

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Cheryl Bernhardt

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: March 10, 2012

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is March tenth. My name is Therese Strohmer at the home of Cheryl Bernhardt in Cleveland, North Carolina to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina. Actually, Leslie Batten is here, too, with us today. If you would like to state your name, Cheryl, the way you'd like to read it on your—like the way it to read on your collection.

CB: Cheryl Ann King Bernhardt.

TS: Okay. Well Cheryl, why don't you start off by telling me when and where you were born?

CB: I was born October the eighteenth, 1948 in Knoxville, Tennessee.

TS: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

CB: I have one younger brother who's four and a half years younger than I am.

TS: Four and half years?

CB: And that's it.

TS: That's it? What did your parents do when you were growing up?

CB: My mother worked in a couple factories and did some sales work, and my dad worked for the post office his whole life.

TS: His whole life? So, he retired from that?

CB: But he was also in the military. He was in the navy in World War II.

TS: Oh, okay. Do you have other people in your family that were in the military, that you are aware of?

CB: No close relatives.

TS: No?

CB: No.

TS: Well, what was it like growing up in Knoxville, Tennessee?

CB: It—For the time it was a rather large city. And we lived close to the city, and they took us into the city limits when I was a teenager. So, I grew up in the fifties and sixties in a small middle-class neighborhood. Everybody had two bedroom, one bath house, and everybody knew everybody else.

TS: What kinds of things did you do for fun?

CB: For fun we played outside; played board games and skated.

TS: You skated?

CB: Yes.

TS: Down in the neighborhood, or—

CB: Down the driveway; we had an asphalt driveway, so we did a lot of roller skating.

TS: Were there a lot of kids in the neighborhood?

CB: There were a lot of kids, and we walked to school.

TS: It wasn't very far away?

CB: It was about a mile away.

TS: Oh. It was a little ways away.

CB: Yes.

TS: They would think that was a really long way today.

CB: And these days, no, you wouldn't have been able to walk that road. I wouldn't let my children walk that road because it was very curvy and narrow.

TS: Did you walk as a group?

CB: We did some days. My dad would take me when it was raining, but every other day for first grade through eighth grade I walked to school.

TS: What was the name of your school you went to?

CB: Robert Huff Elementary [School].

TS: Did you like school?

CB: I did, I loved school.

TS: What kind—what did you like about school so much?

CB: Mostly the reading, and I liked learning but reading was one of the things I liked.

TS: What kind of things do you remember hooked you on reading? Any particular book?

CB: No, I just remember I ended up having a—in first grade and part of second grade I had a homebound teacher because I had bronchitis and pneumonia a lot, so I had a homebound teacher in first grade.

TS: So, that meant they came to your house?

CB: Right, for probably seven months of the—I didn't go to school much. I had homeschool, so I had one on one attention. I had a very good teacher. The in second grade I had the same one for a few weeks. And then again I had her in fourth grade actually in the school. She was a great teacher, so she probably was one of my big influences.

TS: What did she do when she homeschooled, you know, when she came to your home. Just, all the different subjects?

CB: All the subjects.

TS: Yes? Did she spend all day there, or was it a few hours?

CB: I remember—I'm sure it was just a couple hours probably.

TS: So, you enjoyed reading, and what was her name?

CB: And math. Her name was Ms.—it's either Griffin or Griffith.

TS: Okay. And she became your fourth grade teacher?

CB: Yes. She was a great lady.

TS: So, you liked math as well?

CB: I did.

TS: What did you like about math?

CB: It just came easy, I don't know if anything I particularly liked about it, but it just came easy.

TS: Did you have a favorite teacher besides this Mrs. Griffith?

CB: Probably Ms. Legg in fifth and sixth grade.

TS: Why did you like her?

CB: She was a good teacher. She knew how to manage the children quite well.

TS: You were thinking that as a young girl, “I like this teacher because she’s managing—”

CB: Yes. Of course, she did give me a few paddlings on my hands.

TS: Oh, did she?

CB: She used—back then you could use the ruler. She would take us out into the hallway if we talked.

TS: Were you a talker?

CB: I was shy, but apparently I did talk some, and I was honest when she’d ask us who was talking. She would paddle us on the hands with her ruler.

TS: On the inside?

CB: Yes.

TS: That doesn’t sound very pleasant.

CB: That was the only time I think I got—

TS: Got in trouble?

CB: Corporal punishment in school.

TS: Now, did you have any games you liked to play? Were you outdoorsy, did you play sports or anything growing up?

CB: There wasn’t much opportunity for girls—

TS: There wasn’t?

CB: —in the fifties and sixties in my area. I liked softball. I did play softball, but not organized.

TS: How—Just pickup games?

CB: Yes. In the neighborhood or at school as part of our phys. ed.

TS: But not—You didn't have basketball or anything like that?

CB: We had basketball in high school, but it was half court and I was bad at it.

TS: That's the one or two dribble, right?

CB: Well, you have your forwards on one side.

TS: On one side of the court?

CB: On one side of the court, and the defensive players on the other side. You didn't cross.

TS: Okay.

CB: If you were defensive you were just defending the other team's offense.

TS: From shooting?

CB: Yes. You didn't go back and forth.

TS: So, what—did you play that at all?

CB: Just in phys. ed.

TS: Were you offense or defense?

CB: I think I was defense because I wasn't good at dribbling and shooting.

TS: That a whole lot different from today's game isn't it?

CB: Yes. But we did—my school didn't have very many opportunities for actual sports. Probably basketball, tennis, may have had swimming and golf maybe. That's about it. No softball, which I probably would have done if we'd had some.

TS: Would have played softball? Did you—when you were growing up as a little girl, did you, like, have an idea of what you were going to do when you grew up at all? Like, your future?

CB: Oh yes, of course. [unclear] But in the fifties and sixties there weren't that many opportunities unless you were really—a feminist type person; teaching, secretarial, nursing, or stay home. Get married after high school and have your children and not work was still a big issue, I guess, going on then.

TS: Did any of those appeal to you?

CB: Nothing appealed to me but nursing. I had been sick a lot and that might have been part of it, when I was younger.

TS: Oh, okay.

CB: I had several hospitalizations and felt like that was something I could do.

TS: Do you remember at what point—

CB: And I was too shy to teach, or at least I thought. I was really, really shy.

TS: Oh, is that right?

CB: So, I thought I was too shy to teach. And I had a cousin who had gone to Berea College; it was a BSN [Bachelor of Science in Nursing] program, and she—she was older than me. She was probably fifteen years older than me, I guess, or maybe more because my dad was the baby of eleven, and some of his nieces were older than him. So, this one was not much younger than him. Anyway, she recommended to my parents that it would be good for me to go to a four year school.

TS: For college?

CB: For nursing.

TS: For nursing? Okay.

CB: Because at the time most people were going to the three year, the diploma schools, and Knoxville didn't have a four year school. University of Tennessee, four year in nursing was in Memphis.

TS: Do you know why she recommended that?

CB: She had been and she just thought it was a good opportunity for a female.

TS: At what point did she recommend—is this when she knew that you were interested in going in nursing.

CB: Yes, when I was in high school.

TS: So, in high school—how was high school for you? Did you enjoy that?

CB: I enjoyed it but I was so shy I didn't participate in a lot of activities. I was more studious than anything.

TS: Would you have liked to have participated?

CB: I would have. I wish I hadn't been so shy.

TS: What kinds of would you wish you had done?

CB: Sports, if they had had sports. I always wanted to play in the band, but I didn't tell my parents I wanted to play in the band.

TS: Is that right? What did you want to play?

CB: I wanted to play the clarinet. I did take piano lessons earlier, so I could play the piano, and I did play the piano some at church. Church was important to the family, and we walked to church because it was about three houses from us.

TS: It wasn't very far?

CB: No.

TS: It's not that mile walk to school.

CB: So, we walked to church when it wasn't raining.

TS: What kind of things were—did you do in high school for fun? Did you have—did you go on any sock hops or dances or anything like that?

CB: Did not go to a single one.

TS: This is the shyness.

CB: This is the shyness. I went to a few ball games, but very few ball games, but I enjoyed them. I didn't have a car and my neighborhood was ten, eleven miles from the high school. It was, what we used to call, on the other side of the tracks. Then, some of the other feeder elementary schools were in the country club[?] section, and we weren't so there was a, you know, different group.

TS: Social, economic—

CB: Yes.

TS: —mix there? Now, what year did you graduate from—

CB: From high school was '66.

TS: Okay. So, do you remember when JFK was assassinated?

CB: Oh, I do.

TS: You want to tell me about that?

CB: November 22, 1963. I was in biology class.

TS: You were in biology class?

CB: Yes. That's my mother's birthday, the twenty-second of November. Otherwise I wouldn't remember it.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: How was that?

CB: It was—I was sad, very sad because I enjoyed that time period and that presidency. As they say it was like the Camelot era. I enjoyed the Kennedy's.

