

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

INTERVIEWEE: Maribeth Snyder Peters

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: March 14, 2012

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is March 14, 2012. This is Therese Strohmer. I'm at the home of Becky Peters in Advance, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Becky, could you state your name the way that you'd like it to read on your collection?

MP: I'd like it to read as Maribeth Snyder Peters.

TS: Okay. Well, Becky, why don't you start out and tell me a little bit about when and where you were born.

MP: I was born in Troy, New York. It's a small city a little bit north of Albany, about 150 miles straight north of New York City, and had a wonderful growing up time.

TS: When were you born?

MP: I was born June 7, 1947, and spent all my growing up time in Troy; we never moved. When I left home to get married my father was still living in the same house that I had grown up in. I have two sisters; one older, one younger.

TS: What are their names?

MP: Louise is about six years older than I am, and she lives in Chicago now, and Joann, or Joannie, is one year younger and we're very, very close. She actually lives in Chapel Hill now and works for the university.

TS: Oh, she's not too far from you.

MP: Not far at all.

TS: That's good. Now what did your folks do growing up?

MP: My mom was a stay-at-home mom, and she was just like June on *Leave it to Beaver*. I mean, she wore the dress and the heels and the pearls and the whole deal.

TS: Really?

MP: People look at that and say, “That wasn’t real.” And I think, “Oh, yes it was. My mom did that.” My father was the editor of our town newspaper—city newspaper. Life changed for us when I was thirteen; my mom died, but my dad was amazing. We certainly noticed the difference, and missed my mom something fierce, but he was amazing. He made up for it. He also made, especially in my younger sister and I because my older sister was already in college when Mom died, but he instilled in us a can-do—I mean, he would always say, “Of course you can do it,” and that’s what I grew up thinking; of course I can do it. Whatever you decide to do, you have to sit down, you have to figure it out, but you can make it happen. That’s how I have lived life.

TS: Did you—What was it like growing up in Troy? What kind of—Was it a very large city at the time?

MP: Oh, no, no. Troy is a small city. I think it’s got about maybe 40,000 people. It’s in the foothills of the Adirondacks, it’s cold in winter, lots of snow. Not this year, but lots of snow most years.

TS: Right. It’s a mild year.

MP: It was a very safe place to grow up. You could go about anywhere and not worry about things. You made friends, and many people stay in Troy forever. I still have friends back there that I grew up with and they’re still there. Troy is a good place to grow up.

TS: What kind of things did you do for fun as a little girl?

MP: Well, we spent all our summers in Cape Cod, so I loved swimming and sailing, that sort of thing. In the wintertime my dad, when we were smaller, would make a huge ice rink in our backyard. When we got older we could skate in the creek and pond across the street, but when we were younger Mom wanted us to stay closer to home. We had a large hill in our backyard and so we always made trails for saucers. And we made them—we thought we were making them, like, as though they were Olympic trails, you know, you could come down and we had banked edges and all like that.

TS: Like a bobsled, kind of?

MP: That’s exactly what we thought. So, we did a lot of outside time, a huge amount of outside time. Dad was not into sports but he was into exercise, so every Sunday we went out walking and walked several miles. You know, we just did a lot of things at home. It was fun.

TS: That's neat. Did you have a lot of friends that would come over and do it, or did you mostly stay with your sisters?

MP: No, we had friends in the neighborhood, and then friends from school who—we went to their house, they came to our house, so people were in and out regularly.

TS: When you talk about school, what school did you go to as a young girl?

MP: I went to Sacred Heart School, a Catholic elementary school, and then I went to Catholic Central High School in Troy, and graduated from there for high school.

TS: In elementary school, when you were growing up, did you have like a favorite subject or favorite teacher, anything like that?

MP: No, it was different from what you see. We didn't change classes at all like that, and it was nuns. Nuns are a bit different, and so, I can't tell you I had a favorite one. Remember, if you've read anything about Catholic schools and that sort of thing, corporal punishment was very real. You got whacked on your knuckles if you talked out of turn or anything like that. I learned really well, you know, I think I got a really good education. But I can't say that there was one person that I stayed close to because with the nuns they'd get transferred. So, it wasn't like a teacher who lived in your neighborhood and you got to know them and knew them even when you were grown up.

TS: Did you get your knuckles rapped?

MP: Not very often.

TS: Not very often.

MP: My older sister did. [both chuckle]

TS: Is that right?

MP: Oh, yes! I had to carry the notes home. She was in eighth grade when I was in second, maybe, first, first, maybe. I regularly carried the notes home because she—they got lost if she [unclear] home.

TS: They didn't think they'd make it home if they gave them to her.

MP: They *knew* that they wouldn't make it home.

TS: So, growing up did you have a sense of, like, you had stated earlier how your father said you could do anything.

MP: Yes.

- TS: Did you have an idea of what possibilities there were for you for your future?
- MP: Well, my mom was a nurse, and I just—from the time I was little I wanted to be a nurse. I knew—and my plan was to go where she had gone to school, to Saint Mary's Hospital, and get a diploma. By the time I got into high school my mom had already died, and that was the one thing my dad said was, and he read voraciously, and said, "No, I think you need to get a baccalaureate. I don't think you need to get a diploma." And so, you know, I graduated from college in '69 and diploma nurses made up the absolute minority of nursing graduates. And so for Dad to have said that, he really was a fore-thinker, a future thinker, you know. But he said, "No, you have to get a baccalaureate."
- TS: Why was that? Why was that change happening with wanting—nurses more wanting to get the baccalaureate?
- MP: I don't think nurses were more wanting to get the baccalaureate. I mean, educators felt like it was the way to go for a true profession, to move beyond a service-oriented education to a truly education-oriented education. Nurses in a diploma program are very service-oriented. You might have to work all night long and then go to class during the day.
- Thirty-five years ago when we lived in Charlotte, [North Carolina], I was charge nurse of the ICU down there at Presbyterian Hospital, and they had their diploma program still at that time. It wasn't unusual at all to have the surgical unit that was right beside my intensive care unit have, during the evening shift which is what I worked, having a senior student being the charge nurse there and I was her backup. If she ran into problems she came to me. So a diploma education is very service-oriented, and the change was already in the wind, you know.
- There was a 1965 resolution that came out from the ANA [American Nurses Association], I think, that by a date that has long since passed, that there would be no further diploma education; it would all be baccalaureate. Well that didn't happen, but my father had read about that by that time, and I started college in '65. He had read about it in '64, '65, and that's when he was saying, "The future says baccalaureate, you really need to get a baccalaureate."
- TS: I see. So, when you say the diploma one is more service-oriented, what do you mean? What's the difference between?
- MP: When I say service-oriented, they worked. They put in many hours of working that was not associated with their education. Now, it made them quicker and faster. You take a diploma graduate and a baccalaureate graduate, and for the first couple of months it will look like the diploma graduate could work circles around the baccalaureate graduate because baccalaureate graduate has a certain number of hours in the clinical area. You may not be the most proficient bath-giver, bed, you know, all that kind of thing when you graduate from a baccalaureate program. Whereas, when you looked at a diploma nurse, they were going to school during the day, they were working evenings or nights in a unit. They knew what they were doing as far as the hands-on work was concerned. They may not have had the background as to why they were doing some of these things, but they

had a huge amount of clinical service hours. They actually—that's why the cost was so low in most diploma programs, because they got a huge amount of work out of those girls. And it was mostly girls back then.

TS: Right, okay. So, you had—did you have a—after your mother died did you still feel like that was something really strong that you wanted to do, still be a nurse?

MP: Yes. Yes.

TS: You never wavered from that?

MP: No, I wanted to do that.

TS: Just wanted to be a nurse?

MP: And, you know, she had never worked as a nurse while I was alive. She had already retired from nursing by that time, but she talked a lot about it and I was really interested in it. I knew that's what I wanted to do.

TS: Did she do any nursing during the war, at all?

MP: No. My older sister was born in 1941, and so she was already a homemaker by that time.

TS: I see. Okay. Had your father been in the service at all?

MP: No, he was not and that was always something that was upsetting to him. My father had very, very, poor eyesight, and he was rejected 4F [refers to military draftees rejected for being physically unfit].

TS: I see. He had wanted to join, but—

MP: Well, he said—for those of us who weren't alive in 1941 though '45, I don't think we have never experienced like the country experienced at that time. He said you just knew it was your duty to go. He said, you know, "Somebody going to Canada? No way!" Because at that point they really believed if we lost the war, our country as we knew it was going to cease to exist. Whereas, when you think about the Korean War, or Korean conflict, Vietnam, even Afghanistan, Iraq, if we lose in those areas,—we certainly didn't win in Vietnam—how did our life change back here? It didn't. But in World War II, I believe, from listening to my parents and their friends, that people truly believed, and probably rightly so, that if the U.S. had lost the war, the United States as we knew it was not going to maintain itself. And so, yes, everybody believed you have to be out there. My father became a spotter after that. He said he spent more time during the war on our back hill watching the sky, but he was 4F to go in.

TS: So he felt like with that spotting that he was participating in the—

MP: Oh, yes. It was funny because they talk about they still wanted to go on vacation to Cape Cod, but remember, all the gas and everything was rationed. During the whole year my father walked to and from work. My mother walked to and from the grocery store, and they saved their gas ration ticket so they could get to Cape Cod in the summertime.

TS: That's a good plan, I think. That's a real good plan.

MP: Yes.

TS: Tell me a little bit, so, you're—you went to a Catholic high school?

MP: I did.

TS: So, actually, JFK [President John Fitzgerald Kennedy] would have been assassinated while you were in high school.

MP: That's correct. I was a sophomore in high school.

TS: How did that affect you?

MP: Huge. I mean, huge. I can remember when—I was in eighth grade when [President Richard Milhous] Nixon and Kennedy were running against each other, and it was really funny because my father was for Nixon and my mother was for Kennedy. The reason she gave that she was for Kennedy was because he was so cute, and my father kept saying, "Betty, you don't vote for somebody because he's cute." But we got interested in politics and listening to them talk during that time. Also, in eighth grade we had mock elections. In a Catholic grade school who do you think won? I mean, come on. [chuckles]

TS: Did anybody vote for Nixon?

MP: I don't think so. But anyway, we really got into the politics of things and I had an aunt who was living just outside of [Washington,] D.C. My father had a number of siblings, but she was by far the closest to him, and we would go down and visit her regularly. So, we had been to D.C. multiple times, and would go and see what was happening and that sort of thing. And then I remember being in such a state of this can't be when he died. Then the weekend after he was buried we went down there to see the eternal flame and all like that. It was—yes, it was a huge effect. I remember him starting the Peace Corps and everybody talking about "Well, maybe I'll go there" and "Maybe I'll do that." You know, it was a very special time, I think. People talk about Camelot. It really was.

TS: So, when you did hear, you said you were a sophomore—did they announce it?

MP: Yes.

TS: Did they?

MP: Yes. I was in class, and it came over the loud speaker at about one-something in the afternoon that Kennedy had been shot, and then just—our school principle, and a few minutes later it came over, “The president has been pronounced dead,” and then school was let out. We, just, all went home.

TS: How was your mother?

MP: My mother had already died.

TS: Oh, that’s right.

MP: She died the spring after Kennedy was elected.

TS: I see. Now, did you have any kind of duck-and-cover things for the Cold War?

MP: Yes.

TS: Did you do that?

MP: We did. We’d go out into the hallway, and my younger sister and I had this really bad habit of not wearing slips under our—you know, in Catholic school we wore a uniform. And I’ll tell you what, you learned really quick to wear your slip because you were to take your uniform skirt and hold it up to cover your face. You’d go into the hallway, out of the classrooms where there were windows, into the hallway, get down and then cover your head with your uniform. That was really embarrassing when you forgot your slip. [both chuckle] You didn’t forget it very often after that.

TS: Yes. Well, what did you think about it at the time? Do you remember, as a young girl, thinking—being afraid or what kind of—

MP: No. No. It’s really—It sounds silly we did all these things, but no, it never entered my mind that anything could happen to our country. I think that’s partly why Kennedy being killed was such a total shock, because that didn’t happen in our country, you know? Bad things happened other places, not here.

TS: Well then what did you think about [President Lyndon Baines] Johnson, President Johnson?

MP: Not too much.

TS: No?

MP: I mean, he—when you compared him to the vivaciousness and everything of Kennedy, he was there. Since that time, probably twenty years ago now, we’ve been down to Austin, [Texas], and gone to the Johnson [Presidential] Library and all like that. But at the time I remember him picking up the dog by its ears. Do I remember a whole lot about

what he—I remember him saying he wasn't going to run, and I remember him saying we were getting out of Vietnam. That's about it. As far as the things he did, like, I remember really reading a lot about what Bobby Kennedy [Robert Francis Kennedy] was doing with organized crime and the McCarthy people [Joseph McCarthy] and all like that. I remember a lot about that. With Johnson, no, I remember the dog. I remember him not running. Lady Bird planting, you know, doing the flowers.

TS: Right. What do you remember about the McCarthy hearings? Anything?

MP: It just seemed like not—I don't remember anything specific except that it seemed like people who weren't that bad were really being attacked. That's what it seemed like.

TS: At the time?

MP: And I'm sure my dad would have had his two cents in there, and so anything that I can tell you I saw was probably very much influenced by Dad saying, "Well, I can't believe they're—"

TS: Right. Sure. Well, so did you—as a child growing up and losing your mother, how would you characterize your childhood growing up in Troy, New York?

