it. And behind that story is another story, of however it was before that came to be. And when you keep moving back in history, of the story behind the story behind the story behind the story and get to ground zero, so to speak, you know that there was a cause for something to happen, and that cause created—moving forward, now, some result, or some effect. But that became a cause that moved to some effect, and keep on moving those cards now, forward, looking at them forward, 'til you get to that very first card that you started with, and you understand, you understand how that card came to be. Well, when I look at my daughter, I understand how she came to be, because I'm one of those cards. Jeanne Holm is one of those cards. In between that is Marcelite Harris. And so when I look at female—the history of female veterans, we're stories behind stories behind stories, and I know that my daughter can lean back on quite a few people in comparison to how many I can lean back, and I'm in awe right now, as I think that Jeanne Holm knew I needed to lean on her. And I wonder, now, about the card that was in front of her—that was behind her. Who they leaned on, and who they leaned on, and only they can tell those stories. And this is why telling these stories is so important, because you're making sure that all our cards are put together to form this deck, this playing deck called, you know, female veterans. And it's interesting, it's really interesting, because I can now place my child, my daughter, in the shuffle, where I just sort of looked at her and watched, I now—she now has her card. And I cannot wait, now, to give her this announcement of this metaphor. I'm going to give it to her as a gift. This is interesting.

TS: Wonderful. Well, I'm going to have to figure out a way to talk to her. There's a few questions I have left.

YH: Okay.

TS: And you have answered so many of these questions without me even asking.

YH: I'm sorry. [laughing]

TS: No, no, it's wonderful. I enjoy it very much. But one question that I have that I'd like to ask is, what is patriotism to you? And this is the day before Veteran's Day, and you have your ribbon on, and [unclear].

YH: Patriotism is—it's the loyalty that one offers to, in my case, in this situation, the country. And defending and supporting its ideals and its values, realizing that it's still imperfect, realizing that it's—it's a belief in progress. In spite of hypocrisy, of human fallacies. That's patriotism. It's recognizing that the colors here are red, white, and blue, and they're not black, green, yellow, red, dot dot. It's recognizing that all of us will bleed red, white, blood, okay, when we do that. Patriotism is acknowledging the fact that no matter what, there's no other place that I'd rather live and defend than where I wake up in the morning, and I will do nothing to hurt it for my legacy and for posterity. That's patriotism. I—this is why it's very important that we teach our children patriotism,

because they need to know that we're not perfect, this is the only world that we have. This is why—and I'm saying this, now, this is why black soldiers fought for this country, although they realized that people still thought they were slaves. This is why many people changed their names from the Jewish name or Italian name to more of an Anglo-Saxon name so they could be accepted more in a place they really wanted to be, you know. This is where Jews came for refuge, because they felt, for some reason, there was going to be safety here. Because people protected one another here. And they weren't being protected where they were, they were overwhelmed. So for all those reasons, we need to teach our children that we're not perfect, and the people here aren't perfect, and they may get you angry, but we're trying our best to live our world and a life where people are safe, people are respected, and people have a chance, if they so desire to partake of it. And I'm loyal to that, and I'm willing to defend it, and that's patriotism.

TS: Now, is there anything that you would like to tell a civilian, although you have done it throughout this—actually, I think you've done it in many ways throughout this interview, but is there something specifically that you'd like to say to the civilian world about their misperception of military or veterans?

YH: There's an—I may have mentioned it before. One of the most important things about being a soldier—aspect—is the fact that you can depend on one another. [Be one so hard to?] watch your back. In the army, the soldiers sit in a foxhole, and they're on opposite sides, so if the enemy comes either way, they're being protected, okay? In the air force, in the cadet corps, they used to be asked "Is this person someone that you feel you can trust your life with?" The civilian community needs to recognize that they need to ask themselves that question of their neighbors, and need to ask that question of themselves. We learn how to protect one another, we learn how to take care of ourselves and each other. We insist on the next person being as strong as we are so that we can have a sound sleep when it's our watch. They need to put themselves—you need to put yourself in check, civilians. Put yourself in check and recognize the fact that your neighbor, your American—not your black, your white, your Italian, or your male, or your female—but your neighbor needs to know that you're there for them, regardless, because they are a human being. And you need to insist that that neighbor comply with the values and the laws and the rules that keep you safe when your eyes are closed or when your children are outside. If you don't do that, you're making my job as a soldier much more difficult, because while I'm trying to take care of the foreign adversary, I now have to worry about my local adversaries too? You're asking too much from us as soldiers. We need for you to take on your responsibilities as a soldier as well, because we lose—as my ex-husband says, we lose many of our loved ones in peace as we lose in war. And you're causing us to have a lot of war during peacetime right on our own grounds, and that's not right. We can't fight two wars on both sides. You're going to have to give us soldiers some peace, and it has to be here at home. And if it's not, this is why you're having your wars in your own neighborhoods.

TS: Well, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to add?

YH: No, besides the fact that somebody needs to design these uniforms a little bit better.

TS: [laughs]

YH: No, I don't think so, I think we've covered it. And thank you very much.

TS: Well, thank you, Doctor Hunter, it's been quite a pleasure.

YH: And it's been quite a revelation for me.

[End of Interview]