TS: What did you like about them?

CB: I thought he was a very good president, and he was the civil rights movement. I could have probably joined the Peace Corps, that was one thing I was thinking about post college.

TS: Would he have inspired you to do that?

CB: Yes.

TS: With is speech and everything?

CB: You know, ask not what you can do for your country—ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. Yes, I loved that time period.

TS: Some women that I've talked to were really motivated by that, you know, they remember that quite distinctly, and they did do things like join the Peace Corps and actually join the military.

CB: And there was a, and I can see it now, but then there were some, mostly guys, were happy that he had been assassinated. That made me very sad at the time.

TS: How did they articulate that?

CB: Verbally.

TS: Really?

CB: Yes. Like, "Yeah!" Remember it was—we had just—we may not have integrated at that time.

TS: Sixty-three.

CB: Yes. I don't remember, and we were integrated when I graduated, but we may not have been integrated when I first went to high school. So, we integrated sometime in the sixties. It was—I just could not believe that people were treated like they were treated in the sixties. Also, he was Catholic and I grew up Baptist at the time, and there was some animosity between the Protestants and a Catholic president, so it could have been some of the Protestant's judas[?]. They didn't like him because he was Catholic.

TS: It was actually some of the students that said negative things?

CB: Yes. Yes. Not the teachers.

TS: I see.

CB: Students.

TS: Growing up during integration did it happen during your high school years?

CB: It did.

TS: How did that go?

CB: Elementary was totally segregated. Our high school I think it was our problems. I don't remember there being any problems, but there were still not that many.

TS: How about, like, a couple?

CB: It would probably be—we had a graduating class of 260, so there may have been twenty to thirty, something like that. Probably not even that many, but I remember it being at our high school very quiet. I don't remember any episodes.

TS: No? Did you have any friends who were African-American?

CB: Not in high school.

TS: Not in high school? Did, so, —did you—at that time, as a young girl growing up, did you—like you said, you were aware of the civil rights movement.

CB: Right.

TS: What do you have a memory of, at that time, what you thought about it; what was happening?

CB: I thought we needed to move on; that everybody should be treated equally. And I couldn't believe how bad people treated black people.

TS: Did they have segregated things, like, drinking fountains where you grew up or any of that? Like, the public facilities?

CB: I don't remember it, but there probably were still some leftovers, but I don't specifically remember it.

TS: Well, now, so, if you—do you have any thoughts about Jacqueline Kennedy?

CB: At the time I thought she was very—of course she was stylish for the time. But she was a stand by your man kind of gal.

TS: Why did you say at the time? Has your opinion changed some?

CB: Well, I don't think she would be a feminist type person. I'm not[?] sure she would be up for equality, women's equality.

TS: At—

CB: At that time. At that time. She wouldn't be into the feminist movement.

TS: Yes, well, that was coming, right? That was—

CB: Yes. [unclear]

TS: You kind of followed along with that. Did that have any impact on you, the feminist movement?

CB: Probably later on, probably not so much in the sixties.

TS: More in the seventies?

CB: Probably more so in the seventies.

TS: So, you're—you graduated from high school now. At what point in high school did you decide that you were going to go on to college?

CB: Probably would have been around tenth or eleventh grade, because I had to take—we did not have to take the SAT, we took the ACT in Tennessee. So, somewhere—would have

been junior year, maybe, or first part of senior year. Back then I don't think you had to do it as soon as you have to do it now.

TS: As early.

CB: It might have even been senior year, but I had already been just trying to decide what I was going to do.

TS: What kind of things were going through your mind?

CB: About?

TS: What you wanted to do.

CB: Well, I was so shy that I was—and had never really been away from home, but it was the best thing for me and I knew that. I wasn't really too uptight about it or worried about it. I knew I needed—probably was not going to get married, so I had to have a profession.

TS: Why didn't you think you were going to get married?

CB: Shy. [Therese chuckles]

TS: No boyfriends?

CB: No boyfriends. You have to talk to somebody before you get a boyfriend.

TS: Yes, so, you were really shy?

CB: Really shy.

TS: Okay. So, you got accepted. Did you apply different places to go?

CB: I think that's the only school I applied to.

TS: And what was that school?

CB: I may have applied to Berea, I can't remember.

TS: Oh, Berea. That's the one she had gone to.

CB: Right, in Kentucky. But it was further away from home.

TS: And which college did you end up going to?

CB: East Tennessee State, which was two hours away from home.

TS: So, tell me about that experience. How was that?

CB: College was fun! [chuckles]

TS: In what years were you in college?

CB: Nineteen sixty-six to nineteen seventy. That got me out of some of my shyness.

TS: Okay, fun. Tell me what we did for fun in the sixties.

CB: In the sixties?

TS: Yes, exactly. Tell me specifically.

CB: In the sixties, well see, I still wasn't that much of a fun person. I did go to dances in college; we had dances. I don't know if—they probably don't even do that anymore, but we did have dances. So, I did go to some dances.

TS: Did they have, like, a band play?

CB: Yes.

TS: Okay.

CB: So, we had dances in the gym and we would go and girls would be asked by guys, unless you went—you already had a date.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: With somebody.

CB: I did go to some dances.

TS: Did you get to dance?

CB: I tried. [chuckles]

TS: Yes?

CB: But, I had not danced in high school, so that was kind of scary.

TS: What kind of dancing did you do?

CB: Gosh, I don't know. What did we do in the sixties? I don't even know what they called it.

TS: What kind of music were you listening to?

CB: They played a lot of music, like, Four Seasons and Righteous Brothers. Oh, I can't remember any other groups then. Probably didn't play any hard rock. I think Led Zeppelin was around then, maybe. Chicago.

TS: Oh, Chicago. Any Beatles?

CB: Beatles? Had to, I had to, yes.

TS: What was it like now to be away from home?

CB: I enjoyed it. I really didn't get homesick.

TS: No?

CB: I was surprised because I had—my freshman year, there were four of us in a room. That was a hoot.

TS: Four in a room? How big was that room?

CB: Not much bigger than this room; a little bit bigger than this room. Not as big as this room and the kitchen. We had two bunk beds, a dresser between, another dresser. We didn't get a walk-in closet for four us. And we had our own bathroom with a bathtub.

TS: Private bathroom?

CB: Private bathroom with a tub, but if you wanted a shower you had to go to the community shower.

TS: Down the hall or something?

CB: Down the hall, yes. But there were four of us and I liked two of them.

TS: Two of your roommates?

CB: Yes.

TS: Okay.

CB: One of them was actually from my high school. We had not—we knew each other, and we had not asked to be roommates. But she ended up joining a sorority.

TS: Did you get along?

CB: We did till midyear, and then she—she had her daddy at Christmas break, this is just little petty things but times are different.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: I don't know that they are.

CB: Had her daddy change mattresses with—we had a girl from Ecuador as our roommate, Beatrice Consedo[?]. Enjoyed her; enjoyed Bea so much. But her daddy didn't think it would matter if he changed mattresses. I happened to see him changing mattresses, so when Bea came back from Christmas I said, "Marcia and her dad changed mattresses," and we just need to change them back. So, we locked the door and we changed the mattresses. I mean, it's an itty bitty thing.

TS: Why was he changing them?

CB: Because hers wasn't comfortable.

TS: Oh, so she just took one of the others?

CB: Yes, Bea's mattress.

TS: Oh, okay. He didn't, like, bring—I was thinking he brought one in.

CB: No, just switched without asking. Just, "I'm going to give her the better mattress." Such a little thing. And then—

TS: That's a big thing!

CB: And then back then we had inspect—room inspections, and we got demerits.

TS: Oh, in college?

CB: Yes.

TS: Did you have—

CB: And this was a public college; public university. So, if your room wasn't clean enough you got demerits, and I don't remember all the other things. But anyway, we got tired of cleaning. Three of us would clean, and Marcia wouldn't ever clean, so we decided one week we weren't cleaning. And it was very obvious that we hadn't, so we got a bunch of demerits and she pitched a fit.

TS: Marcia did?

CB: Yes, because we'd gotten demerits.

TS: And because you guys didn't clean?

CB: Yes. And we told her, well, it was her turn. So anyway, she decided she needed to move out and she went to a sorority house. She ended up being a doctor; [OB-]GYN doctor. But that was a hoot, and she was from the country club section. [both chuckle]

TS: How was this Bea, meeting her from Ecuador?

CB: Oh, that was wonderful. One of my—here I am Southern Baptist and Marcia was Presbyterian. Religion entered into things then. She was Presbyterian and Bea and my other roommate, Olivia, were Catholic. And I grew up, my minister said that Catholics weren't Christians and preached against Catholicism. So, I said, "I don't know anything about the Catholic religion, I need to learn. I ended up going to masses and went on a Catholic retreat with—oh, this priest was to die for. [chuckles]

TS: As in, good looking?