MP: I would characterize it as safe, fun, having—you know, after—everybody would laugh because my parents were older when they married, and older when they had kids. My dad was almost forty before I was born and, you know, sixty-five years ago that didn't happen that much. So my dad was the age of a lot of my friends' grandparents, and Dad came to everything. Everybody would say, "Is your dad coming tonight? Where's your—dad?" Everybody loved my dad, absolutely loved him. And so I remember being really proud of my father and happy and having a life that was good. You know, people say, "Oh, it must have been so hard losing your mother," and of course it was, but Dad made up for it. Dad was everything to us.

Do you know when I got to college I had never ironed anything in my life before? It was, like, "Say what? How do you do this?" I brought an iron with me and all and the others said, "Well, don't you iron at home?" "No. Daddy did that."

TS: Your dad ironed?

MP: Dad did everything. Dad did all the cooking; I couldn't cook anything.

TS: Really?

MP: Dad did everything.

TS: He had three girls!

MP: That's right, and Dad did everything. We were totally spoiled girls.



TS: How about that.

MP: He was just amazing.

TS: What newspaper did he—

MP: The *Troy Times Record*.

TS: Okay. I wanted to get that on record for sure. So when you were thinking about going to a college and—how did you pick the college that you went to?

MP: Well, I knew I wanted to go away from home. My older sister had gone to Union University; she's a pharmacist. She had gone there and commuted, and I didn't see that she really got into the college life at all, because she came home every day. She didn't want to go away though, and I knew I wanted to go someplace. I was looking at schools in Buffalo; there were several. Again, at that point in time I was still very Catholic. Our family was very Catholic. It about killed them when I decided not to be a Catholic a few years back, well, more than a few years ago, about thirty years ago. I was still very Catholic and when you grow up in a town that it is 85 percent Catholic, when everybody looked at colleges, most of us were all looking at the Catholic girls schools, you know, all that kind of stuff. And Dad was very concerned that my older sister had been exposed to things that he didn't think were good in life. She—When I was a senior in high school—she was already finished college by that time and already out working, but somehow, he ascribed it to college—she got pregnant. And got married and had a good married life for a number of years. But, Dad was, like, “Whoa. This is not good.” And so, he decided that my younger sister and I—

TS: What college was she going to?

MP: Union University.

TS: And that was in?

MP: Schenectady, New York.

TS: I see.

MP: Do you remember *The Way We Were*? That movie with Barbra Streisand?

TS: I remember the movie, yes.

MP: Well, it took place at Union University.

TS: Is that right? Okay.

MP: Anyway, well, the first part of it did. Dad said, “Now, I want you and your sister,” he said, “I agree, you should go away to school to get the real college experience, but I want you to go to a small, all-girls college.”

We were like, “Okay.” I mean, I was very pliable back then, you know, “Well, okay Daddy, if that’s what you think.” And he started checking around to colleges and I had gone out to see a couple of the colleges in Buffalo and liked them.

And then Dad was on the board of Saint Mary’s Hospital in Troy, New York, which was run by the Daughters of Charity. The sister, Sister Mary Agnes, who was in charge, she was the nursing director there at the hospital, she said to my father, “Joe, where she needs to go is Saint Joseph College. That’s our college in Maryland. It’s our home school. That’s where she needs to go.”

So Dad said, “Sounds pretty good to me.” So we all got in the car and drove down there, took a look at the place, and I loved it. It was a beautiful little school. Very little. I mean there were five hundred and sixty-some in my graduating class from high school and one hundred and some, 110, in my graduating class from college. Very small school. But I liked it a lot. Dad said, “What do you think? You want to go there?”

I said, “Yes, I want to go there.”

He said to my sister, “The year after you want to go there?”

And she went, “Yes, I’ll go there.” So, we both went there.

TS: Did you both? How about that. That’s in Maryland, you said?

MP: Yes.

TS: Just a stones throw over the—

MP: Just a tiny speck south of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

TS: That’s right. It’s just south of that. Just over the border from Gettysburg.

MP: Yes.

TS: Okay. Tell me a little bit about that. What was that like, being away from home for the first time, I would think?

MP: It was for the first time. I think the only thing that really bothered me was that on the day they dropped me off for college—and it was my younger sister. My older sister was already married, of course. And my younger sister and Dad came down for the weekend to bring me down there, and they had things that were going on for the parents and the freshman on that first day. But they had to leave early because it was a ten-hour, maybe, I think a ten-hour drive back home, and my sister had to get home in time to see the Beatles on Ed Sullivan [television variety show] that night.

TS: It wasn’t going to be playing anywhere where you were at?

MP: Well, they had to get home on that day, but they had planned on staying into the afternoon and then driving into the night. She really needed to see the Beatles that night, so they had to leave.

Actually, college, I absolutely loved it. I also have to say that high school, for me, was good and not good. I still have some really, really close friends, dear friends, but in high school I could've won, hands down, queen of the nerds. I mean, I was. You know, I always got the highest out of all the tests and I just—I needed to change, and I knew I needed to change. I went to the proms, but otherwise I didn't date. I really—By the time I was a senior, I really knew that I enjoyed being smart, but I didn't want to be queen of the nerds anymore.

TS: Did you do any kind of extracurricular activities? Sports?

MP: Oh, yes. I was on the yearbook, I was in the German club, I was in the chorus, yes, lots of things, but I was still queen of the nerds. You know? I mean—

TS: How did you get that title?

MP: Because your shy, you don't date, and I gave myself the title. My younger sister, the one who's just a year younger, she was vice president, because of course girls weren't president, vice president of her class, and dated all the time. She and I are so close, and she would say, "Oh, I wish I could get grades as good as you." And I'd say, "Oh, wow, I wish I could do that, you know, what you do."

TS: Sure.

MP: So anyway, we talked about it that summer before I started college. Up to that point I was always called Maribeth, except at home. In school, everywhere I went, everybody called me Maribeth. At home I was always Becky. Actually at home I was Beck because my mom wanted me to be called Beth, but my older sister didn't talk real well and called me Beck, and so at home I was always just called Beck.

My sister and I talked about it before I went to college and she said, "Well, you just have to change. First of all, lose the Maribeth. You'll be Becky."

"I can do that."

She said, "And you don't have to study every night and you don't have to get the top grades in everything. You can go to parties and have fun and go with the girls." And then just, well, it worked. I changed.

TS: You followed this plan? This little blueprint?

MP: Yes!

TS: Did you?

MP: Oh, yes!

TS: So, you didn't get nervous about not getting the top score?

MP: No, no. Because I knew I wanted to change.

TS: What was it that made you, besides being—

MP: I was tired of hearing all these other people saying what a great time they'd had at this party, and what they were doing at that, and what they—when they went to movies and—

TS: So, you felt like you were missing out on things?

MP: Yes, it was time to change.

TS: Okay. It was the sixties.

MP: Yes. It was time to change. And so, one time I got really brave when I was a senior in high school and Paul's was the little restaurant that all the high school kids went to, and Paul's had raised their prices. So everybody was fussing about raising the prices and they were having a sit-in in front of Paul's. And I thought, I mean, that is something I would never do, but I thought, "I'm going to go and do it." And so I go, and I'm sitting there and this policeman walks up and he says, "Aren't you one of Joe Snyder's daughters?" I mean that's what happens when you live in a small city and your dad's well known. And I went, "No," but I went home really quick. [both laugh]

TS: Ran home maybe?

MP: Yes, but then in college, I absolutely loved every minute of college and I love it that my sister was there. Now, she was not a nursing major, I was, so I was gone about half the time down to Providence Hospital in northeast.

TS: How far away was that?

MP: Seventy miles. We lived off campus; the nursing majors lived off campus. Part of their sophomore year, all their junior year, and half of their senior year. But I saw my sister regularly. She'd come down sometimes and spend the weekend down in D.C., and she was her regular popular self. Her first two years she—my father said she wanted to try and get every major she could under her belt, so she switched majors regularly. I mean, started out as a chemistry major, and then a math major. Chemistry and math are not her things. She ended up in social work and has been a social worker ever since. Actually teaches social work over at Chapel Hill now, but we were really close and college was wonderful. I had a great time in college.

TS: So you were growing up in college—was it, you said, '65 to '69?

MP: Yes, yes.

TS: So there's a little bit going on in the culture.

MP: Oh my god, yes.

TS: What do you remember about that?

MP: Well, I remember, you know, first of all being a Catholic. I remember that's when John the XXV [Pope John XXV] was big, and then he dies. And Pope Paul [VI], was it the first who came in to take his place. Anyway, wanted everything changed. Pope John was letting women do things and all of a sudden it was like, "Oh no, no, no, no, no. We're not doing—" So, I took part in a lot of the rallies over at Catholic University because Providence was only, maybe half a mile from Catholic University. So we'd go over there a lot. Use their library, but do things, and so I took part in rallies over there against the Pope.

TS: Rallies against the Pope?

MP: Well, against what he was changing.

TS: Okay.

MP: The fact that he was pushing women back into the background again.

TS: I see.

MP: You know we were ready for women priests at that point. I had a wonderful time. I mean, I remember studying really hard, but having a great time. I know I didn't get the top grades in everything, but I always did okay, you know, I did fine. I just—I loved college, every minute of it. I loved being in D.C. It was fun. We did everything. We went through the House Office Building, we went to the parades, we went to the inauguration. When poor old President Eisenhower died we went to his funeral. We skipped class to do that one. [chuckles]

College was fun, very much fun, and I do remember being aware of—Vietnam was starting and getting big, big, big. I remember watching the death count every night on TV at the news and, you know, things like that. But I still never thought about going into the service until Jean, again, the same—my roommate. Her father—

TS: Your roommate where?

MP: In college—

TS: In college.

MP: —and in the military.

TS: What's her full name, Jean?

MP: Jean, you've got it, Jean Gibbons Denny.

TS: Okay.

MP: Jean's father—In our sophomore year, the end of our sophomore year, her father became very ill. He had Parkinson's disease and he had had one surgery that was very successful to decrease the symptoms of his Parkinson's. He had a second surgery that was very much unsuccessful and he was never able to work again. She knew at this point she had to figure out some way to pay for college or she was going to have to drop out. So she said, "Listen. These recruiters keep coming around. You say you don't think you want to go back to Troy, you want to see some other places after graduation. What do you think we go in the army and see what we can see?" And I said, "Yes, that might be fun."

TS: Did you say that right away?

MP: Yes.

TS: Right away, like, "Oh, let's go in the army."?

MP: No, she said, "Let's go in the army," and I said it might be fun.

TS: Okay.

MP: Of course, by this time I'm twenty years old and extremely intelligent. So I called home and said to my dad, "Dad, what do you think about this?" And my dad said, "Absolutely not." And so this extremely know-it-all, intelligent young woman says, "Oh yes?" And so, I signed up.

TS: Because your dad said no?

MP: Partly, partly. I was thinking about it but really it irritated me that dad should say absolutely not.

TS: Why did he say absolutely not?

MP: What he said was, "Do you know what they're going to do? They're going to send you to Vietnam." And I said, "Daddy, they would never do that to me." I should have listened to Daddy. [both chuckle]

TS: Was he opposed to it for any other reason besides the war?

MP: No, no. As a matter of fact, after I was in he was very proud of me. He was just really worried that I could get killed.

TS: In Vietnam?

MP: Yes. He felt positive that a young women for whom they had paid for education, had no dependents, would be a prime person to be sent overseas. And he felt pretty strongly it was going to happen, and he was afraid something bad could happen there.

TS: I see. So, you—what year did you sign up during your college program?

MP: Sixty-eight.

TS: Sixty-eight. Was that your junior year, then?

MP: Yes. It was in my, early in my junior year and we were PFCs—well, it had to have been my—let me think now— [pause] for about a year, so maybe it was the end of my sophomore year that I was signed up, and then we were commissioned as second lieutenants a year before we— [pause] It was six months before we graduated, so I became a second lieutenant in December of '68, so I'd been in for a while, so I must have gone in the end of my sophomore year.

TS: Somewhere around there.

MP: Yes.

TS: Well, now, '68 was a pretty, um, transformative year for Vietnam.

MP: Yes it was, it was.

TS: Do you remember, you know, the Tet Offensive? I mean, you signed up right, right around that time.

MP: I do, and, you know, think about you're—you're young, and of course with most young people you believe nothing could ever happen to you, of course, you know nothing would ever happen to me. You're altruistic, and the recruiters were nurses, so they could speak our language, and they came and they said, "You know, think about the guys that you go out with, think about your brothers, think about it. Don't you want somebody who knows what they're doing to be there and take care of them?" And you go, "Yeah." "And think of all the places you'll be able to visit, and the things that you'll be able to do. Of course, if you want to go home and work in the small hospital back home, that's certainly your choice, and we wish you the very best. But can you imagine all the places you can go and the fact that the things you do might be remembered by somebody forever."

And, you know, part of that was true, when we went to the dedication of the Vietnam [Veterans] Memorial, and each hospital marched together, and so of course we marched with the 93rd Evac. [Evacuation Hospital], and were marching down the street, this guy runs out into the street and grabs my arm and he says, "I know you took care of me, I know you did. Thank you, thank you, thank you." And you go, "Wow!" And then older people would be there, and they'd say, "My son died at the 93rd Evac. I wonder if

you might have been there with him?” You know, and you go, “Wow.” So the recruiters didn’t lie, but it was interesting.

TS: So it was an emotional tug to get you—

MP: Oh, yes.

TS: —to join. Sure.

MP: Yes.

TS: But they were all nurses, the recruiters were?

MP: The ones they sent to the colleges, yes. We didn’t have any recruiting sergeants or anything, and “call me any time if you’ve got a question,” and they would return your call immediately and, “Oh, I heard you had a question about such-and-such.”