CB: Yes, so that was another good reason to go to mass; to the retreats. But anyway, I was learning about Catholicism and had a catechism book. My mother got a little upset about that. She said, "You're not learning the Catholicism?"

I said, "No, I'm just trying to learn about it."

TS: That's what you do in college, right?

CB: I had had three years of Spanish, but Bea wanted to talk English, and I could kick myself now for us not doing a bilingual, because she was just a fascinating person, and, like, three doors down we had a girl from China. She had had twelve years of English, but you could barely understand her.

TS: Because of the accent she had or something?

CB: Yes.

TS: She didn't speak it as well as Bea had?

CB: No. Bea was very good with her English, but she wanted to learn more. It was just fun learning the different cultures, and the girl from China, I wish I could remember her name, she—dating, if you—it's like if you kissed a boy you were going to be getting married.

TS: For her or for everybody?

CB: Yes, for her. Well, and she couldn't understand why things were different.

TS: Not every boy that she kissed wanted to marry her?

CB: Or that—she probably, I don't know—she didn't even date in the beginning, but I think she ended up, I don't know if she married, but she dated an American guy later on. But they were interesting. I enjoyed being around them a lot.

TS: Did it, kind of, open your world up a little bit?

CB: Yes.

TS: Is that one of the reason you liked to read so much, too?

CB: Probably. I enjoyed reading about the—

TS: All the places?

CB: —different areas of the world. How cultures were different.

TS: Well, now, I'm curious about these inspections, because a couple of places, like at Women's College they had a curfew.

CB: Oh, we had a curfew.

TS: Really?

CB: Yes, freshman year—

TS: Did you break that curfew ever?

CB: Not my freshman year. [both laugh] Later I did. Had people that would let you in the door. I learned these things.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Like a code?

CB: That was in the nurses dorm because we still had—that was my junior year I guess, my roommate—met Judy a couple times.

TS: Oh, Judy! That's the friend you showed me the pictures of.

CB: Yes. She snuck me in a couple of times past curfew. What were we talking about?

TS: I was just trying to get the life that you were having while you were in college and experiencing that.

CB: Oh, the curfew. And see, things are so different now. I'd like to go to school now.

TS: Nothing's stopping you.

CB: I think unless—well, the first semester we were quarter system. First quarter it was, like, ten till eight, I mean, we had an early curfew during the week. And then if your grades—

TS: Ten till eight?

CB: Ten till eight, I think. It was early, because I was in bed by ten o'clock because I didn't like to stay up late and study. If I couldn't get it by ten o'clock—

TS: You're done?

CB: I'm done. Then, I think it was second quarter, depends upon your grade and how good you were, you could go to the library. You could sign out and go to the library and be out later, till about ten.

TS: But that's it?

CB: And then on weekends I think it was eleven. There were no phones in the room, of course there's no such thing as a cell phone. There's no phones in the room. You had one room on each—one phone, I believe it was just one phone for the floor.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: On the floor?

CB: No, I think it was for the building.

TS: Oh.

CB: So then, they'd have to call you over the intercom that you had a phone call at the desk. And guys could only come into the little hall.

TS: The foyer area?

CB: Yes, couldn't come up to the rooms.

TS: As an unannounced guest? Couldn't sneak them?

CB: No.

TS: Nobody was sneaking in the boys?

CB: Not on my floor, now, they may have elsewhere. I didn't see any on my floor, but they could have been elsewhere.

TS: Okay, now, how were you doing in school? How are you enjoying the classes and things like that?

CB: Oh, I enjoyed them.

TS: You still loving math?

CB: Not as much. [Therese chuckles] No.

TS: What are you enjoying?

CB: The sciences.

TS: Yeah? And now, you know you're going in nursing school? Have you definitely committed to that?

CB: Yes. Freshman year.

TS: And so, what—where did you go then when you graduated; when you finished?

CB: Graduated, we—my roommate and I had a scholarship from Holston Valley Community Hospital in Kingsport. They gave us money for our senior year and we had a commitment to work for them for six months.

TS: So, you had a scholarship while you were in college in that, so by accepting that you said you'll work—both of you got it?

CB: Yes. Actually three, another friend of ours. There was a foursome. She got it also, but she paid hers back because she got married.

TS: Oh, and then she wasn't going to make that commitment?

CB: And also, my first two years I had a work scholarship where I had to work in the nursing office and got my tuition paid.

TS: Oh, okay. What were you finding that you liked about nursing? Any particular area of expertise that you enjoyed?

CB: You didn't have as many opportunities then as now, of course. I liked adult health, med surg.

TS: Med. surg.?

CB: Yes. Medical surgical.

TS: Okay. So, then when you went—you and your friend Judy got done, you went to this other hospital; Kingsport to work?

CB: We did.

TS: And you worked there for—

CB: One—A little over a year.

TS: Did you like it?

CB: We did. She was working a pediatric floor and they threw me into ICU, and we'd never been inside the door of an ICU.

TS: Up until that point?

CB: Yes.

TS: How was that? Did—

CB: I loved it, after I got used to it.

TS: You loved it?

CB: After I got over being scared.

TS: What was it that you enjoyed so much about it?

CB: Well, you had more technical aspects, and at the time we had a mixed [unclear] care unit. Intensive care for other medical issues, trauma, and I enjoyed the fast pace.

TS: The day went by pretty quick I bet. At what point did you and Judy decide, you know, to go a different route with your nursing?

CB: Sometime after our six months was up because we ended up staying a year, but we were looking for something more adventuresome. We toyed with the idea of going to a large city like Atlanta or, I'm not sure if it's still around, it may be, the Ship of Hope. Ever heard of Ship of Hope?

TS: No, I have no idea what that is.

CB: It was doing—it's kind of like the Peace Corps thing but it wasn't Peace Corps. They were providing medical care on a ship to places that didn't have much—kind of like Doctors Without Borders. Have you heard about them?

TS: So, you mean, like, worldwide?

CB: The ship would go worldwide to different ports and provide medical care.

TS: I've never heard of that.

CB: We had toyed with that idea but we weren't sure we wanted to go to the far ends of the Earth yet.

TS: Were you still thinking about the Peace Corps at all?

CB: It was in the back of our minds, but there again you have to—we were—we were homebodies, kind of.

TS: Yeah?

CB: We didn't want to go that far away.

TS: A safe adventure.

CB: Yes. Yes. [Therese chuckles]

TS: So, how did you—

CB: Oh, my train of thought goes.

TS: Go ahead. It's alright.

CB: I was going to say something.

TS: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you.

CB: What was I going to say? Oh, I was going to say how we ended up thinking about the air force. One of our teacher's we'd kept in contact with, because we had gone to the local nurses associating—association meetings, and she was very active. She had been our public health instructor. We also liked public health. She told us that air force might be a good experience for us, and we said, "Nah. That's not us."

But she said, "Well, let me send the recruiter to you."

So, she sent us the recruiter and we said, "Well, sure, we'll talk to him. We're not going to join the air force."

She sent the recruiter and he was very personable and he said, "Why don't we just go visit an air force base? An overnight trip, and we'll see if you like it." So, he did that and it seemed okay. Went to Shaw Air Force Base.

TS: Shaw? How far away was that?

CB: Well, we were in Kingsport, Tennessee to Shaw, that's in South Carolina. I don't know, about a six hour trip. And then we stayed in the visiting officers quarters, and he took us to the NCO club, the non-commissioned officers club. Wined us and dined us, and then he—after that he'd call us, "Are you thinking about it?"

"No, not really."

And then he said, "Well, why don't we just go get your physical?" This is really how it happened. "Why don't we just go get your physical and then if you decide, we have all this stuff done and all you have to do is sign on the line."

So, we did. We went and got our physical, and we were thinking but we hadn't set our minds to doing it.

TS: So, you had a whole bunch of other things you're thinking about right?

CB: Right. That's just one of them.

TS: I see.

CB: We weren't sure if they'd be able to follow through with what they said. Number one they said we could go in on the buddy system and we could pick our base and we could stay there the whole two years.

TS: But you weren't sure if you trusted that?

CB: No. Well, you know the government. [chuckles] The Vietnam War was going on. We didn't—we weren't sure we really wanted to go to Vietnam, but we wanted to be helpful.

TS: What did you think about the war?

CB: That we shouldn't have been there.

TS: At the time that's what you thought?

CB: At the time we shouldn't have been there. But somebody needed to be taking care of the veterans, or the active duty. At that time it would have been active duty military.

TS: Since you're such a shy girl, did you ever go on any protests or anything like that?

CB: No, I didn't.

TS: No? Did you ever think about it?

CB: I thought about it, but I thought I'd be the one getting in trouble and going to jail.

TS: So, that fear—

CB: Now I'd probably do that.

TS: Oh, is that right? Now you would?

CB: I don't know, maybe, but that was a big to do then.

TS: What about Judy? Did you guys have the same feeling about it?

CB: Yes.

TS: Were there any protests that were in your area?

CB: I don't remember any [unclear]. There's a lot of colleges that had big protests, and then you had, what was that one where people were killed?

TS: Kent State?

CB: Kent State, yes. That was—

TS: Was that before—

CB: I think that was in the sixties.

TS: Seventy, I think.

CB: Early seventies. Yes, so there was a lot of—

TS: Do you remember that about Kent—

CB: A lot of drug raids going on, too.

TS: Drug raids?

CB: Yes.

TS: At the colleges?

CB: Yes.

TS: Who was doing the—police just doing the raiding?

CB: Yes. I'm sure it would be too much for them to do now, but they had drug raids. Dogs, take around [unclear].

TS: What did you think about this, kind of, counter culture that was happening at this time in the United States? Was that part of, like—you talked about, like, you're a little bit aware of it, right? The drugs and the protests.

CB: I hated I was too shy, that I couldn't break out of my shell and be more active; be an active participant.

TS: In what part did you want to be an active participant?

CB: Either, maybe, some small protest or—

TS: Small, peaceful, quiet.

CB: Yes. Or be more adventuresome—

TS: In what way?

CB: —and go overseas with the Peace Corps.

TS: Okay. Something like that?

CB: Something like that.

TS: It was a pretty exciting time.

CB: Yes, it was.

TS: Do you know anything about the black power movement?

CB: Vaguely, yes.

TS: Yes?

CB: The Black Panthers.

TS: The Black Panthers, that's right, yes. How about hippies? How did that—

CB: Hippies fascinated me, but I was not a hippy person.

TS: No?

CB: No, I was not a flower child.

TS: How did they fascinate you?

CB: Just their free will and they were more—they weren't shy about their feelings and free love. That was not me. [both chuckles]

TS: How would, say, other than being shy, how would you describe yourself at this time in your life?

CB: At this time in my life? Responsible. You know, I still remembered—

TS: Is that the opposite of the free love hippies?

CB: Yes, and I still remembered my religious upbringing. It was still there, you know, and what you should and should not do. Moral aspects.

TS: So, you weren't going to—what was that car you showed me that you had?

CB: [Mercury] Cougar.

TS: A Cougar? When did you get that?

CB: I got it in—when I graduated in '70.

TS: In seventy? So, that would have been after Woodstock. I was going to say, you weren't, like, wanting to get in your Cougar and drive to New York and go to Woodstock?

CB: No, because I was too shy and responsible.

TS: But, so then, how is it—when this recruiter was calling you and you and Judy were talking—thinking about, “What are we going to do,” right? Something different; exciting yet safe.

CB: Right.

TS: What—How did you come to decide to join then?

CB: It was just a process. I don't know, it was kind of scary, thinking back about it, because it was not us. She was very religious also and we kept thinking—you know, then you would hear negative comments about women in the military.

TS: Like what?

CB: Like they were, Rush Limbaugh said, sluts, I guess.

TS: Who said?

CB: Easy women. Rush Limbaugh, this past week.

TS: Oh.

CB: He called that woman a slut about the birth control issue.

TS: That's right.

CB: But anyway, that women were easy, and that you weren't thought of very well. So, we had that in the back of our mind, but we were going to be officers so we thought that might be different. That we wouldn't be thought of in that way. And I'm surprised that my parents did not say anything negative.

TS: No? Not at all?

CB: They did not.

TS: They were very supportive?

CB: They were.

TS: Do you remember what they did say?

CB: Just that, “If that’s what you want to do we’re fine with it.” That shocked me because I figured they would’ve been, “No!” You know, women in the military. Not a good reputation, but—

TS: You said your father had been in the service.

CB: He’d been in the navy.

TS: He didn’t have any kind of talk with you or anything?

CB: No. No.

TS: So, they were supportive? What about Judy’s family?

CB: They were supportive too. They didn’t say anything negative, which I think we were real shocked about that. They knew, I’m sure, that we were responsible people; we had been up till that point.

TS: They knew who you were.

CB: We were grown, we were adults, but we were women. But they didn’t argue against it at all, or for it. They just said, you know, “Whatever you want to do.”

TS: Had you ever considered any of the other services?

CB: No, I liked blue.

TS: Did you like the uniforms?

CB: I liked the uniform.

TS: Tell me about when you and Judy, then, finally decided to join.

CB: I actually didn't decide until I signed the paper.

TS: Is that right? Well, how—were you—what was the name of this recruiting officer who—

CB: Pierce. Sergeant Piece.

TS: Sergeant Pierce.

CB: He did this big to do. He had—I'm not sure if we were—He had photographers there.

TS: When you went to sign up?

CB: Yes. He put an article in the paper, and I don't remember what else he did besides the photographers.

TS: Do you remember what paper that was in?

CB: Should have been in the Kingsport paper.

TS: Okay. So, they had some publicity because he was signing up these two nurses.

CB: Publicity because of these two nurses. That was a big nail in his—or a feather in his cap.

TS: Now, how long of a process had this taken for you to—from the time that, you know, you went to see that—

CB: It was probably at least three or four months, I guess.

TS: Okay, so it wasn't that—necessarily that long.

CB: No, it was a short process.

TS: I'm thinking, like, a year.

CB: No, because we were only in Kingsport a year, so it would have been less than that; six months or less—

TS: Okay, so, you went in—

CB: —that we were deciding.

TS: —there's publicity. You're picture probably in a paper somewhere.

CB: Probably, but I don't remember getting one.

TS: Okay. Did your parents go?

CB: Yes.

TS: Did your brother go too?

CB: I don't remember. He was still in high school. Now, he was a hippy. [chuckling] He was part of the hippy—

TS: Your brother was a hippy?

CB: Yes. [chuckles] Yes. He was into the hippy stuff. He had one of those VW [Volkswagen] vans.

TS: Yes?

CB: Yes.

TS: Did you get to—

CB: Drug user.

TS: [chuckles] Yes? So, he went all out?

CB: Yes, he went all out.

TS: He was too young for Woodstock though?

CB: Yes. Yes.

TS: So, you signed up and you weren't sure that you were actually going to do it until you—

CB: No, I wasn't but Judy had already told the recruiter that she was signing.

TS: Were you just going there with her for moral support, then, in some ways?

CB: I was still weighing my options actually, because I had told the—I told him—I said, “I think I’m signing, but I can’t tell you yes, I’m signing.” But we invited all these people so it’d be kind of bad if I hadn’t signed. I’m sure it was—

TS: [chuckling] It’s like going to a wedding, and—

CB: Not going to say your vows. Not going to say, “I do.”

TS: That’s right.

CB: So, I guess I was just playing with him, but anyway, I signed.

TS: Maybe you weren’t sure though.

CB: I wasn’t a hundred percent, because it was totally out of character.

TS: So, you did. You signed up.

CB: We signed up and we got to pick the base within a certain area. Every base wasn’t open, but they gave you selections. We didn’t want to go as far away as California, which would—

TS: Oh no, that would be way too far.

CB: Which we should have, but we ended up in Mississippi which is about a ten hour drive.

TS: Was that one of the ones you picked?

CB: Yes.

TS: Was it the top one?

CB: Out of what they gave us, yes.

TS: It was, okay. So, you went to, was that—

CB: Sheppard [Air Force Base].

TS: Sheppard? Okay. Tell me about that. Tell me, like, going to Sheppard were you nervous.

CB: I wasn't nervous because [unclear] first time on a big plane. I had been on a two-seater one time. That's another story

TS: That seems like it would be a little more scary.

CB: I had never been in a plane and the—one of the girls across—her room was across from ours; she was in another four-bed room, at eighteen decided to get her pilots license. And stupid me went up in the plane with her, just the two of us because it was just a two-seater. That was scary. Thinking back I think who in their right mind is going up with an eighteen year old in this plane, but we did. Anyway, so, that was my second plane ride and I had never been on a large plane.

TS: Okay.

CB: Just that itty bitty plane.

TS: Tell me about your first days, then, in this training that you had.

CB: We had auditorium style training.

TS: Auditorium?

CB: I mean, you were all—there were hundreds of us.

TS: Inside?

CB: Inside where they gave us all of our printed material, and what to expect as an officer—medical officer. Then we had, of course, that—

TS: The bivouac?

CB: Bivouac.

TS: Where did you—where was that at? What did you do for that?

CB: That's where we went and did the airplane crash scenario.

TS: I know we talked about that off tape though, so that's why I'm having you describe it now.

CB: It was somewhere in the boonies of Oklahoma where they had a mock plane that had crashed, and we had to eat k-rations and use the latrine.

TS: How were the k-rations?

CB: Awful.

TS: Awful?

CB: I'm sure they have improved now, but no, they were not good. So, we had to eat those—

TS: That's with the can too?

CB: Yes. Just for twenty-four hours; it was just one day. There from, like, dawn till late night because we did the airplane crash when it was dark. We had to do triage and some of us had to be victims and some of us had to be the triage personnel.