TS: Did you go visit any place before you joined up?

MP: No.

TS: You just—

MP: No.

TS: Well, okay. So when you saw—the other things that happened in ’68 was we had two other assassinations—

MP: Yes, we did. I actually—they made a huge impression upon me. Remember, that was my junior year in school, and so I was down in Washington that whole entire year, and Easter weekend—the weekend before Easter, excuse me—is when Martin Luther King Jr. was killed. And I wasn’t listening to the radio or anything that day, and a couple of us decided we would go over to Kentucky Fried Chicken and get some supper.

And the students were well known, I mean, there weren’t McDonald’s and all those things around, but there was Kentucky Fried Chicken and there were, you know, various other little places. We could certainly eat in the dorm, but a lot of times we would go out to a place like that. And the people—we stood out. You know, we were in Northeast, which was, back at that time, probably 100 percent black, and there you have all the girls from the college walk in, and, you know, and I say, “all the girls”; there were only thirty nursing majors in my class. So there weren’t that many of us, so they got to know us, and we’d talk to them and, you know, we just knew them.

And we walked in to Kentucky Fried Chicken that night and a guy who was always there and who always waited on us said, “You girls go home right now. Go home right now. Something bad has happened. You go home and you turn on the TV and don’t come out on the streets tonight. Do not. Go home right now.” We went, “Oh-kay.”



TS: But he didn't tell you what happened?

MP: No, he didn't. And so—but he was strict, I mean, he came across strongly enough that we said, “Okay.”

TS: And you just left?

MP: We left. We went right back to the dorm, turned on the TV. Here in the country, people hunt around here

TS: [speaking simultaneously] Yeah, I'm sure they do [unclear] shotgun.

MP: And turned on the TV and went “Whoa.” And that night the riots started. And we had tremendous—remember, oh, you don't remember, you're not old enough—but you may have read about tremendous rioting in Washington, D.C. And then Resurrection City was the tent city that was down on the Mall. Well, when the rioting started, and the whole city was put curfew, and you couldn't drive anywhere, it was—it really made an impression on me, because the nursing students, we were there. And the nurses couldn't get in to work. And so we worked eight hours on, eight hours off, eight hours on, eight hours off. You know I can truthfully say there was only one place in my nursing education that I said—well, probably two, because I really didn't think I wanted to work in psch, but that wasn't a strong one—but there was one place I said—

TS: You didn't want to work where?

MP: Well there was one place I was sure after I finished my rotation there that I never, ever, ever wanted to work there: labor and delivery. That is not for me. But part of it was because of what I saw. They were very old fashioned, our doctors were, and we didn't have any awake deliveries. I thought that normal color for a newborn was sort of a dusky, gray-blue, you know, because these women were so heavily sedated. And you walked in the door and you got Scopolamine and Demoral immediately, and Scopolamine is an amnesic and so these women all just, just, were, I mean like animals. They'd scream and yell and we padded the side rail so they wouldn't break their teeth if they were hitting it. Oh, it was not pretty, you know, it was like, I would never work there.

Well, guess where they assigned me to work during the period of time that this was going on? I worked labor and delivery. And our interns and residents there—Providence Hospital is not directly affiliated with a college. It's not like UNC Hospitals or anything like that. So our interns and residents were mostly from South America, mostly Spanish, Hispanic. And so there's all the interns and residents who speak some English, heavily accented, and the student nurses. And I mean, we worked the hospital at that point in time. We all went up on the roof to watch the tanks going by, I mean, it was scary. And then somebody came running upstairs because the tanks had seen all the nurses out there looking like this, the student nurses out there, and saying, “Get them off the roof!” Cause that's where you went to sunbathe and everything, was up on the roof of the dorm. And so we went up there to watch the tanks, and you could see fires; there were a lot of places burning and, I mean, Washington, D.C., and those riots, it was awful. It

was really awful. And the sad thing about it is the black people burned their own neighborhoods. But they, they happened. So, yes, I remember Martin Luther King Jr.'s death a lot.

TS: Were you personally afraid?

MP: I was afraid for my car, you know, people came and they were turning over cars. I didn't have my pretty car yet then, I had a little, ancient, old English car that—everybody else's car had windows broken and things taken. My car was sitting there just fine. [both laugh] It was like an old English taxi—

TS: Oh, okay.

MP: —a Hillman Minx, and I don't know where my dad got it, but my car wasn't touched. I was really worried about my car. Was I afraid? No, and I don't know why. You know, I'd probably be afraid today, but it was like, "Wow, do you see what's happening?" I mean, if we'd been afraid, we wouldn't have like idiots stood up and looked over the edge of the roof, you know? And watched the fires and watched the tanks until they sent up word to get us off that roof.

TS: Right. Well then, what happened then when Robert F. Kennedy was—

MP: I was really calm by then. School had ended.

TS: [unclear]

MP: Yes. He was killed in June, and I had watched that evening, you know, I was watching TV because I—he was our senator by this time, remember, he became the senator from New York—

TS: That's right.

MP: And so he was our senator, and I was very interested in seeing whether he was going to get the nomination and all like that, and watching TV that night. So I was watching TV when it happened. And I couldn't believe. You know, it's one of those where you just go, "How? It can't happen."

TS: Because they showed him speaking and then, did they cut?

MP: They just—they had shown him speaking, and then he, they said he's leaving now and they showed just a big crowd of people and he was going through and shaking hands, and then you heard a noise and a scuffle; you didn't actually see it happen. And this voice came on and said, "Senator Kennedy has been shot." And I thought, "Oh my God." That was sad, that made an impression, but I was not at school when that happened.

TS: So you had—so now you're already signed up—well, you're in the army—

MP: Yes.

TS: Army Nurse Corps, and these things are happening that are associated somewhat—part of the anti-war movement—

MP: Oh, yes.

TS: —but also the counterculture. Are you thinking, “What am I getting myself into?”

MP: No, because I really believed in being there for the guys and taking care of them, and I still do. Whether or not you believe in the action that’s happening, whether or not you support it [pause]. Afghanistan today...I’m not really sure why we’re there. But if I were at the ago to go, I would go without hesitation because whether or not you support what’s happening, our soldiers deserve to be supported. I believe that’s why fewer nurses have had psychiatric problems, then infantrymen and things like that, because were were there doing what we were educated to do and helping people.

TS: And you volunteered.

MP: Yes.

TS: Where a lot of those men were drafted.

MP: That’s absolutely true, the majority.

TS: Yes.

MP: Or docs. We heard a lot about that from the docs.

TS: Well did you have a personal opinion about the war at the time? Did it evolve over—

MP: Yes, it changed. I supported it when we went. I can’t say today that—again, I sit there and I say, “What were we hoping to accomplish?” You know, this is a country that had been at war for hundreds of years. The French before us. I mean, they were always fighting about something. The country, the people and the country I don’t really believe supported us, because—I mean, the everyday people, because you would see, you know, you go through. I wasn’t supposed to be out there but sometimes I would go over to Bien Hoa to see Stewart, and you could tell if there were expecting Viet Cong though. They’d have Viet Cong flags flying from the houses one day and American flags the next day.

TS: Did you witness that?

MP: Oh yes! Absolutely.

[End CD1—Begin CD 2]

MP: We were not allowed to leave our compound at all. And in order to go over and see—and he couldn't leave his, because he had to stay with his helicopter.

TS: And Stewart, we may not have said on tape, is your husband.

MP: Yes, yes. And so he had to stay with his helicopter, and so I--I can't believe this. I've always said this to Stewart, I wouldn't do it today. But you may not remember but there used to be a song that was out that said, "When I'm in love you best believe I in love, l-u-v," you know. Well, I must have been in love, l-u-v, because I made friends with the garbage truck drivers, because all of the vehicles were checked by the MPs when they would leave Long Binh, and if you didn't have a pass to go out, of course you couldn't leave. And nurses didn't get passes to go out in the countryside. And so my friends the garbage truck drivers would let me ride in the garbage, climb up over the wheel and into the garbage truck, and I would ride in the garbage, and when we'd get to Bien Hoa, they'd go in the gate, they were heading of course for the dump, but they'd stop and they'd say, "Okay, lieutenant," and I'd climb over the top and get back out.

TS: How often did you do that?

MP: Fairly frequently, you know, once every ten days.

TS: That's fairly frequent.

MP: [speaking simultaneously] —the guys over where Stewart was were—they would tease me really bad and they'd go, "Your wife is here!"

TS: While holding their noses? [laughs] That's funny. Oh very good. Well, now did—we talked some of the political side of the culture, but about like, the music, and those kinds of things that were going on? Did you have an interest in any of that?

MP: Oh, I loved all the folk music and all like that, and the different songs, you know, that came out. Yes, I liked all of the folk music. Of course, the Beatles were big while I was in college, and that sort of thing, but it changed in the early seventies, moving more towards songs that definitely were related the happenings of the day. And, yes, I loved—

TS: What folk musicians did you--do you remember enjoying?

MP: Ah, oh God, you know, when you get older, your memory of names—Judy Collins, certainly. Now they weren't folk music per se, but when you'd hear the Kingston Trio, they had different things going on. They were earlier; they were still around a little bit by that time, but they were mostly earlier. But a lot of the ones, the Judy Collins types, you know, that sort of thing.

TS: What about Elvis and all? Was he ever—

MP: He was earlier; he was more in the fifties, and the early sixties, and so I think his songs are really pretty, I think he had a great voice, but he was not super popular by the time I was—

TS: You were in college?

MP: Yes.

TS: Okay. Now when you--we talked about the recruiters coming around and your friend, Jean, recruited him too, in some sense. Was it just the army or were there other service branches that you—

MP: Oh, no, no. There was another roommate, Kathleen—who I don't have any pictures of her out here—but I have stayed in touch with her too. She went into the navy, and so it was the army and the navy recruiters who were there.

TS: Okay. Not air force?

MP: No, no. I don't remember ever seeing any air force.

TS: So how did you and Jean decide on the army over the navy?

MP: I don't remember. But I remember at the time, Kathleen tried to convince us to go navy and we didn't want to. I don't remember why. I don't remember.

TS: That's okay.

MP: But we thought about it, because Kathleen really wanted us to go in the navy. But we didn't. We decided army was the one we wanted to go into.

TS: Now did you and Jean—now you both signed up together. Did you do like a buddy system or anything like that?

MP: Well, no. They didn't promise us to be together, but they inferred that we could probably be together.

TS: Okay. Well, let's talk about that then. Let's see. You graduated in 1969.

MP: Yes, in May of '69.

TS: May of '69, and then—and you had been commissioned as a lieutenant previously in the fall.

MP: Yes.

TS: A second lieutenant.

MP: Yes.

TS: So tell me about—now had you done any military training up to that point?

MP: None—

TS: You were just getting stipends for—

MP: —none whatsoever. Yes, they paid tuition, and books, and we also got a stipend, which was really nice.

TS: You had talked about your father said “absolutely not,” but then you did it anyhow. What was his reaction to that?

MP: Dad’s really tolerant; he was like, “Well, okay.” And then he was very supportive. Once it was done, then he was totally supportive. And he had said to me, “I’m really worried that something bad could happen.”

TS: What about your sisters? How did they feel about it?

MP: They were fine. They were fine.

TS: And your friends?

MP: Yes.

TS: Because most of them were nursing and were aware of the programs?

MP: Exactly.

TS: Yes. So you didn’t have anybody who was like, “Oh, you’re going in the army?” And stuff like that?

MP: I was in a small, all-girls Catholic college. We weren’t out there demonstrating; we weren’t Kent State. We were small, all-girls—mostly the Catholic colleges had a lot of compliant young women, and we were pretty compliant. [laughs]

TS: Well tell me about then your first day that you went to Fort Sam Houston.

MP: Jean and I—Well, I worked at home for a couple of months in the hospital at home, and then Jean and I set off in my pretty new convertible—

TS: What kind of convertible is that?

MP: Mustang.

TS: Okay.

MP: Went down to Texas. We left—actually, this is really interesting when you think about what was going on in life. We left—I drove down to her house; she was from New Jersey. And when I passed, when down the New York Thruway, there was a huge traffic jam, because what was going on—

TS: Woodstock?

MP: Yes!

TS: Is that right?

MP: That was exactly when I was leaving—and that was one time when I thought, “Whoa, they’re all out there doing this and I’m going to the army?”

TS: Did you think about that at the time?

MP: I did, I did!

TS: Did you want to take a turn toward—

MP: It was just one of those where you think, “Wow, this is really weird.” And at that point, I’m the one who’s thinking, “I’m the one who’s way out there. They’re doing the normal things and I’m the one who’s out here.”

TS: Oh, right.

MP: And then Jean—I picked up Jean in New Jersey, we drove on down to Texas. Well, August in Texas—the more we drove, and my car did not have air conditioning. I got this car in upstate New York. It was hot. And the more we drove, the hotter it got. Well we got to Fort Sam Houston probably a day or so before we were supposed to report in. And so the two of us thought about it for a minute—now remember, we had had no contact with the military up to this point—and we decided we were sure they wouldn’t mind, and we were so hot, we would just go to the beach for a few days.

So we went to the beach; we went down to Padre Island, which was just beautiful, absolutely beautiful. And we had a wonderful time at Padre Island. And then we said, “Well you know, we’re supposed to be in the army, we probably should go back.”

So we drove back to Fort Sam Houston, got there a couple days late, and I remember this sergeant who checked us in saying, “Lieutenant, do you understand what AWOL [Absent With Out Leave] is?” And we went, “No, no, no. AWOL’s for bad people; we just went to the beach, and now we’re here. So it’s, no, we were not AWOL, we just went to the beach.”