TS: What were you?

CB: You know, I can't remember.

TS: It's because you were thinking about those k-rations, maybe, and using the latrine. You've mentioned that a couple times. Did you not—was it not pleasant to use the latrines?

CB: Those were pretty good actually for latrines, but where you sat on the latrine, inside that tent that's in my pictures, it went down a hill. So, there could be people coming up that hill, they could see your backside. [both chuckles]

TS: And being the shy—

CB: Yes.

TS: —woman that you were. Not very comfortable. I see.

CB: And then we had an obstacle course that we had to do. That took up part of the day. Out in the field doing the—running through the obstacle course.

TS: Was anything about this training particularly difficult?

CB: No.

TS: Not physically or emotionally?

CB: No.

TS: Was it kind of fun?

CB: It was fun.

TS: It was fun? You enjoyed it?

CB: And then we did one—we learned to drill one day on the flat line[?].

TS: One day?

CB: One day.

TS: One day of drill?

CB: Yes.

TS: That's it?

CB: Then we had to do a drill session where we were actually supposed to be doing it right, and raised a flag.

TS: What do you mean by actually supposed to be doing it right?

CB: I mean, what can you learn in one day? [Therese chuckles] And I know we were standing at attention on the flat line and my cap, that little beret, fell off, the wind blew it off, and I reached down to pick it up and I got yelled at. That's the only time I got yelled at.

TS: Oh, what else were you—

CB: “You stay at attention! You don’t break formation!”

TS: Even if your hat comes off, right? Did you ever bend over again when—

CB: We never did it again.

TS: That’s right, you had the one day.

CB: Yes, and then you had to learn who to salute and who salutes you and all that stuff, and when to salute.

TS: Yes.

TS: So, the training. How many days did you say? It wasn’t very long.

CB: It was just two weeks.

TS: Two weeks, right, and what was it called again?

CB: OBMT/M. Officer Basic Military Training/Medical.

TS: Okay. So, you and Judy went through this together?

CB: Yes.

TS: And then you both got stationed—

CB: At Keesler Air Force Base

TS: Is that in some place that you requested too?

CB: Right. Out of the selections we had. We went in as buddies and we’re supposed to stay buddies and not have any other orders, which didn’t happen.

TS: Oh, it didn’t?

CB: We got orders after we'd been in twelve months to go to Taiwan.

TS: Both of you?

CB: Both of us.

TS: They were keeping you together.

CB: Yes. So, they lived up to that, but at the time we had met our future husbands and didn't want to leave the states. So, lo and behold we were actually able to find two other nurses that wanted to take our orders, and they let us swap so we didn't go. And now I could kick myself for not going.

TS: Really? Aw.

CB: But we did have orders to—MPK, I think, was the name of the air force base in Taiwan.

TS: Had you been married already?

CB: No.

TS: [unclear] How long have you been with your husband now?

CB: Thirty-nine years.

TS: That worked out pretty well.

CB: It did.

TS: Well, let's talk about Keesler. Now you've gone through this mini training and then you're going to your first base.

CB: Right.

TS: How was that? How was the experience of the real military; the real air force?

CB: To me, for the most part, it was just like being a nurse, because for the most part you were doing your nursing duties. I worked neurology/neurosurgery ward, and I had done

some of that in the ICU before we went in the military. Similar, because we got—we had three neurosurgeons who were wonderful. They were all three excellent neurosurgeons.

We were basically a regional medical center so we got in a lot of stuff that other places didn't take care of. We had a lot of spinal cord injury patients, and at the time they used a lot of different devices to turn patients.

TS: So, like, a Stryker bed?

CB: Stryker bed, circle electric bed, and a foster—

TS: What's a circle—

CB: Circle electric is one that turns them this way.

TS: That's circular?

CB: Yes.

TS: Okay.

CB: And the Stryker you turn them—

TS: You flip. You're flipping, right.

CB: Flip them.

TS: Then you said there's a third.

CB: Foster.

TS: What's the Foster bed?

CB: It's similar to the Stryker. It's just made a little different.

TS: Okay. How is that different from today?

CB: Today they use, for cervical, they use the Halo. Have you seen the Halo, where they put in bolts to keep your head straight; head and neck straight?

TS: Okay.

CB: But then they used the weights. They'd put tongs in your head.

TS: Tongs?

CB: Tongs. Like, tongs. Then it would be attached to the weight on the frame to keep you—

TS: I need a video for you. [chuckles] You're very good with your hands describing—

CB: To keep your neck straight.

TS: Okay. So, that's one way it's different.

CB: So, then you would turn them, and we would have a lot; a lot of young guys.

TS: Did you get any of the men from Vietnam?

CB: We were the—the war, or the POWs [prisoners of war] were released on the day I got married, January the twenty-seventh 1973, Nixon signed the—

TS: [unclear]

CB: Whatever it was saying that the POWs would be coming home.

TS: Okay.

CB: At Keesler we got some of the POWs that did not require a whole lot of medical attention. They required medical attention, but they didn't need critical care or anything like that. So, they took our intern quarters, because we had interns, and they did get red carpet.

TS: Did they?

CB: They got—probably not too many places because the returning veterans were not treated like they are now. How sad. But those POWs got the red carpet treatment there, and then we got to take care of some of them when they had to come back for some type of treatment or diagnosis.

TS: Do you remember any of them?

CB: Not by name but I know there was one that had been a POW for five or six years. I wish I could remember his name.

TS: Did you talk to him?

CB: Yes.

TS: How—Do you remember what he talked about his experience at all?

CB: No.

TS: You just talked to him about his care?

CB: Right.

TS: Did his family come and stay with him?

CB: I don't remember them because he was ambulatory, this particular one. Most of the ones we got in were ambulatory, and they were just there for processing and medical tests.

TS: And then they were—

CB: Then if they came back for reoccurring medical issues then we would have them as patients on our unit.

TS: So, most of the—Were—Most of the injuries that you had are military people, besides the POWs that came in? Or were they just car accidents and things like that?

CB: Right. We had dependents also—

TS: Oh, dependents.

CB: —that we took care of. At the time, it was all female dependents. I don't think we had any male dependents. The rest of them were active duty military. Some had been injured other places, some were local driving accidents; car accidents. We had one, in particular I remember, was an air force captain that had ejected in his jet at 5,000 feet and his parachute didn't open.

TS: He survived?

CB: He survived. He was still strapped to his seat.

TS: When he landed?

CB: When he landed. Of course, it fractured a few lower vertebrate and his jaw, because his knees came up to his jaw, but that was—and nobody could believe—

TS: That he survived?

CB: —that he survived. He shouldn't have survived.

TS: Did he recover okay?

CB: Physically, yes, well, he was paralyzed.

TS: He was paralyzed?

CB: He was para—yes, paraplegic.

TS: So, what was a typical day for you like at the hospital? What kind of hours did you work? Did you go to the chow hall? What kind of things? Did you live on base or off base?

CB: I lived off base in an apartment. My buddy and I had a two bedroom townhouse not too far from the base.

TS: That's Judy?

CB: That's Judy. We were five minutes from work, so we would—most of the time we worked days, like, eight to four-thirty. Sometimes we would do other shifts; night shift, evening shift. Of course, we worked weekends and you were always on call because you're military. You're at their service.

TS: Did you get called in frequently at all?

CB: Not too often, no.

TS: Something happened maybe?

CB: Not too often. And when you had to go on leave you were supposed to sign out in person.

TS: Supposed to?

CB: Supposed to sign out in person because your leave counted the weekends. So, if you went on a fourteen day leave they also counted the weekends. Unless you had somebody sign you out, say, on a Friday—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So you could—

CB: You'd leave on a Friday and then somebody else signs you out on a Sunday so that you don't count those two days.

TS: Did you do that Cheryl?

CB: I did.

TS: [chuckling] Okay. Well, you want to save your days, don't you?

CB: Yes you do, because we didn't see the sense in that. I almost did that when I got married. I was going to do that. It was probably good that I had the flu. I got the flu and couldn't leave when I was going to, because they called me to come back to work.

TS: Why was it good that you didn't—

CB: Well, because I probably would've gotten in trouble.

TS: Oh. [chuckles] They would have caught on to you.

CB: They would have caught it. They would have caught me. But, I couldn't leave when I was supposed to, or had planned to because I was too sick.

TS: Well, did you have—was there anything particular that you really enjoyed about you being in the air force and being a nurse in the air force?

CB: We had—It was a very good learning experience. It was very good medicine.

TS: Good medicine?

CB: Good medicine. We had a good staff. The doctors and nurses. It was a good staff, and you learned.

TS: Was it mostly learning, like, on the job or did you do other kind of training?

CB: There was other training.

TS: Other training, too, that you did?

CB: Medical type training.

TS: Just to, kind of, keep up with what was current?

CB: Yes. And then there was a lot of opportunities.

TS: Like, what kind of opportunities?