And the poor sergeant, I mean, he had to babysit these, these nurses. And he said, “Oh, lieutenant, you could look at this as AWOL.” And we said, “No, absolutely not.”

Well then the poor man, I think it about put him over the edge. He said, “Well, let me look and see where to put you in the BOQ.” And he came back a couple of minutes later, and you can see this look on his face, like, you know, he’s about to have the big one. And he said, “It would appear the BOQ is full.”

So I had to live with Jean in the Holiday Inn for basic training. And the Holiday Inn was right beside Fort Sam, so it was fine, you know we were able to get back and forth, but that’s where I lived, was the Holiday Inn. And that’s why—remember I said to look at my uniform in the picture, it didn’t fit very well? When we were supposed to be going to get fitted for uniforms, we would back go to the Holiday Inn and go swimming, because it was so hot. Well then comes the day and they say, “Tomorrow everybody is supposed to be in uniform. Your uniforms have arrived.” And we went, “Whoa. Uniforms have arrived? How did they arrive? Oh, that’s right, we were swimming.” So we weren’t quite sure what to do. We went to the thrift shop, and found some uniforms. But they were a little bit too big.

TS: You got your uniforms at the thrift shop?

MP: Well, because you could get it that day. So I mended the corners, and, yes, that’s where I got my summer uniform. Not dress blues. We did get dress blues.

TS: I just want to clarify this with you, Becky. So they day they’re like, “Okay, your uniforms are in, you’re supposed to go and get them,” you went to the pool?

MP: Well all the fittings, you now? That’s when we’d go to the pool. We figured we could get that done later, all that uniform stuff. And then they say, “Tomorrow everybody is to be here in uniform.”

TS: In uniform, right.

MP: “We’ve got a problem.”

TS: Did you have your uniform, or you just didn’t have it fitted, or—

MP: We didn’t have anything.

TS: You didn’t even have—

MP: Because they fitted for you and then fixed it to fit you and then you got it.

TS: I see.

MP: So we found some at the thrift shop [Strohmer laughs] and we knew we wouldn’t be wearing uniforms much once we finished basic training, so thank God people had put their uniforms in the thrift shop. So we got our uniforms. We did buy the regular hats, we did buy our hats. But, ah, yeah, we got our uniforms at the thrift shop.



TS: So how long were you at basic training?

MP: I was there [pause] I guess it was about seven weeks.

TS: Okay.

MP: And, I mean, I think back to some of the things—now some of the things did make you realize, “Wow, this is not a game playing.” But some of them were pretty funny. We had decided God lived in a helicopter. Why do I say that? Well, you know, if you were here in the States, when it starts to dawn on you, “Maybe Daddy was right,” you know? You don’t need map reading here in the States, to shoot azimuths and things like that. I don’t mean map reading like, there’s the road, you know. But they said, “You might be some place, and it could happen that the people who can read maps would not be with you and you have to be able to find your way to a place.” So we had to learn how to shoot azimuths from the sun and different, you know, shoot the angles so—

TS: Oh, the azimuth, okay.

MP: —so you can figure out how to get from one place to another. And then they put us in groups of three for your final test, and you were out just about all day and you had to go from one place to put site A to site B and then end back up again at site C, and that would show that you could read maps. And so they put us out in the morning, it’s hot in Texas, we’re in our fatigues, and the whole deal, you know, and our boots and everything because we weren’t in the other uniforms and they didn’t fit the fatigues to you, so we were good for those. But anyway, we’re out there and we think we’re doing really well and all of a sudden this helicopter comes zooming across and hovers over us. And the loudspeaker says [in a deep voice], “Lieutenants, you’re going the wrong way. Turn around.” And it was like, and that’s when we decided, I mean we were joking, that God was in the helicopter and he was getting us to the right place.

TS: He was paying attention to you.

MP: Some other things that we did during basic training that, like I said, made you realize that things could really be—that we had to learn to handle a .45, aim it too, you know, that kind of thing.

TS: And you shot it?

MP: They wouldn’t give us ammunition, so we pretended to shoot it. [laughs]

TS: Is that right?

MP: Yes, probably safer, probably safer. But we all had them and we were pointing and doing our thing. And then, and the animal activists would have a heart attack at this, but I did not. I love animals as much anybody could, but I would rather practice on an animal before I got to a human being. And what they said is, “You might be working in an

atmosphere where”—and that’s when you start to say, “Whoa, I think I’m going”—“where the docs are all busy with major wounds,” and so we needed to learn how to treat wounds, take shrapnel out of wounds, and we did that on goats. And the goats were shot, and then we had to clean their wounds and all. And then we also had to place a treach in a goat. And you passed your test when the goat could breathe through your treach. And like I said, I know the animal activists about had heart failure, because by the time we finished the goat had several treachs, you know, because different people were practicing, and he’d had wounds and all. And it was sad, but I’d rather practice on a goat than on a human being.

TS: Right.

MP: And I did use some of those skills later on, so I was glad I had learned.

TS: Yeah.

MP: And when you do things like that, that’s when you sort of go, “Wow.”

TS: So that was part of your basic training?

MP: Yes. At that time, Jean and I got orders to Fort Polk, Louisiana. And everybody told us that was the worst place in the whole world. So we went to talk to people to see if maybe we could get out of going to Fort Polk. And they said, “Well, okay, if we say you can go to Fort Bragg, [North Carolina], I’m going to tell you, you are going to go to Vietnam.” And then the next breath they said, “But there’s a 99 percent chance you’re going to go to Vietnam if you go to Fort Polk too.” So we decided we’d do it. So we knew for sure we were going to go to Vietnam, but we got to go to Fort Bragg first, rather than Fort Polk.

A hard time. As a matter of fact, Jean met—there was a lot of partying going on during basic training. Ours was not the serious—we did learn a little bit marching and saluting and all like that, but we didn’t do all the things the guys do. And she met this dentist who was going to Korea, and four years later she married him.

TS: Oh is that right?

MP: They lost touch completely, and after she got out of the army, she went to the VA center to get her teeth worked on, and he was working there and said, “I know who you are. I met you when you were in basic training.” And they got married.

TS: They connected again, how interesting. That’s an interesting story. So you—so basic training, was it—did anything particularly difficult come out of it?

MP: No, no. I mean, it was hard to do the animals, you know, that sort of thing. Now back at that time, if you didn’t pass boards, you were out. And a few people—that was back when you took boards and you didn’t get your scores for a month, two months later. And so some people found they had not passed their boards and they left. And that was also

back at the time when, if you got pregnant, you were out. A couple of people found they were pregnant and they were gone. But overall, no, it wasn't hard.

TS: No, not physically or emotionally?

MP: No, no.

TS: But you had this lingering feeling now that you're going—

MP: No, it wasn't a lingering feeling, I knew I was going.

TS: Going to Vietnam? Probably especially since you're father had [laughs] planted that seed for you too. So you and Jean went to Fort Bragg. Did you drive there in your Mustang?

MP: We did. As a matter fact we drove in the Mustang. We left Fort Sam and we were going to go home, because we had a few days of leave first, and we got all the way to Asheville, North Carolina. I had never been to Asheville before. That car was packed up to the top. We had our uniforms, we had—I mean, we had all sorts of stuff with us by this time. And we got to Asheville and both of us were just tired of driving, and this was so typical, I mean, sometimes I think about, you know, how loopy I was. We got to—we saw a sign for an airport, we went in the airport, we left—now this is a convertible, anybody could have opened it up and gotten all of our stuff—left the car in the long-term parking and flew home.

TS: From Asheville?

MP: Yes.

TS: You just left the car there?

MP: Yes.

TS: With everything packed in it?

MP: Yes, because we were tired of driving by this time. And then I got down to Jean's house—I don't remember if I took the train or the bus—after leave was up, and then she and I drove back in her car and stopped in Asheville to pick up my car.

TS: And was everything there?

MP: Yes.

TS: And how long were you gone?

MP: Oh, about three weeks.

TS: And everything was still there?

MP: Yes!

TS: Well that says something about Asheville, North Carolina.

MP: It sure does.

TS: I guess so. Okay.

MP: And then we went to Fort Bragg, and we had already decided we wanted to room—we had made friends with three other nurses. Well, we made friends with a bunch of people but especially with three other nurses in basic training, who—and the other three were also going to Fort Bragg. And so we decided that we would all like to room together, find a house or a big apartment or something like that to room together.

TS: Were you able to do that?

MP: We did, we did.

TS: You didn't have to get special permission for that?

MP: No.

TS: No?

MP: No. Well, here's some things. We were there at Fort Bragg in the wintertime and I'd heard everybody talk about how the South doesn't tolerate the snow and all. Well we had snow one day. Well, of course, remember I learned how to drive in upstate New York, and so driving in snow did not bother me at all. And it snowed one day, and I thought, "Well, shoot, it would be fun to stay home and play." So I just called in and said the snow was just too much, I couldn't come to work that day, and so there we are, just outside having a good old time when the MP showed up to get me to work because they heard I couldn't drive. [Strohmer laughs] I thought, "Well, I guess I won't be playing today."

TS: So they needed somebody at the hospital then, I guess.

MP: Absolutely.

TS: Yes. Well how was—so did you have like real army yet? Were you--

MP: Oh, it was—real army to me went when we got to Fort Bragg. Remember I said my dad had been chairman of the board at St. Mary's Hospital in Troy? And that's how we picked colleges where I went and like that. Well, when I worked those two months after graduation from college before I went to basic training, they put me on one unit—I don't remember—I have to tell you I was very spoiled. And they put me on one unit that I think

I didn't like, I think it was a medicine unit and I decided I didn't like it. [clock chiming in background] And so I marched myself down to personnel and said I really didn't like that unit, I would like them to put me on a surgical unit, and I didn't want to work nights, I would like to work days. And they said, "Sure." Now at the time, if anybody had said, "You know, your father's chairman of the board, what did you think they'd say?" I would have said, "Oh, no, they did it just because that's what I wanted." And I really believed that.

So I get put on a medicine unit at Fort Bragg, and they tell us that were rotating shifts. In one week you could work all three shifts, you know, and so I marched myself downstairs and said I really didn't want that. And he said, "Well, that's where you're assigned, so get over it." And it was like—

TS: Kind of a shock?

MP: —Whoa! And then, you know, people, it's real life, you have to salute, you have to do all those things, it's not a game any more. Yes, it felt like the army then.

TS: Did you have any kind of reaction to that at all?

MP: Yes, just about like that, "Wow! Guess I have to do this stuff," you know?

TS: But you didn't feel uncomfortable about it at all?

MP: No, because everybody we were with was military. I mean, Fort Bragg had all—the neighborhood where we lived in in Fayetteville had a lot of rental houses, and two-thirds of the houses were rental houses and they were all with military people. And so when everybody is the military you just go, "Oh, okay."

TS: Describe to me how—you're kind of playing army outside of the hospital but in the hospital you're pretty much just doing your job and your profession and not so much, it's not so much army until like you walk onto the—

MP: I would say I agree with that in part. I mean, it depends on who you're commanding officer is, who's in charge, and—the unit that I went to first was very much into saluting and you know, there were a lot of fun things—

TS: [simultaneously speaking] Even within the, in the hospital?

MP: Yes.

TS: Okay.

MP: So I experienced that more, I mean, not as much when you—

TS: [speaking simultaneously] There's four of you, right, after all?

MP: Yes.

TS: Yes.

MP: And you had to feel like you were in the military. Now it was fun. We had good times, you know, and we played games and we did all sorts of things.

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

MP: Well, by that time I'd met Stewart. I went out with him, we gave parties, we gave great old parties at our house, I mean, five nurses. We gave really good parties. We just had a really good time. One time he and his friend had been out hunting and they caught a coon and that—we had our communications system was one of those old tube systems, and they sent us a CLT through the tube. I was working when they got back with a coon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich. We played games [laughs].

TS: So how long were you at Fort Bragg?

MP: I got there in the end of September and I left, ah, the third week in January. Not very long at all.

TS: Not very long.

MP: No, not very long.

TS: So how quickly did you get your orders to Vietnam?

MP: I got orders in the beginning of January, I think, maybe the second, first week in January.

TS: So you didn't have long to get ready to go?

MP: No, no. As a matter of fact, I met Stewart at a Halloween party but then I didn't see him again because he was going on a temporary duty and I didn't see again until right, you know, in December. And then saw him again in December, and I got orders in January and we got married two weeks later. So I knew him six weeks when we got married. Now my father was worried about that one.

TS: He was?

MP: "Honey, have you thought about this?"

TS: Well did your friend Jean also get orders?

MP: Yes, all five of us got orders.

TS: All five of you, all of you in the house?

MP: Now the one got married, and I don't remember where she went, because we didn't, we weren't—Carol, she got married and maybe she didn't get orders. But she got married before we got our orders and so she left. So then there were only four of us in the hospital, four of us got orders at the same time.

TS: All to Vietnam?

MP: Yes.

TS: So what did you think now that--did you--now that you got your orders to Vietnam?

MP: I was scared.

TS: Were you?

MP: Yes, I was scared.

TS: What were you afraid of?

MP: Getting killed.

TS: Yeah?

MP: I mean, you know, we took care of a lot of guys who had come back, and—

TS: At Fort Bragg?

MP: Yes, and, you know, I mean bad things happened.

TS: Well what was that like, caring for the men in Fort Bragg that had come back from Vietnam? What kind of injuries would you see?

MP: Well, all sorts of injuries. I mean, I didn't work with amputations or anything like that.

TS: What ward did you work on?

MP: I was on the medicine unit, but I would see the guys, and because in the army if you're too sick to go back to regular work, but not really, really sick. In other words, during that rehabilitation time that you'd have at home, these guys still lived at the hospital, but they were out on all the floors, mopping floors, and helping clean, and—they had duties even though they were still patients. They'd be there in their, ah, pajamas and mopping way—[laughs]

TS: So they had assigned duties that they had to do even though they—

MP: Yes, they did. So you'd see guys there who would have been hurt, various types of wounds.

TS: And so when you—tell me about then preparing to go to Vietnam, what kind of preparations did you—

MP: No preparation.

TS: Well besides getting married.

MP: Yes, I got married. We got married, that was the day I finished work on, probably Wednesday; we got married on Saturday, and then we left. That was the last I was at Fort Bragg.

TS: Yes. And then where did Stewart—did Stewart have orders to Vietnam too?

MP: No, he did not. He had actually already been over--at the time, you know, I couldn't believe his mother was so upset, but, he had already been over and been shot down, and spent time in the hospital. He went over at Tet, in '68, then crashed in July, and, ah, was still not back to work yet. Yeah, he still wasn't back to work yet a year later. He had had fractures, you know, that sort of thing.

TS: I see.

MP: And he volunteered to go back after I got sent there, and I couldn't understand at the time because I really did believe I wouldn't get hurt, even though I was scared, couldn't believe, couldn't understand why his mother was so upset. And now I think about it, oh my God, your son has been injured, he made it home, not in one piece but he made it home, he got better, and he volunteers to go back? And so he didn't go back when I did. I went in February, and he came over in April. But we weren't stationed at the same place.

TS: No, because you had to take a garbage truck to go see him.

MP: That's right. He could have been stationed at the hospital, but the only helicopter station at the hospital were medevacs, and Stewart said, and I agree with him 100 percent, people didn't not fire at you simply because you had the cross on your helicopter. They got shot at a lot. And they were always going into hot places or they wouldn't have had patients to pick up. And he said, "That's like a target on the side of your helicopter," and of course the medevacs carried no guns. He said, "I'm not flying a helicopter with no guns into hot LCs [?], I'm not going to do that." So he went over to the 190th assault helicopter group.

TS: So he could protect himself better?

MP: Yes.

TS: Why did he volunteer to go back to Vietnam?



MP: To be with me.

TS: Yeah?

MP: Because I was there.

TS: What did you think about that at the time?

MP: Remember, I was a spoiled little girl back then. I thought it was the right thing for him to do [both laugh]

TS: You couldn't see his mother's perspective?

MP: I couldn't, but now I think about it and I think, "Oh my God."

TS: Now did you go over to Vietnam on your own or did you go with any friends when you took the trip?

MP: Jean and Helen—

TS: All of you went together?

MP: Yes, the four of us. The four of us went together.

TS: So tell me about that trip.

MP: Well, it was a converted cargo plane, we had—we left San Francisco, we flew—we had to stop in the Philippines, which was not a planned but because we were having engine problems. It took forever to get there. That wasn't a jet, remember, that's back in the old propeller days. Oh, it took twenty-three hours, I think. And we were in the Philippines for about four hours while they worked on the plane, and then we stopped for gas at Guam, and I don't know if we stopped anywhere else, and we landed in Saigon.

And we were put up in the BOQ in Saigon, and told to go to work, or come to the office for our assignments the next day. Now we had met Helen and Donna in basic training. Jean and I sort of came as a pair. But they were our really good friends. Well what they told us was they had two assignments at 3rd Evac., or 3rd Surg. [3rd Surgical Hospital] in Saigon. And two at the 93rd Evac in Long Binh. And how did we want to split up? And I was really glad Jean spoke up because she said, "We'll take the 93rd Evac.," and we did. And it turned out to be a good thing. You know, working in the 3rd Surg. had to be so weird because you wore white uniforms there, it was very military, you were always having people come to visit—

TS: So because it was in Saigon, in the city?

MP: Yes, and Helen and Donna hated it, didn't—not hated it, but Helen said many times—now sadly Donna has since died of a brain tumor—but Helen wasn't happy. She wished that they had been someplace else, and then Donna fell in love with a surgeon there and so then Helen was really left out. And so it was hard for Helen. But Jean and I lived side-by-side. I said it was funny, how many people do you know you room with in college, you get married, and then you go and you room with them again?

TS: In Vietnam. Not many, I'm thinking, not very many at all. And I don't know how many nurses got to go over together as group like that either.

MP: I don't think many.

TS: I don't think so.

MP: I don't think that was a typical thing.

TS: It didn't seem—I don't—not many that I've talked to. They seem to be going over by themselves.

MP: That's right. And it was good to go with friends. And Helen was from Oregon, so when we traveled across we met in Oregon and traveled around there some. And then she had relatives in San Francisco and they took us out to dinner and so we had a lovely time right before we left. It was hard for me. Jean said, "How can you said you had a lovely time? All I can remember is you crying," because of course I had just gotten married two weeks before that and Stewart had gone back to Fort Bragg and I went with the others.

TS: So you were crying the whole time and—

MP: That's what they say! I didn't remember it was that bad but they say it was that bad.

TS: [laughs] Well, they might have had a different perspective on it.

MP: Yes, I think maybe.

TS: And looking back how many years now, you know, it has changed some, I'm sure. That's true. Well, do you remember your first thoughts about when you arrived in Vietnam?

MP: I remember it was so hot. It was so hot. Now, not too long after I got there, they actually put air conditioning into the nurses' quarters. And so we were so lucky, but when I first got there, oh, it was so hot. And we were assigned—and you know, when you think about it, I mean, all these new graduates who they took in, if it hadn't been for the corpsmen I don't know what we would have done, because we had minimal experience, because remember I had said the baccalaureate people did not spend a huge amount of time in the hospital?

They still don't. I mean, they spend what I consider enough to be a new graduate, but were we super proficient? No, we were not proficient, super proficient. We had a lot

of knowledge in our heads, but our hands were not as good as they needed to be. Some had worked. Jean had worked at home, you know, she had helped around the house taking care of her father and like that. But she hadn't been out working. I had worked for a couple months at the hospital at home, so at least I had that behind me.

But we arrived on scene with little or no experience. And I'm assigned to the emergency room? It's like, "Whoa!" But the corpsmen were wonderful. I have the utmost respect. They taught me how to start IVs, the docs taught me how to suture, they—we learned how to triage, and of course the triage I learned here, and I worked at the emergency room here in the States in later years. But the triage there is very different from the triage here.

TS: How?

MP: Well, here in an emergency room if a terrible, victims of a terrible car wreck come in to Baptist Hospital today, you would see everybody—not everybody of course—but the trauma team immediately go for that person who's going to die in five minutes if you don't do something. Go for them, and other people are working on the others who can wait, getting them their IVs started, you know, doing what needs to be done. But the trauma team really zeroes in on those who have those immediate major needs.

We didn't have the personnel to do that. And so military triage is, you look at those who can wait, they have minor wounds. Okay, they go to the side. Then you look at those who have major wounds. Those who have life- hugely life-threatening, like sucking chest wounds, the ones who you don't think are going to make it, those who have already bled out a lot, those who have lots bad burns. We were a burn center, the 93rd Evac. And there were a lot of helicopter pilots came in with phosphorus burns. And they get pushed to the back, and you take care of those who have the immediate needs, and then if those guys are still alive, then you work on them. But you've got to work with those who have a chance of living. Now I'm not saying that if you had a major wound that means you were doomed to die, I'm not saying that at all. But if you had the kind of major wound that would take lots of blood, many people, a lot of hours—

TS: You're, ah, you're using your resources to save the most people.

MP: That's exactly right. Which is very different from triage here in the States, very different.

TS: Because you have more personnel?

MP: That was hard, that was really difficult to say, "Push them to the back," you know. I mean, there I am with my three months of experience, you know, and that was very hard. But you got experience really fast. When you're working twelve hours a day, six days a week, you get experienced real quickly.

TS: So what was a typical day like for you?

MP: Well, you know, emergency room—Jean worked in a surgical unit and so hers was a typical surgical nurse's type thing. Mine, it depended on what was coming in. Some days

we'd see a lot of malarias, a lot of VDs—sounds really terrible but I took great joy in giving them that big old shot of penicillin [laughs]—but we would see medical illnesses and then we always had the radio right there. We'd get word that a helicopter was on the way in and they had, you know, you might be sitting there playing games like you saw in some of those pictures and all like that, and then five minutes later you have seventeen traumas come in. That's why you had to decide who could be cared for successfully.

TS: How many people did you work with at a time?

MP: Two and sometimes three nurses; we would have two, usually, two corpsmen. They were great. And the docs, it all depended on what was happening. Of course we had very little planned or scheduled surgeries because we were a short-term hospital. If you were thought to be able to successfully return to duty, then you got sent to Cam Ranh Bay, you didn't stay with us more than about, maybe seven days max. If you were really—if it looked like you weren't going to be successful to get back to duty pretty quickly, we sent them to Japan, or actually we sent them to Saigon who sent them to Japan.

So our docs weren't doing scheduled surgery, so when we'd get word that we had a helicopter coming in, we would probably have—oh shoot, we'd have one doc who was our ER doc, and then we'd have maybe five surgeons, all come down to help us with the triage and decide who went where, but then as soon as they weren't in surgery, then it was our ER doc and us. And that was it. So if we kept getting traumas in, that's when I would do the minor debridements, right down there in the ED—

TS: What's that?

MP: When you clean out a wound that you'd normally send to surgery, but it would be a minor surgery—well, if you don't have any surgeons available, that's why we had to learn on those goats.

TS: And so you're—would it be like—the bell rings after twelve hours and you leave?

MP: No, no, no, no, no. I don't go to Vietnam movies, but I did watch a couple of TV shows. There was one, I forgot the name of it, but Dana Delany was in it.

TS: China Beach?

MP: Thank you. I hated that show because it was—maybe it was very much like Cam Ranh Bay, but it wasn't anything like where I was. It was so different. They were all wearing their street clothes and driving in cars and going to the club and—we didn't have that. Where I was, we had cantonment buildings so it wasn't that we had—or quonset huts—we didn't have tents, but otherwise our life was just like M\*A\*S\*H.

TS: In what way?

MP: We worked until it was finished.

TS: Okay.

MP: You just kept going until everybody was taken care of. You didn't say, "Oh, seven o'clock, time to go." You worked until it was done. And there was, in the off-duty time, there was a significant amount of drinking, a lot of parties, lot of extra-marital stuff, and you know, here I am, twenty-one years old, and married three weeks, it was like, "Whoa." And you know Donna, my good friend who married the doctor? He was married with kids when she met him.

TS: The dentist? Was it—oh, the doctor.

[speaking simultaneously]

MP: No, not the dentist, the doctor.

TS: Oh, okay, right.

MP: And I mean, stuff went on that was sort of—and I had a couple of the nurses who were already there when I got there made fun of me and said, "Oh, you'll change. It won't last. Do you think he's sitting home back in North Carolina?" And I thought, "Well, yes!" So things like that, after a while I did go to parties, but I never dated anybody or anything, but a lot of people did.

TS: Yeah.

MP: But there was—you had to make the most of today because who knew what tomorrow was going to be, and so people really did that. We watched a lot of movies; they showed movies every night outside. And it was really funny because all the quonset huts were connected by metal covered pathways, so that the patients wouldn't get wet or maybe the staff wouldn't get wet, especially during the monsoons because it just poured rain constantly then. But if you were sitting under those metal things to watch the movies at night, because the movies were always outside, you couldn't hear anything in the movie because the rain was hitting on the metal, and so you'd go to movies and watch the movies. I went to the South China Sea to go swimming on my days off, which Stewart was not happy about.

TS: No, why? [speaking simultaneously] Why wouldn't he be happy about that?

MP: Because I was not supposed to be in a helicopter, I was not supposed to be out there. We would have to go over bad areas; we at times took fire. But remember, here I am that idiot who thinks, "Well, I'll be fine." [speaking simultaneously--illegible] But yes. I would go over to see him at times, depending on what was going on, how much he was flying, that sort of thing.

TS: You had told me before we started the tape about when you first got over there, you had to learn to do sutures.

MP: I did.

TS: Tell me about that.

MP: Well, again, you know, suturing back in those days was done by physicians. There's a lot of places now where nurses do suturing, but that was not part of the educational process for nurses back forty years ago; I still don't believe it's part of the educational process. But there are facilities that will teach people how to suture so that they can assist in various ways. That didn't happen back forty plus years ago.

But the same reason I was talking about—or the same thing I was talking about when you had all these physicians available, once they all got into surgery and you had your one ER doc and he didn't need to be tied up suturing wounds that were minor wounds, you know. I'm not talking about those where you need to do the deep sutures and then the other, I'm talking about minor closures, you know?

TS: Like on your skin, the top?

MP: Exactly. And so we were taught how to do that, and you needed to learn some time. You didn't want to learn the first time when you've got a young man who's been wounded, and so we learned on payday weekend nights, because you saw a lot of those who got in fights, who cut open their heads, and we learned on them because our docs all said—and you know, we didn't think about probably the ethics or certainly not anything legal in those days. And said the hair's going to grow back over it, so if it's a really sort of ugly scar, if you don't do a real good job it won't be a big deal. And like I said, the first time I sutured and the doc said, “You could have done better on that, that's not evenly together, I think you need to really work on that again.” So I took the sutures out, sutured him up a second time, did much better the second time, but we learned on drunks.

TS: On drunks?

MP: So if there are some—

TS: So they were already medicated so to speak?