CB: If I had stayed in I probably might have—nurse manager thought I should go to flight school.

TS: What's that?

CB: Flight school.

TS: Oh, flight school.

CB: Be a flight nurse. Medi-vac.

TS: Oh, okay. That's adventurous.

CB: Yes. That may be why I didn't. [both chuckle]

TS: She wanted to do it while you were there, too.

CB: Yes.

TS: Not—There weren't that many that got to do the flight nurse. But she would have recommended it?

CB: Yes.

TS: That's really neat. Did you go on any temporary duty assignments?

CB: I did not. Stayed at Keesler.

TS: Was there anything in particular that you did not care for in the military?

CB: There were certain things that you had to do as an officer, and since I had married an enlisted person he couldn't come if it was in the officer's club. We had—we would have mandatory—I remember a Christmas party was mandatory for all officers to go, but if your spouse was enlisted they couldn't come into the officer's club, so I couldn't bring him.

TS: What did you think about that?

CB: I didn't think it was fair, but that was the military, and now I couldn't marry him anyway because it'd be fraternization and I'd be kicked out. So, we had to dress in our mess[?] dress.

TS: You dress in your mess dress for the party.

CB: Party. You know, everybody's dressed alike in their mess dress.

TS: That's right.

CB: They were nice get-togethers, I just couldn't bring my husband.

TS: Was there anything else that irritated you about the military? Like, did you have a lot of rules or things that, you know, when you think some people—

CB: Oh, yes, there were a lot of rules. There were a couple—I got to where I, you know, if I thought it was not a good rule that I would try to break them.

TS: Really? For example?

CB: I mean little things.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: [unclear] Give me a tiny, insignificant—

CB: One thing was wearing earrings. We couldn't wear earrings.

TS: At all?

CB: No. And that was left over from when I graduated from nursing school. We couldn't if we had pierced ears.

TS: Is that, like, a hygiene sort of thing for—

CB: Hygiene and the only ring you could wear was a wedding ring. You couldn't wear any jewelry, of course you couldn't have—you weren't supposed to have long finger nails, nail polish, but you couldn't wear in the military, then, you couldn't wear your earrings. So, I kept wearing mine and my captain—in the pictures you see Major Anderson, this was a Captain Casterline[?], she was my first nurse manager, kept telling me to not wear my earrings. I kept wearing them and she finally told me, she said they are going to discipline her if I didn't take my earrings out. Plus, discipline me so I said, "Well, I guess I'll take my earrings out."

TS: So, that guilt kind of worked.

CB: Yes, it did. Yes, because they were going to do something to her because she wasn't managing her people right. She was a nice lady, so I took them out. Then, not too long before I got out, I was over the weight limit. There's a weight limit. I was four pounds over the weight limit. Now, I'm about seventy or eighty, but then I was four and you had a weigh in; you had to go to weigh ins. Well, I was getting out. This was just a few weeks before I was due to be discharged, and I didn't see the point in going to the weigh-ins

because I was being discharged. They finally called me up and said, “You’re not going to be discharged if you don’t weigh in.” Well, I had lost the weight. I was now under the weight limit, but I didn’t see the point.

TS: You went and got weighed?

CB: I went and got weighed and everything was fine, but they said, “You’re not going to get discharged if you don’t come weigh in.”

TS: Did they have the annual tests that you do for the physical training?

CB: No, we did not have to do that.

TS: You didn’t?

CB: No.

TS: Did you have to ever do, like, revelry or formation?

CB: No, nothing.

TS: The only time you had to do the drill was in that auditorium?

CB: Right. In the flight line.

TS: On the flight line? That’s it, huh?

CB: That’s it.

TS: Alright. What kind of things did you do on your off time at Keesler?

CB: Well, there was not nice beaches close in Biloxi, but we would go to Dolphin Island to the beach. Go to Pensacola, go to New Orleans.

TS: How was that?

CB: It was nice. I didn’t like the—it smells.

TS: It smells?

CB: Around the—

TS: French Quarter?

CB: —French Quarter, yes, where Pat O'Brien's and different places are. It smelled, and it still smells because I've been recently.

TS: Oh yes? [chuckles]

CB: It still smells. But it was fascinating. A different kind of place. I had a boyfriend that took me to, I guess it was probably my first trip to New Orleans. It was before I met my husband, and he thought I needed to experience some of the—what New Orleans had to offer. So, he took me into this place where the women were coming out on the trapeze bars, naked.

TS: Oh my. He took you into there?!

CB: Then when we went in—he thought it was a hoot.

TS: I bet he did.

CB: Because he knew I was shy, too. We went into one of the little bar areas and there was a lady dancing with tassels on. And I don't know that I needed that experience, but anyway, I had that experience in New Orleans.

TS: Did you date him very long?

CB: No, about three months, maybe, then I made him mad.

TS: Did you get to go—

CB: Then we went fishing. I like to fish. We fished and biked.

TS: And biked? So, you had some kind of recreation. Did you ever do any—did the military ever put together any kind of packages to do, like, to go on tours or go—

CB: Not that I recall. They may have, but I don't remember it.

TS: You didn't have anything like that? Well, how did you feel like you were being treated then, like, at work by your supervisors and things like that?

CB: Very well.

TS: Yes? Did you get along pretty well with everybody?

CB: Yes. It was a different culture.

TS: In what way?

CB: Being medical, I think, —

TS: Okay, then what?

CB: —because we had to do our medical jobs, so that was primary.

TS: Compared to what though, I mean, how—

CB: Compared to being, probably, in another area of the military.

TS: Because it's like a profession that you're doing.

CB: Right. You're doing your job; your medical profession.

TS: You have those rules you're following as well as—

CB: Right. Right.

TS: —maybe that supersedes some of the military?

CB: More or else, because we probably only had two weeks of basic training.

TS: When you signed up did you have a time frame that you signed up for originally? You might have told me, I don't remember.

CB: Two year commitment.

TS: Two years, okay. So, you got along really well with your supervisors. Did you—How about, you know, the idea of sexual harassment or anything. Did you ever experience anything like that?

CB: No, not harassment, no. I had a lot of guys that might hit on me, but—

TS: Flirting?

CB: Flirting.

TS: That wasn't—you didn't—

CB: But not the harassment part, no.

TS: No? Was that something that happened when you were in at all? I mean, to like other women that you knew?

CB: I did not know about it if it happened, but I know it does and probably did. See, I worked for the VA after I got out of the military, so I was able to see and talk to some of them that were victims of sexual harassment.

TS: What time frame was that?

CB: At the VA?

TS: Yes.

CB: From, got out of the military in '73, '74, 5, 6, 1976 till 2007.

TS: Oh, you worked there for quite a while.

CB: Yes.

TS: Was it as a nurse?

CB: As a nurse.

TS: Okay, well, we'll talk about that in a little bit then. I want to ask you something about that. So, did you feel like—you were promoted while you were in.

CB: To first lieutenant. That's pretty automatic.

TS: Okay, but you still have to get the recommendation for it.

CB: Right, after a certain time frame you went from second lieuty to first lieutenant.

TS: How did that feel to get a—

CB: Well, that's better than being a second lieutenant.

TS: The better hours[?] and—

CB: Yes. Yes. And if I had stayed in I was due to be capt.[captain] and I was going to stay in. Should have. Toyed with the idea of staying in till my husband got out. I would have been captain.

TS: What would have enticed you to stay in, do you think? Anything in particular?

CB: To make sure I stayed on there.

TS: Not getting the orders to Thailand, or Taiwan, I mean?

CB: Yes, which I probably couldn't have gotten out of again. If I had reupped for a year and a half it wasn't a guarantee that I could have stayed at that base. They tried to send couples together, but it didn't always work out, so I was kind of leery of signing up.

TS: Did you have anybody in the military who, kind of, mentored you in your job at all; helped you along?

CB: My nurse managers were good. I had to nurse managers.

TS: What kind of things did they do to help you?

CB: Well, we had training on the types of patients we were seeing; the neurosurgery patients.

TS: Was one of them one of the ones who recommended you for the flight nurse training?

CB: No, that was higher up.

TS: Higher up.

CB: That was, like, the chief nurse.

TS: Overall do you feel like you were treated pretty well?

CB: I do, yes. And then we had, before I got out, we had a male chief nurse which was kind of unusual for the time. There weren't that many males nurses in the seventies.

TS: And how was he treated?

CB: I think he was treated well. He was a colonel, Colonel Swansburg[?], and he had written a book, a nursing book. He had the credentials.

TS: But nobody thought it was out of place to have a male head nurse or anything like that?

CB: Well, we talked about it, but he was well respected.

TS: He was? So, at first you were kind of like, what? What is this? Why is a male—

CB: A man chief nurse, because in my graduating class we had one male nurse and was a—he had been discharged from the navy and pretty much had the training, but then you couldn't do it in civilian life.

TS: Why?