MP: Oh, they were well-medicated, yes! And so if there are some sixty-ish-year-old people around who spent time in Vietnam and say, “I don't remember what happened but I have got this scar on my head—”

TS: “—and it's a little crooked.”

MP: Probably was a new guy—[speaking simultaneously—unclear]—learning.

TS: Right. Okay. You had told me also about how a couple incidences, one incidence you said about an unexploded grenade?

MP: I did, I did. I was working nights in the emergency room one night, when it came over the radio that they were bringing in a patient who had a grenade in his groin or abdomen, and a grenade? Now I'm only telling you what I've been told. I never did much with grenades personally. But a grenade when it shoots off, it starts to rotate and when it gets to a certain rapidity of the rotation it arms the grenade, so that the next thing it hits, it's going—I'm not talking about the kind where you pull it, I'm talking about a rocket-launched grenade. I'm not talking about the kind where a person's holding the thing, pulls the plug, and then throws it. I'm talking about one that comes from a rocket launcher, or a grenade launcher.

And so it's got to get up to a certain velocity to arm it, so that then it will explode when it hits something. If a person were hit by a grenade at fairly close range, it probably did not get up to the velocity to fully arm it, but you don't know for sure, maybe it's now armed but sitting in this guy. And so this young man, turned out he was an ARVN soldier, a Vietnamese soldier, and he was brought in and sure enough he had this—well, while we were getting ready, because we had gotten word that he was coming.

TS: Like in the stomach area?

MP: It was down in the groin area.

TS: Oh, groin area, you did say that, yes.

MP: The guys from x-ray and all—first of all they wanted to know who had no dependents. And of course I had no dependents, and a couple of the guys in x-ray had no dependents, some had children. Those who had children they said, "You guys stay back." Our doc from the ER, it was Dr. Fuji, Fujimoto, who I just loved, he was there. He had children but he said, "Listen, you gotta have a doc and I happen to be the one here. I didn't sign up for only the good times." So he was there, and some of the soldiers came in and built a wall about chest high with sandbags that was open at one end and so when the helicopter came in, they brought in the stretcher on the gurney. They brought it in and put it in so that it had sandbags around it. Now we probably wouldn't have died if it had gone off, but we would have probably lost our hands or our arms, because we reached over—

[speaking simultaneously—unclear]

TS: Oh, so you're working over top of the—I see, okay.

MP: And it turned out that it was not armed, they were able to get the grenade out of him, and everybody was going to be fine. It didn't go off, but it was terrifying when you think this thing has a potential to explode right now.

And that's when my manager put in for all of us who were working that night, she put in for the bronze star for all of us. And she just said it's a paperwork—well, I don't know if it was a paperwork thing or not, I don't know what's required to have the "V" for valor on there. I know it's a major deal, and since she wasn't there and didn't feel comfortable doing all the paperwork showing the "V" for valor, she put in for meritorious

service. And so I was very proud to receive that. She put in the paperwork. I didn't know I was going to receive it, I was already back working at Fort Polk.

TS: When you received it, the bronze star?

MP: When I received it.

TS: How long did that take? I mean, how long were you in the—

MP: Probably forty minutes or so.

TS: Yeah.

MP: Because you know they went really slowly because they didn't want anything to—

TS: Right, sure.

MP: And had to sedate the guy. We had somebody from anesthesia come and sedate the guy and then Dr. Fuji opened up, we got the IV started, and got everything going and assisted him and got it out. I was going to do okay.

TS: So how do you decompress from something like that?

MP: They went to parties and drank. I mean there was a lot of drinking going on, and it was really a sad thing—not the drinking, I mean I'm sure that there were some people who developed very, very bad drinking habits while they were over there, but you know, we as officers could get alcohol. The enlisted guys who were below sergeant, which was all your corporals, all these other guys, couldn't get any alcohol.

TS: Why not?

MP: They weren't allowed to buy it. I don't know why. I mean, it was just the rule. But they could get drugs so easily.

TS: Drugs?

MP: Oh, yeah, drugs were everywhere over there.

TS: What kind of drugs did they have?

MP: A lot of marijuana, and heroin. Those were the two majors that I saw. And I saw some of my friends who worked with me get addicted so badly. And I got to the point where I didn't use much of my alcohol. I mean, if I went to parties, somebody else had the alcohol there, and so I would go and buy alcohol because you had a ration ticket, certain amount you could buy, and I bought it and gave it to the guys, because maybe they'd drink that and not do heroin, you know. And the first six months I was in country we saw



more trauma type wounds, but the last six months I was in country more the fighting went up north, and we saw many more drug cases than we saw—drug overdoses, things like that.

TS: Oh, really, after?

MP: Oh, yeah, a huge number, and so many of them died.

TS: They did?

MP: Yes, if you get a huge amount of heroin in you, they come in with a temperature of 107 and it had already screwed up their systems and it was really bad.

TS: So how were you this young woman in your early twenties dealing with these terrible injuries and the death that came with it?

MP: It was hard. But you have to move on, you have to say that there's going to be somebody tomorrow I can help, you know, if you lose one. The only time that it was really terrifying to me, ah—Stewart was supposed to fly one day, and I knew he was flying because he had told me he was flying. It turned out he'd traded with somebody else to take the flight out, and he had actually come over to see me. But I didn't see him yet, he wasn't there. And we got some traumas in, and it was a helicopter crew, four-man crew, and I recognized the crew chief. It was his crew chief. And I thought, "Oh my God," and we only had three of the guys, and I kept saying to our guys, the corpsmen who would bring the patients in from the helicopter, "Where's the fourth one?" Well, they thought I'm just looking for another casualty, and we always—we never said the morgue, we said out back, put them out back, that was the morgue—and he said, "Don't worry, he's out back." I thought, "Oh my God." Well, the crew chief heard the conversation that was going on and he said, "It's okay, it's okay, it's Fitzie [?], he took the flight today." And that was awful.

Now Stewart said afterwards that Fitzie was a guy who took chances, he would fly too low, he would do things, and he took a bullet right through the forehead. And of course since he was the pilot, the other guys weren't shot but they had crash injuries.

TS: Because they went down after—

[speaking simultaneously]

MP: —you lose your pilot, you go down.

TS: Yeah. But the other ones did survive?

MP: Yes.

TS: Well that must be—

MP: That was scary.

TS: Very scary, sure.

MP: That was really scary.

TS: And how soon after that did you see Stewart then, if he was—

MP: That afternoon.

TS: Yeah. That had to be a real tough day.

MP: It was scary. That was probably the most scary for me. You know, personally. It was funny, we took what they call sappers, those are guys who break through the wires. Every compound—you know, Vietnam did not have a front like World War II did. You had compounds, so I was at Long Binh, Stewart was at Ben Hoa, those were compounds surrounded by MPs and wires and sentries and all sorts of people, but all in between here was the regular countryside and the roads and you weren't allowed to go there. It was very dangerous. That's where I rode in the garbage truck.

We would take sappers through the wire and that meant somebody was trying to cut their way into the compound, and I don't know why they were called sappers, there must be a reason, but I don't know what it was. They'd always just say, and you knew there were sappers through the wire because if some—the sentries who are out there along the perimeter, if they saw movement but they weren't thinking it was a person, it could have been a dog, it could have been anything, they put up a white—it looked—a flare, it sort of looked like fireworks, very pretty. If they saw movement and they were thinking it might be a person, it's got movement like a person, it was yellow, which meant get on your alert. And if they definitely knew people were coming through the wire, it was red.

And we were always supposed to—now Jean saw more of this, because she had patients there in the beds, or the cots. I might have patients on the stretchers and all, but you were to take your patients, pull them out of the bed, put them under the bed, and put the mattress on top of them to protect them when we were taking sappers through the wire. And then we were supposed to get out the .45s and be ready to shoot whoever came in. Well I never had to shoot anybody. I said that—

TS: Did they give you the bullets finally for the .45s?

MP: They did, they did.

TS: Okay, just checking.

MP: But they said—I always said if they guy was eight-feet-tall I probably had him, because—

TS: Your arms are going up and down?

MP: You shoot the .45 and [makes noise]

TS: Oh, you recoil, I got you.

MP: But we never had, we never got anybody in. Now we did one time take mortar fire, and our lab got hit, and some of the guys I knew got killed in the lab, but when we would take mortar fire, or have sappers coming through—now sappers, no, you wouldn't leave your patients—but if you were taking mortar fire, we were supposed to go out and go into the safe areas, you know you had safe areas that were built up with sandbags and all like that. And you were supposed to stay in there, but there were also snakes and spiders in those places, and so it wasn't until I was about three days from coming home and all my friends laughed at me because we'd hear it and everybody would yell that you were supposed to go, and we'd all go, "Yeah, yeah, yeah," and not go. Three days from home and we were taking mortar and I go shooting out there and everybody is laughing. They say you can tell a short-timer every time. And I thought, "I'm not going to get killed three days before."

TS: So all the other times you're more afraid of the spiders and the snakes and all that then you are the—

MP: You're really close to getting home.

TS: Yeah, then you really are—

MP: More afraid of the snakes and spiders than the mortars and also that feeling like nothing is going to happen to me.

TS: Up until you get short-timers?

MP: Yes.

TS: And then you worry about everything?

MP: Uh-huh!

TS: Did you have like superstitions that you followed?

MP: No.

TS: No? Well—

MP: Some people did.

TS: Sure. I probably would have [laughs]. But you—so—even though you’re feeling you’re invincible up to a certain, until the short-timers come, did you have real fear? I mean, you had real fear for Stewart, did you have real fear for yourself?

MP: On specific occasions, sometimes when we were out with the MEDCAPs and the MPs would say, “Now, go!” And you think, “I don’t know what’s out there, but it’s out there.” Those would be a little bit scary.

TS: Talk a little bit about the MEDCAPs, because we did that before I turned the tape on.

MP: MEDCAPs were—it was totally volunteer, on your time off, and what you did was a group of some corpsmen, nurses, and doctors would go out and set up a clinic. They’d usually work it out with maybe some of the Buddhist monks in one of the monasteries, or with the head guy in one of the little towns and all like that. You’d drive out there and you’d set up a clinic and you’d see people with cuts or sores or, you know, illnesses or whatever. You just—it was a clinic. But sometimes, you know, bad things can happen, and the MPs were watching continuously, and if they got word that there was a group coming near here, maybe snipers, maybe whatever, who knows. They would just say, “If we ever say to you, ‘Get in the Jeeps now,’ don’t question us, don’t finish what you’re doing, get in the Jeep now.” And that did happen at times. It definitely happened at times. But the clinics were nice and people were so appreciative, they really were.

[End CD2—Begin CD3]

TS: How often did you go out on those?

MP: Oh, wow, I went on them probably about weekly.

TS: Weekly? For your whole year that you were there?

MP: Yes, yes.

TS: So do you have any memorable trips that you remember some of the people?

MP: No, not some of the people, but some of the places that we went, you know, when we went into some of the Buddhist monasteries and the carved topiaries and the, I mean beautiful places, just, and everybody—we would always have our interpreter, but none of us spoke Vietnamese and so we’d have our interpreter, Miss Twee [?] was our interpreter and Miss Twee would interpret for us, so you couldn’t really talk to the people that much.

But they were so appreciative, and you know sometimes you could see they knew that American medicine was better than what they had available to them. And you would see in it, at the 93rd Evac., we’d get somebody brought in and they’d come in by helicopter, they couldn’t just walk into the gates, they weren’t allowed too unless they had passes and you know all that kind of stuff. But they helicopter would bring them in and say he says he was kicked by a GI water buffalo, you know, and they’d do anything to get covered by our care.

TS: Oh, a GI's water buffalo.

MP: Yes.

TS: Not just any buffalo.

MP: No, no, it had to be something related to the Americans to get care.

TS: I see, I see.

MP: And I understood better why. One of the officers who Stewart worked with asked me one time if I wanted to go into the hospital at Ben Hua and see what the hospital looked like. And I said yes I did. And so I went with him to the hospital in Ben Hua and, oh my goodness. First of all, it was all—you know, the buildings had no windows and no doors, it was all open. So the flies and everything are there. And you know if a person is sick, they need somebody to take care of their animals. Well if there's nobody going take care of their animals, they bring them with them. So there were goats and chickens and all walking around and all. And people wore their own clothes, and if they got food, it was because their family brought it with them, or cooked it, or got it while they were there. The food was not given to them in any way.

TS: Who ran this hospital?

MP: The Vietnamese.

TS: Okay.

MP: Then went to surgery, and the people would walk in and lay down on the mat. They walked into surgery and laid down in their clothes and they opened up their clothes enough to get to whatever needed to be cut on, and you think—and a person would hum when they felt like they were ready to go home. So if you felt ready to go home after one day, or six months, your choice. I would go one day. It was not a good place.

TS: Yeah.

MP: I could understand far better why people would talk about the GI water buffalo after that.

TS: Sure, and so, like, whole families would be there?

MP: Oh, yeah, yeah.

TS: And their animals?

MP: Yes. Now when I say animals, I saw chickens; you never saw dogs much around or cats, because they were a good food source, apparently, they didn't last.

TS: So did you feel that, in this time, as your—as time goes by while you’re in Vietnam and you’re working twelve-hour shifts six days a week, how are you feeling? Are you having any feeling about the war at all? Do you have any ideas?

MP: No, not really

TS: Just still like you’re still—

MP: I was very living in the present at that point; let’s take care of today. Now—I—that’s not true, because while we were over there, Kent State happened. And I was very angry at both sides on Kent State. I felt like the National Guard overreacted too quickly, but I also was very angry at the students. I mean, I wanted to say to them, “Don’t you know we’re over here? So that you can maintain your way of life?” Because at that point I still believed that. To think the students would be demonstrating and then ended up getting killed, some of them, that, Kent State really bothered me. You know you think about the things you, because home is supposed to be perfect when you’re away from home, especially when you’re away from home in a not-so-good place. And so that was a real shocker to me.

Apollo 13 happened while we were overseas and I couldn’t believe our guys might not get back, well of course they did. And then the earthquake in—one of the earthquakes in San Francisco or San Jose—California somewhere—happened. And it was like, “Wow,” you know, and I know other earthquakes had happened and all, but still when you’re away you think everything’s supposed to be perfect at home, but it was a real shocker when things would happen at home that ought not too.

TS: Right.

MP: And your news came through AFVN, you know, the Robin Williams movie, *Good Morning, America*?

TS: Oh, right.

MP: Well we really did listen to AFVN and “Good Morning, America.”

TS: Yeah, did you have a jockey like that?

MP: Oh, yeah.

TS: Yeah?

MP: And you know how on M\*A\*S\*H they play the music over the loudspeaker at the 90th Replacement, which was where you go when you’re going into country and when you’re leaving? It was just like that, too. The music coming over, and there was one song they played I swear a thousand times, it was a horrible song, “My Bella Mi,” and I remember that song forever because I heard it for like four days straight.

TS: Is that right?

MP: That guy must have liked it; he was the one playing the music.

TS: Yeah. Well what other things to you remember about the culture?

MP: Not a lot about the culture. The Vietnamese ladies who worked on the post would bring their fish with them and they cooked the nuoc mam, which stinks, really.

TS: Nuoc mam?

MP: Nuoc mam, it's sort of a fish stew but the fish is old; oh, it's really awful smelling. But they liked it. I remember Mama San—oh, our Mama Sans were Buddhists, and so the lady who cleaned our barracks—we had the biggest cockroaches I've ever seen in my life and one day in front of Mama San I stepped on one. And she was so distraught because you don't kill living things.

TS: Did you intentionally step on it?

MP: Oh, yes I did, it was a big old cockroach and it was in my room. And so after that when Mama San was around I never would hurt an animal, but in the night, you know you wake up and you could hear them in the wall, and sometimes you'd wake up and there'd be three or four cockroaches walking on your body, and that was gross.

TS: Did you not have like netting that you—

MP: No, no.

TS: No netting?

MP: No. And in our shower, we had a big rat that lived in the shower. He lived underneath the, the—

TS: Drain?

MP: Well, he—above the drain, but we had the boards, you know, that go on top there?

TS: Oh, okay.

MP: And he was under there, and I remember the first day I got in country and I said, went in to take a shower, and I came out three seconds later and said, "There is a rat in there!" And they went, "Oh, yeah, he lives there. You'll get used to him." And I said, "Well I'm not taking a shower." And they said, "Yeah, you'll change." Well after about two days of sweating I thought, I've got to take a shower, and after a while you got used to it. The rat stayed in the back when you took the shower, and you know, you got used to brushing

your teeth with non-potable water, so you made sure you never swallowed any. I mean things you just got used to, you just did them.

TS: So this young girl who had been spoiled by her daddy growing up, in a few different ways—

MP: Had to change a few ways.

TS: Yeah. Well, what were the—so it's hot, you've mentioned that you do not like being hot—

MP: Well this was—actually I like being hot now, but remember I was straight from upstate New York—

TS: That's right.

MP: And it was really hot. But by the end of the year, you know when we went into the cooler weather, it went down to 75 or so, and I remember we had a new guy in country who said, "What is wrong with all of you? Do you have malaria or what?" Because we're all sitting there in jackets because we were cold.

TS: Sure.

MP: But that was the coolest we had seen in months and months.

TS: It's just how you had acclimated your body?

MP: Exactly.

TS: But did you—what were your—you lived in Quonset huts?

MP: Yes.

TS: And did you have air conditioning in—you said—

MP: We did after a while.

TS: Initially you didn't but you said soon after? That's in your living area?

MP: Yes.

TS: And also where you were working did they have the air conditioning?

MP: Sort of. Yes we had it; sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. And it was different, you know, it was a slight slope where we were, and of course they had sort of flattened off the area where the emergency department Quonset hut was, but we had a



swinging door out the back and a swinging door, you know, one at each end of the building, and during the monsoons the water would just zoom on in right through and right on out the back door, you know. So it was sort of air conditioned.

TS: Did you do anything—besides partying, did you go anywhere for your off time?

MP: Off time? No, you couldn't. I mean, except to see Stewart, and I wasn't supposed to do that.

TS: You didn't get any special leave to—

MP: Well, the only reason a nurse would be given leave would be to go see the GYN physician in Saigon, there was only, he was only in Saigon, there was not GYN physicians, and so that poor little guy who gave out the passes probably thought we had the sickliest bunch of nurses. Yes, I would go to Saigon at times and you'd just go to him and say, "I need a pass to go to Saigon." He'd say, "Well, lieutenant, why?" "Well, [whispers] I need to see the doctor." And he'd go [in low voice], "Okay, lieutenant." And then my roommate would come and say, "And I need to go too." And he'd, "Oh, okay." He was embarrassed, you know, he was probably nineteen years old and here are these women saying they need to see the GYN doctor: [whispers] "You know, female problems." And he'd go, [whispers] "Oh, okay."

TS: So what would you do in Saigon?

MP: We'd go down there and go through the shopping areas, you know, just that. We didn't do that very often, because you had to ride a deuce and a half, an old truck and you rode the back of the truck to get down to Saigon and I didn't like that especially.

TS: No? Helicopters were much more—

MP: Yes. Much nicer, much nicer.

TS: Much better transportation?

MP: And the guys who I knew in the helicopters, now they had offered to take me up, I wanted to see a fire base, you know where the guys would be way up, but Stewart about had a cow on that one and said, "I don't tell you what to do but this time I am. You are not going up there." So I told them I couldn't go, I didn't go on that one.

TS: Yeah. Well you had a nice—I don't remember if you had said this on or off tape, but you had said that Stewart wouldn't take you up in the helicopter, but that you could get other guys to do it for you.

MP: Yes, take me riding, just go riding in the helicopter; I liked riding in the helicopters.

TS: What did you like about it?

MP: It just felt good, it was fun. And the guys would zoom and sometimes, you know, it—mortars, you know, from the ships—our ships were out and they would send mortars in, and they'd know where they were because it would be on the radio to make sure everybody could stay safe so you could fly under them. And it'd go [makes sound] when it would go over you and it was just, it was stupid fun.

TS: This is entertainment in Vietnam?

MP: Yes.

TS: There you go. You had talked to about how the corpsmen and the doctors were really good at mentoring you for your job and—

MP: Yes.

TS: Was there anybody in particular that you remember that was?

MP: Dr. Fuji.

TS: Dr. Fuji?

MP: And Dr. Dennison. He was just the nicest man, he was from Kansas and talked about his wife and kids all the time. And Dr. Fuji didn't have any kids, I don't—maybe—he didn't talk about his kids but he must have had kids, because I remember when we got that guy in with the grenade, he said something—

TS: The grenade, yeah.

MP: But Dr. Dennison, nice man. I mean, they were the ones I remember the most. Dr. Paine was probably the cutest, he was unmarried and he was Captain Paine when he came then he got promoted and he became Major Paine, can you believe that? And the guys, when you get guys in who are wounded but not so badly, they'd look at his name and say, "I'm being treated by Major Paine?"

TS: How did he spell his name?

MP: P-a-i-n-e.

TS: Oh, okay, it was pretty close to that, then. Now, what was the food like?

MP: I thought it was delicious. It was typical, I mean, it was institutional-type food, it was mess hall food. Now I loved to go over and eat at the air base, because their food was way better than ours. I mean, they had steaks, actual steaks and all like that. We had, like our potatoes were all the dried things that they—

TS: Rehydrated?

MP: Yeah, and our eggs were the same way. Scrambled eggs you could have them from now until life ended, we had enough scrambled eggs, lots of beef. The food was fine. Was it great? Was it memorable? Now his was really good and memorable, but ours was, it was good, solid food. I don't remember being turned off by the food at all.

TS: Yeah.

MP: No, it wasn't anything that you'd say, "Wow, I've got to get that recipe."

TS: Right.

MP: But it wasn't bad.

TS: Well how did you feel that you were treated by everybody that you worked with? Your peers?

MP: By the corpsmen, by the soldiers that we came in contact with, they treated us like queens. Some of the other nurses were not, especially me, you know, the twenty-two-year-old, newly married—some of them were mean, you know, but I think they weren't really mean, I think they were teasing me and I just took them as mean.

TS: Some of the other nurses?

MP: Yes, some of the other nurses. Captain Peterson, my head nurse, she was great. Absolutely great.

TS: What kind of things would she do, that were so great?

MP: Well, just mentoring type things. There was only one time that I got angry with her and afterwards I really could understand why she was doing it. But, Christmas was really, you know, I'd been in country ten months already by Christmas. And when I got there everybody talked about the big deal the whole year was Bob Hope. And I always heard that the guys who were longest in country were the ones who got the day off, to go see Bob Hope. Well remember I said by this time we weren't taking that many traumas, what we were seeing was huge numbers of drug overdoses? And we're getting close, we'd heard Bob Hope was coming on a, like on December 15 or something, he was going to be there, and we were so excited about it. And Jean and I were both going to go. Now Jean worked on a different unit, but Captain Peterson came in and she said, "We need to talk for a minute," and I said, "Okay." And she said, "I know you're looking forward to Bob Hope," and I said, "Oh, yes I am!" And she said, "Well, I've made a decision, you're not going to go." I said, "Why? You know there's only a couple of us"—I think Marie and I were the longest in country at that point who worked in that department." And she said, "It is really depressing around here right now, when what we're seeing for the most part, 80 percent of our cases are drug problems, you know, and our new guys in country are

just getting so down and so depressed about everything. I just really feel like I need to send them.” And I was really angry at the time, I mean, I was mad. But it turned out okay. I actually even sent in a thing to the newspaper here when they say send in your favorite Christmas story? And I sent it in. I was working on Christmas, and a guy came in—we got in a guy who’d been hurt, and I was cutting off his clothes, because that was the first thing we did, when you get somebody in there was cut off all their clothes, which sounds really weird, but, you know, if you’re adrenaline is going and you can see that your foot is bleeding, you might not realize you have a big hole in your back.

TS: Right.

MP: And so we would have to inspect their whole bodies, and I’m cutting off the clothes, and this guy came in and I’m cutting off his clothes and he said, “Oh my god, you’re the first American woman that I’ve seen in ten months or eight months or something and now you’re cutting off my clothes,” you know, I said, “It’s okay, it’s okay.” Well, he was just so sweet and he said, “Well if I had to be hurt I’m so glad I came where you were.” And then you say, “Well, I’m glad I was working, it was right that I worked.” And so it was okay, you know, and we listened to Bob Hope on the radio and we probably would have been half a mile back from him anyway. But it turned out okay. But I remember at the time I was very upset. That was the only time, otherwise Captain Peterson was great. She taught us things, she mentored us, she really was great.

TS: I was going to say, your friend Jean had mentioned that your recollection of going to Vietnam was all fine, but you had been crying a lot. Now would Jean say the same thing about your reaction to the Bob Hope situation?

MP: Yes, yes.

TS: Did she get to go?

MP: She did not get to go either.

TS: No? Neither of one you got to go.

MP: Neither one of us, and we were okay.

TS: Yeah.

MP: She was okay with not going in the first place because, remember, she got really close to her patients, because she was with them for eight hours and they didn’t go anywhere and then she’d be with them tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, you know.

TS: So she didn’t want to leave them?

MP: And these were the guys who weren't well enough to go. If they were well enough to go, they were picked up and taken to see Bob Hope, and so she stayed with the guys who couldn't go. She was okay with that.

TS: Did you have any contact with the Donut Dollies that came over or any of the USO?

MP: Very rarely. I was not impressed with them. They—see, they didn't care anything, a nurse? "Oh, look at him, there's that cute doctor!" I was not impressed. They didn't come very often, they were more down in Saigon, Cam Ranh Bay, places like that. And I've heard people say wonderful things about them, but I didn't seem them very often and when I did, it was like, "Oh, there's somebody male over there," you know.

TS: They weren't there to entertain you.

MP: No. No. And we, they didn't do any shows, or anything like that where we were at all. So we didn't see any of that.

TS: Oh, so what were they—

MP: They didn't visit our patients. They might have been there just to see the place, you know, come up for the day. It was like the city girl comes to the country to take a look and see what we've got out there. So I think they did really good things, but I didn't see those things, so I was like, "Get out of here."

TS: Did you feel that the military was treating well?

MP: Yes, I was well taken care of. I was well protected. If there was any time that I was at risk it was because I put myself there. I felt I was very well taken care of. I've actually—there's the military themselves who are doing a lot of studies right now, about sexual exploitation or things like that, and I can absolutely truthfully say I never had the first problem of any kind, I never felt like I was subjected to anything I shouldn't have been subjected to in a sexual way, no. I was well protected.

TS: Yeah. Well did you hear about any other women that had different experiences?

MP: At the 93rd. Evac. I did not.

TS: So what was it like when you were getting ready to go home from Vietnam?

MP: I was very excited.

TS: Yeah?