CB: Because they don't give you the degree.

TS: Oh, I see.

CB: That's like my husband, when he got out of the military. He did everything an RN did but he didn't have the training.

TS: The certificates?

CB: In fact, he did some things that I didn't do. So, he ended up going to PA school to be a physician's assistant.

TS: Oh, okay. So, while you're in—you're in the seventies. What did you think about some of the presidents, say, Nixon or Johnson that were in?

CB: Nixon was sorry, as it turned out.

TS: Did you think that at the time?

CB: I did. I didn't like him.

TS: No? Why not?

CB: Number one, he was a Republican.

TS: Okay.

CB: Not that I—I do vote either party, but I just didn't like his philosophy and I thought he was sleazy.

TS: How about Johnson?

CB: Johnson was—was he still in in the seventies or he was—

TS: Sixties.

CB: —sixties. I wasn't too sure about him because I liked Kennedy much better. He was not Kennedy, he was not JFK.

TS: Right. Kind of hard to follow up in those shoes.

CB: Yes.

TS: Did you have any heroines or heroes that you looked up to?

CB: I can't think of any right off hand. I'm sure I did, but I can't think of any.

TS: Any kind of movie stars, like, you know how in today's world celebrities are usually up there, they rank up there, but—

CB: No. I don't remember doing that.

TS: Nothing like that?

CB: No.

TS: When did you meet your husband?

CB: The first week that I was at Keesler. We were on the same unit.

TS: The first week?

CB: Yes.

TS: Did you date him right away?

CB: No. It was several months.

TS: After that trip to New Orleans with the other fellow.

CB: Yes.

TS: Okay, and so you said at that time you could do fraternization.

CB: It was still a no-no, but at our base nobody said anything about female officers and a male enlistee.

TS: So, did—when—did he ask you out?

CB: He just—Initially, it was just friends. He'd bring a pizza over after we got off from work. We worked some evening shifts.

TS: Did you work together?

CB: Yes.

TS: Same kind of shift?

CB: Yes.

TS: And so, how long did you—did you marry him while you were in the air force.

CB: I did.

TS: Okay.

CB: We married in January of '73, and I got out in September of '73.

TS: Now, would you have—do you think you would've stayed in if you hadn't gotten those orders, or if something—you've mentioned a couple of times you think you might have liked to have stayed in.

CB: I might have if I hadn't gotten married. I may have stayed in.

TS: Were you enjoying your time in the service?

CB: I was, yes.

TS: Did you get to have the adventure that you were hoping to have?

CB: I think so, and if I had stayed in I probably would have gotten more adventure because it was, like I said, very diverse group of people and you get to—

TS: Well, yes, talk about that a little bit, you know, how—like, the pictures we went through. We did that before we turned the tape on.

CB: It's just a hodge-podge of people from different areas of the country. Different cultures, different race, all working together. It seemed to work well together. And then, for those who had been in longer and been to different bases, you just know people all over the world. It would have been fascinating to stay in and do that. I couldn't have done that in the beginning, but I could have done that later.

TS: Because?

CB: Just too shy. I wanted something, as we talked about, safe.

TS: Right.

CB: Not too adventuresome. Just a little adventure.

TS: But those doors were opening.

CB: Yes, where I felt more comfortable.

TS: Did you consider—Do you—When you went into the air force, did you consider yourself an independent, even though your shy, did you consider an independent person?

CB: Yes, I make my own decisions.

TS: Okay, and so, do you think that a lot of people in the military are like that?

CB: Yes, very.

TS: Sometimes people have a, you know, a misconception perhaps about what you do in the military as far as being innovative and making your own decision and things like that.

CB: Now see, I was in the medical which could be different, but they would listen to your ideas no matter what your rank. Although, I'm sure you've heard, rank has its privileges. Which is true.

TS: Yes? In what way? How did you see that?

CB: Well, the further up you go the more authority you have. More responsibilities; more training.

TS: Where does the privileges come in?

CB: From the rank, because you have—you're supervising the lower ranks, so there is a tier system. But in our group we still worked together. It was like, in the pictures you saw of the party at my apartment. I mean, everybody came.

TS: No matter—whatever rank?

CB: Majors, sergeants, airmen; they were all there for a get together.

TS: So, you kind of work as a team in some sense?

CB: Yes. And that reminds me, the Colonel Swansbury[?], the book he did was on team nursing.

TS: Oh, is that right?

CB: Yes.

TS: Do you think that—Why did you decide, then, to actually get out of the air force? At what point?

CB: Because I was unsure if I could stay at the same base with my husband. And then his plans were to get out when his four years were up.

TS: And were they coming—were your times to get out coming up around the same time?

CB: He was almost two years; two more years.

TS: He had two more years?

CB: Not quite two, about twenty months maybe. Something like that.

TS: So, when you did get out, you had told me before that, you pretty much had the same job?

CB: I did. I went one day—September the eleventh was my discharge date, September the twelfth I reported for duty as a civilian RN, and I just had to change my clothes; different clothes.

TS: Were you paid the same?

CB: Pay was less.

TS: Now, how—why was it less?

CB: Some of your military money is non-taxable, and you get housing assistance, and there was something else. Anyway, some of that is not taxable so then when you throw in taxing your whole salary in there, it made the pay less.

TS: I see.

CB: So, I took a hundred dollar a month pay cut, which was a lot in 1973. I didn't realize it would be that much.

TS: You didn't, at the time?

CB: No.

TS: Were you kicking yourself just a little bit?

CB: Yes. Doing the same job and making less.

TS: So, it was like you had your BAQ [basic allowance for quarters] and your B—then your food, right, too? Your quarters and then your food, so that's a different—differential pay that you got?

CB: Yes.

TS: But your husband was still in, right?

CB: Right.

TS: So, he was still getting part of that.

CB: But he was on sergeants pay, which was less than lieutenants pay.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Was he still making—oh, okay. Less than you made as a civilian, too?

CB: Right.

TS: Was—Did you have any, like, adjustment that you had to make from working in the military as a civilian. Was there any kind of—

CB: No.

TS: Just the same? It was pretty much the same job?

CB: Same job.

TS: Do you think that when you look back at your time and how the military has changed and the type of things women can do today in the military that they couldn't necessarily do then, are you surprised by that at all?

CB: Not now, I'm not surprised. Then I would have been shocked to think that females could do what—basically anything.

TS: Like jets pilots and—

CB: Yes. You couldn't do that then.

TS: Do you think that there's anything that women should not be able to do in the military?

CB: If they're physically capable they should be able to do anything, as long as they're physically capable.

TS: So, even, like, combat?

CB: Sure.

TS: How about the—over the last year one of the big controversies has been the repeal of the “Don't Ask, Don't Tell.” Do you have any thoughts on that; the gays in the military?

CB: We had gays in our hospital, but they didn't say it openly. But you knew.

TS: How did you know?

CB: Well, they never dated females and they had the stereotypical mannerisms and nobody thought anything about it.

TS: Did anybody talk about it?

CB: They would make comments, but probably sometimes in the negative way. But everybody did their job no matter what. And as long as they don't harass anybody I don't see any reason why they can't be open.

TS: How about for women? Were there any lesbians that you were aware of?

CB: I didn't personally know of any. It was gays. I know one of our—we were sure as we could be without him telling us, that one of our neurosurgeons was gay.

TS: Oh, yes?

CB: We just kind of thought he was.

TS: But you didn't know for sure?

CB: Didn't know for sure because you couldn't—

TS: Nobody talked about it openly at that time?

CB: No.

TS: Do you think the repeal of this "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was a good thing?

CB: I think so. Because there's all sorts of sexual harassment it shouldn't be either way, whether it's homosexual harassment or heterosexual. It shouldn't occur.

TS: Now, have you been able to—did you use any of your benefits? Your GI—

CB: I did. I got my masters with my GI Bill benefits.

TS: Where did you go for that?

CB: UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro].

TS: Oh, nice. So, what did you get your masters in?

CB: In nursing. I got a Master of Science in Nursing.

TS: What year?

CB: Eighty-one. Graduated in '81, I went part-time. I started in '78, I think.

TS: How did you enjoy going to—so, did you stay—you wouldn't have stayed on campus because you were married.

CB: No, I commuted from Salisbury.

TS: How long of a commute is that?

CB: It took about an hour and fifteen minutes.

TS: Yes, that's long. How many days—

CB: [unclear] was kind of tiring. Some weeks it was three, other weeks it was two.

TS: Had you had children by then?

CB: I did. I had one when I started and then had a second one midway.

TS: Oh, really?

CB: So, it was tiring, and sometimes I would go over there after working a night shift and that was not good.

TS: How did you stay awake?

CB: Some days I don't know how I got there. [Therese chuckles] That was scary.

TS: Or how you got back?

CB: I'd show up to the parking lot and say, "You know, I don't even remember driving up the road."

TS: Oh no.

CB: That was scary.

TS: Yes, that is a little scary. So, how did you like—how did you like your classes at UNCG since you [unclear].

CB: I liked them. It was enjoyable.

TS: Did you have any instructors—

CB: Until the last semester.

TS: Except for the—

CB: I was just tired.

TS: You were so tired?

CB: Tired. Tired. Tired. If it hadn't been the last semester I guess I would have quit.

TS: Really?

CB: Because it was just overwhelming. That's a waste. Yes, but I said, "Oh, this is the last step. I don't know that I can make it." [both chuckle]

TS: Well, did you have any teachers or instructors that you enjoyed to work with?

CB: I had one, well, more than one, but one and I can't remember her name.

TS: That's okay. You might remember.

CB: She was my—my brain doesn't function as well as it used to. She was helping me with my thesis. So, she was my, whatever you call it.

TS: Advisor?

CB: Advisor. For my thesis. She was very helpful.

TS: Why did you pick to go to UNCG?

CB: It was the closest program that I could commute to for a masters.

TS: How did it work for your GI Bill, then? Did it pay for everything or part?

CB: It paid for tuition and books.

TS: Tuition and books?

CB: Yes.

TS: A good portion of it.

CB: And I believe there might have been a little extra stipend. I can't—that's been—

TS: Like a monthly stipend that you got?

CB: —twenty-something years ago.

TS: Yes, it seems like yesterday, though, doesn't it?

CB: Yes. Except for my memory.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Nineteen-eighty-one.

CB: And I worked part time so I just—I had thought I was going to finish in one to two years, and the pregnancy messed that up. Because my son was born the second or third week of the fall semester, and therefore I couldn't get the fall classes, couldn't take the spring classes because you had to have the fall class first. So, there was a year that I basically just worked on my thesis.

TS: I see, so you had to wait.

CB: Fiddle with my thesis.

TS: And, so then you—

CB: I had to wait till the next fall—

TS: To get the classes.

CB: —to get the classes.

TS: I got it. Now, were you working at the VA at this time?

CB: Yes.

TS: Well, do you mind if I ask you a little bit, when you talked about the women who had maybe been sexually assaulted or anything like that, did you—is there anyone in particular that was memorable to you; an experience that they talked about?

CB: No.

TS: Were you surprised at all by the—I mean, were they assaulted by other men in the military or outside the military?

CB: Military.

TS: Military. On the job or—

CB: I don't remember specifics.

TS: Because something—

CB: Because that was one of the questions we had to ask.

TS: Oh, you did, specific—

CB: We had, what you call, clinical reminders. One of them was military sexual harassment—military sexual trauma, MST. Initially when it came out [unclear] reminder[?] when we went all electronic with the record. Then they would let the RNs ask those questions. Then they decided it was too personal, and maybe the providers, the doctors, or the PAs, should ask that question.

TS: I was going to say, what kind of treatment did, I mean, if you ask—

CB: We had psychological treatment available for them if they needed it. And we had us guys and girls.

TS: Did you come across any post-traumatic stress disorder from men and women?

CB: Oh yes. Yes.

TS: Any of those memorable to you at all, like, a particular case?

CB: No.

TS: Not a person, I don't—

CB: No.

TS: But was there a significant amount of them?

CB: I didn't think—Well, the ones that I came across I didn't think it was significant, but I'm sure if you—

TS: Look at the picture?

CB: Yes, broader picture, there were.

TS: Were they Vietnam veterans?

CB: We were asking all, World War II on. And you would hear stories of World War II when gays would sexually harass a heterosexual male or something. I remember a couple of times they'd talk about that, but what they would do then is beat them up.

TS: Beat up the gay men?

CB: Yes, if they came on to them.

TS: I see. That's what some of the World War II vets were talking about?

CB: Yes. They'd just beat them, so therefore, that stopped it.

TS: So, what did you think about that?

CB: Well, in that time period you weren't going to get anywhere by coming forward with the information, or the incident.

TS: You mean if you were the gay man that got beat up, sort of thing?

CB: No, if were the guy that was—

TS: Getting hit on?

CB: Yes.

TS: Oh, you weren't going to—

CB: Or harassed.

TS: I see. Interesting.

CB: Or assaulted.

TS: right.

CB: Yes, you just beat them up.

TS: Did you use your benefits in any other way. Did you, like—well, you and your husband, did you buy a house with—

CB: No.

TS: No? You didn't use that?

CB: It was better for us to not.

TS: Really? Why?

CB: We looked into it, but we could go a conventional loan which was better.

TS: And get a better deal?

CB: Yes.

TS: Better rate and everything?

CB: At the time. And he went to PA school on his GI Bill.

TS: Oh, he did?

CB: Yes.

TS: Do you know if your friend Judy ever used anything?

CB: She had to because she got her masters at Emory [University].

TS: You said she's in Atlanta still?

CB: Still in Atlanta.

TS: Do you think that your life has been any different because you did go into the air force?

CB: I think it broadened my outlook on issues.

TS: Like what?

CB: Like what? Like working with the different races and cultures was just fascinating to me, and those who aren't—don't ever break out of the box and know other people and other races and other cultures. You're missing out on a lot.

TS: What do you think they're missing out on?

CB: Well, you learn from each other.

TS: What kind of lessons?

CB: You're getting deep.

TS: Yes. Why not?

CB: You just learn how we're all the human race, but we're all brought up with different values and what we come in contact with culturally is just fascinating. And one race is not better than another race, so you learn that fact.

TS: So, you as a young girl, you know, you went in. You're shy, you're not quite sure you want to do this or what it's going to be all about, but you want something a little different.

CB: Right.

TS: Was it what you expected?

CB: It was better than what I expected.

TS: Is that right?

CB: Yes. I think so. The experience was so much better. I didn't totally know what to expect or how being an officer and how you had to act as an officer; how that would be.

TS: Can you put your finger on what made it better?

CB: Going back to we were medical, so I always thought we were playing at being military.

TS: [chuckles] So, you didn't have to go through as much of that military.

CB: When we were in the hospital we were medical, we were nurses. When we went outside and changed our caps, which we did, we had to put a little beret on—

TS: Okay.

CB: —then you were an officer when you were outside, and you had to act more like an officer, like, the saluting part for one thing.

TS: No saluting in the hospital.

CB: No. No saluting in the hospital. You're there to do a job. So, when you go out and you put your cap on, then you have to be aware of who you're passing.

TS: Did you forget sometimes?

CB: I'm sure I did. Especially people I knew and worked with. We just kind of laughed and go—you know, not really do the—

TS: The salute.

CB: The salute.

TS: That's a nice salute. Nice. Nice. Nice one. So, would you recommend the military service for—

CB: I would. Yes.

TS: —young men and women today? Have any of your children ever thought about it?

CB: No. They're not—

TS: Because both of you, both you and your husband, were in the air force. That's not anything they've been interested in?

CB: No, neither one of them.

TS: Did you ever consider yourself a pioneer for the time frame that you were in, because there weren't that many women in the military when you went in.

CB: No, most of them were either in secretarial types jobs, probably, office. And then the medical. They were really recruiting women more, I think in that time period, for medical because they needed nurses.

TS: Because of the Vietnam era?

CB: Right.

TS: Well, did you—is there anything in particular that you would want a civilian to know or understand that you don't think they understand about the military service or military life? Even in the time period that you were in?

CB: I think now—In the Vietnam War there was too much negativity about the soldiers and it was not their war. Now, I think the public and civilians know that it's the commander in chief who sends them to war. They had nothing to do with Vietnam. They just went because they were told. And they weren't really—

TS: Did you see any of that bad treatment that happened?

CB: Just mostly on the news.

TS: I see.

CB: Not on our base, but when they came back there was just too much negativity in the civilian world.

TS: Directed at—

CB: And they weren't given their tickertape parades and red carpet treatment, except our POWs.

TS: Right, so they weren't—the regular soldier wasn't treated well upon their return.

CB: No, it was like they were imposing the government's issue onto the veterans.

TS: What does patriotism mean to you?

CB: Ask not what you can do for—what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. We're here to do for our country. I really believe that. It's a good speech by JFK.

TS: [chuckles] You repeat it very well.

CB: Yes. The government should just not do everything for us. We've got to be out there being proud of our country, and doing the best we can for our country. Not the other way around.

TS: If you had to do it all over again?

CB: I would do it and stay in.

TS: Would you?

CB: I would

TS: Do you think you would have made it a career?

CB: Thinking back I would have. It would have been a good career. A lot of opportunities.

TS: And then you would have had that travel, right?

CB: Right. I would have been able to travel as I got older.

TS: Well, I don't have any more questions unless there's something you want to add that we haven't talked about.

CB: Can't think of anything. The memory's going.

TS: No, you're doing great on your memory. Don't worry about that. Well Cheryl, thank you for letting us in your home and talking to us today.

CB: You're welcome.

TS: I really appreciate it.

CB: Thank you.

[End of Interview]