MP: My father had had surgery actually. I was due to come home in about, oh, I guess it was maybe twenty or twenty-five days, and there was almost nothing going on at the hospital at this point. I had extended to go home with Stewart, and so all my friends, Jean, all my

friends had left, and the hospital was about half closed, and we were getting ready to turn things over to the Vietnamese, and so it was totally boring. And then my dad had to have surgery. It wasn't life-threatening surgery but it was my dad having surgery. And so Stewart got in touch with his parents here in Winston-Salem, called the Red Cross, and got things arranged so I could go home to see Dad, and since I was within thirty days of my time to go home, I did not come back. And Stewart was going home at that time anyway.

TS: The same time that you were going?

MP: It turned out that he—I had extended to go home from his date, but his unit had been turned over to the Vietnamese so he was being sent home a month early and I had extended and couldn't go home. And so it turned out we went home together.

TS: So how many months did you end up in Vietnam?

MP: Thirteen, fourteen months.

TS: Fourteen months. So you went home together?

MP: Thirteen, fourteen. Yes, we did.

TS: On the same plane and everything?

MP: Same plane and everything. He was able to arrange that his time coincided with when I would go.

TS: And how was your—how was the coming home? How was it when you got here?

MP: Ah, my family or friends were wonderful, other people were not so wonderful.

TS: In what way?

MP: The bus driver who took us from the air base down to San Francisco to get the civilian plane home made rude comments, "Well, don't..." because a couple of guys on the bus were saying things like, "It's so good to get home," and "You don't know how hard it's been." "Don't tell me that. You didn't have to be there," I mean. And the guys usually did, they had been drafted, you know. We saw more firsthand, mostly it was more of a, "I don't even want to hear about it" sort of thing from people. You know, the country was so against Vietnam by that time, that it was almost like we didn't exist.

And then what really turned me off the most, and I understood better after a while, but when I went—you know, here Jean and I had agreed for sure to go to Vietnam to get away from going to Fort Polk. When we got our orders to go home, Stewart got orders to Fort Benning and I got orders to Fort Polk. And they would not change my orders to Fort Benning, but they would change his orders to Fort Polk. So he actually was at Fort Benning for some classes, education, and then came to Fort Polk afterwards.

Well when I got to Fort Polk, and truthfully, you know, you had gotten sort of loosey-goosey with the rules while you were over there; you know, we wore fatigues and boots and if my hair went down my back, you saw it, it went down my back, it didn't matter, you know. And I get in there to report in the first day, and this colonel, she was not the commanding officer for the nurses but she was the next highest one. She looks at me and she says, "Just because you've been in Vietnam, don't think you are special. Don't come back here with that hair touching your collar and get that uniform ironed a little bit better before you come back here." It was like, "Whoa, who is she?" And then she was the one who also a couple days later let me know that I was going to get the bronze star and she said, "We have the orders, I'll give it to you, but don't think you're special, just remember that. Don't think you're special." And I'd heard that she had applied to go over, volunteered to go over, and had some run into some emotional difficulties and was turned down. But I didn't know that at the time. At the time I thought—is that turned off?

TS: No, it's not turned off, it's running.

MP: I thought you—

TS: You did not feel kindly toward her.

MP: I did not.

TS: I see. Did you have a ceremony for your bronze star, then if that's how—

MP: Like a two-second ceremony.

TS: Yeah?

MP: You know, I was called for my unit down, she read a little notice, and gave it to me. That was it.

TS: Was anybody—did anybody attend?

MP: No, no.

TS: That had to kind of—

MP: "Don't think you're special."

TS: —deflate your—

MP: It did.

TS: —pride in everything that you did.

MP: And I understood better when—yes, we see you Mr. Bird—I understood better after a while, but I sure didn't like her.

TS: Why did you understand better?

MP: Well, psychiatric problems make a difference, you know, and, and she really bore a grudge that she had not been accepted to go over, and I heard afterwards was angry at everybody who had. And it's really interesting because I was probably the only nurse at—the hospital at Fort Polk was very small, but I think I was the only nurse with Vietnam experience there at the time. And so I was the one she could zero right in on.

TS: So the coming back was a bit of a transition then, into?

MP: The answer is yes and no.

TS: Okay.

MP: You know, we had just survived a year of being there, Stewart and I decided what we wanted to do most was have a baby, and so I was pregnant shortly thereafter and got out that summer. So my whole goal was to be a mother at that point in time, and the army had changed their rules, you know, when I was in basic training, if you got pregnant you were immediately out. But while I was in they changed the rules and you had a choice, you could stay in or you could get out. And I seriously considered staying in, because I did like military nursing, and then they let me know that since both of us were active duty military and both of us had critical MOSs, critical job descriptions—I was a nurse, Stewart was a helicopter pilot—that before the baby was born, I would be required to sign the name of the individual who would be the baby's guardian when or if both of us were deployed to unaccompanied tours. And it was like, "Whoa, I don't think so." And so I decided to get out. We decided I would get out.

TS: Because of that kind of obligation to your—

MP: To be told before you even have had the baby that you have to give somebody's name who's going to raise your baby while you get sent away somewhere? That's not good.

TS: That's what happens today, right?

MP: Yes.

TS: What do you think about that?

MP: I don't think I could do that, not with both parents.

TS: Right.



MP: You know, if I were the mom and in the military, and my husband was not in the military, and was a person who would raise the child, okay, I think that might, might, might be okay. But if you were both, and had to sign away your child to somebody else? No, no, I wouldn't do it.

TS: Yeah. Now did Stewart stay in?

MP: He stayed in for two, two more years, three more years, a total—because we lived at Fort Polk for three years.

TS: And how was Fort Polk?

MP: Actually, we had a lovely life there. We got, made really close friends that we have maintained relationships with. It's a horrible place. I mean, maybe it's fine now, but it was in the middle, truly the middle of nowhere. The nearest ice cream store was twenty miles away. And when you're addicted to ice cream, that's hard. When I first got there, there was no post housing. I've heard that there's lovely post housing now. But there was none, and so you had to go out and rent a trailer, because that's all there was. And we rent—I rented the trailer because Stewart was back at Fort Benning back at that point, and the trailer had been empty for a little bit and I remember going in and there were cockroaches everywhere. Well I was used to that, and so, I mean, if I'd come straight from New York I probably would have died, but after—they weren't quite as big as the ones I had seen over in Vietnam—and so I rented the trailer. Well, there were probably nine—no, more than that, maybe twelve—trailers, but they were end to end along a little dirt road, and there was one mailbox at the end and everybody shared that mailbox, you just went through and found your mail and went through. We were on a party line, I mean I could be playing cards at the, our friends across the street, and ours was three shorts, and if three shorts rang, I could answer my phone at their house. But I remember the first day going there and I went to get the mail and one of my neighbors came out and said hi, and she said, "Oh, are you going out today?" And I said, "No, why?" And she said, "Well I see you wearing shoes." And I know that sounds really stupid, but that's how it was. I mean, it was really country. And you know, after two years I very seldom put on my shoes except if I was going out.

TS: Is that right? [laughs]

MP: It was just—life there was what you made it, and we had a lot of good friends, and we got a boat, and Toledo Bend Reservoir was probably twenty miles away from us, so we went boating a lot and we had a good three years there. Both of my sons now say, "Mother, when you felt the labor pains couldn't you have driven somewhere quickly so we wouldn't have to spend our lives saying, 'Yeah, I was born at Fort Polk, Louisiana?'" But they were born at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

TS: So they were both born?

MP: Yes.

TS: So you'd had—what did you—did you continue to work at all as a nurse?

MP: I did not.

TS: So you—

MP: I stopped working completely. Stewart was flying, and so he was gone a fair amount and so I was a homemaker, and active in the wives' club, and that sort of thing. And then when Stewart got out, he got out right after Jeff was born, and he had not finished his degree when he went in, and I think he majored in keg [?—whispering] at N.C. State and then the military decided they would take him.

TS: You know, even though you're whispering that, that's still on tape. [laughs] So you know, Stewart.

MP: So he was not at school then and he decided, we decided that he would finish his degree, and so after Jeff was born, we were going to move. We were all planned, and we were going to go back to Raleigh. I had actually gotten a job, you know, by mail, and Stewart had flown up and looked at houses, and then we stopped in Charlotte on the way up, and we were not real big planners back at that time, and Charlotte just was a great city. We really enjoyed it, and Stewart said, "You know, we can probably get our money back from the down payment on that house, and you can find another job. I'm sure I can get in school, and we did all those things and stayed in Charlotte for three years, while he got his degree.

TS: Is that right?

MP: Yes, I worked at Presbyterian and then when he finished his degree we moved here, and I worked at Baptist until I retired, almost five years ago.

TS: Here is into Advance?

MP: This house.

TS: Oh, wow.

MP: They were building this neighborhood when we moved in. It's a starter neighborhood, we said we would live here for three, four years and then move to a bigger house, and three, four years went by and we said it was time to start looking at houses and finding a neater, bigger place. And this neighborhood is filled with children, and the boys, you would have thought we just told them we were going to cut off both their arms, and we said, "Well, what are we moving for if it's going to make them that unhappy?" And then by the time they were driving in high school, and they didn't care if we moved, at that point we didn't care if we moved either.

TS: Well did you ever see yourself, because there weren't that many women that went to Vietnam. I mean, certainly the nurses were the majority of the women that were over there.

MP: Yes.

TS: But did you see yourself as a trailblazer for women?

MP: Yes, in some ways, yes.

TS: In what ways?

MP: Showing that women can be in difficult places and can do things and can work well, that they don't have to be protected all of the time. Now we were protected, but I saw things—we were protected from physical harm, but I saw things that were hard to see. And yet, you know you can do a very good job and still live through a lot of things. I can say very truthfully that there are some people alive because I was there, and you know, there's not many jobs you can say that about.

TS: Well, that's true, that's true. When you went in—I'm remembering what you said about your father saying, "Absolutely not." But did you find yourself—even though you described yourself as the Queen of the Nerds, or something, were you independent-minded, even as a young girl?

MP: Oh, very much so.

TS: She's vigorously shaking her head "yes." [laughs] Okay. And do you think that that's a characteristic that a lot of people in the military have that you were around?

MP: No.

TS: Not necessarily?

MP: I mean, some people follow the rules and do what they need to do, and—

TS: So you didn't follow the rules?

MP: I did most of the time, but I don't think, you know, going to the South China Sea to go swimming or, you know, some of the things we did—

TS: Showing up AWOL for your first—

MP: True. Or when I first met Stewart, at Fort Bragg, you know, he and his roommates asked us if we wanted to go flying and we went flying and of course we weren't allowed to be in that helicopter, and we went flying and had a thing get loose and had to make an

emergency landing at the drive-in in Fayetteville. And you know, no, I mean, we'll do some things, but basically I do what's right.

TS: Yeah.

MP: You know, you can get from here to here in many different ways, many of which are acceptable to varying degrees.

TS: [laughs] Acceptable to who?

MP: Well that depends on who's looking at it, now doesn't it? [both laugh]

TS: I guess that's true, I guess that's true. So did you—when you look back at your time in the Army Nurse Corps, what's most memorable to you?

MP: The soldiers. You would be doing nothing almost, and they would be so appreciative of everything you did. And I told you we were the burn center, and it was really difficult sometimes. You know, phosphorous burns are horrible burns; apparently there's a lot of phosphorous in helicopters, or there was, because it would be the helicopter people who would have the phosphorous burns. And they have to be neutralized with copper sulfate, and if you didn't neutralize them, they'd start to burn again, you know, while you were there. Some of these guys we got in, they were pretty much 100 percent burned, and so it was only a little while that they were going to be alive, and what we tried to do, would be to get them to retire. Their families would do far better financially if they were retired when they died. Retired, related to injury, etc.

TS: I see.

MP: And these guys weren't in pain, because they were third-degree burns. They couldn't see how bad they were because they were blinded, you know, with their burns. And I'd say, "Let me tell you what's going to happen now. I want you to retire." "Retire? I'm twenty-four years old, what do you mean, retire?" And you'd have to tell them that they weren't going to make it, and this would be better for their families. And here you've just told somebody they're going to die, and they say thank you. The soldiers were amazing. I think probably that's why I say I don't care if I support what the United States is doing or not, I'd go. The soldiers deserve that. They were amazing. And when you read the stories of things that have happened, I mean, guys going out there to get their comrades, they're still amazing.

TS: You talked earlier how you think nurses maybe didn't have as much of the post-traumatic stress because of the job.

MP: We were doing what we've been educated to do, we were doing things that hopefully would have positive outcomes. I wasn't trying to kill anybody. I wasn't, you know, I wasn't shooting, I wasn't.

TS: But now women can be in different roles.

MP: And I think they will see PTSD.

TS: Yeah? What do you think about that, that women are now, you know, flying helicopters like your husband?

MP: I think it's great. Why shouldn't we? A woman should be able to do just about anything. Now there are some things with physically, the strength is not there, you know, that sort of thing, but I think if a woman has the ability to do the job, then why not?

TS: Now you had two boys, but no—do you have any granddaughters?

MP: Three granddaughters and two grandsons.

TS: Okay, so your—all the pictures are all around me, I should have looked.

MP: A matter of fact, the little one, we take care of her fairly often because her big sisters; she's fourteen, she's twelve, and Emma was a big surprise, and we've all spoiled her. Now this was without anybody coaching her, listen to this [plays recording]: "I'm Princess Emma." She is our queen, you know, and the boys are up in New Jersey.

TS: So if they wanted, any one of those girls wanted to join the military, what would you say to them?

MP: I would say, "Go for it."

TS: Yeah?

MP: Absolutely, go for it.

TS: And your grandsons too?

MP: Yes, I would. I think they have to do it with their eyes wide open. You know, my sister, the one with whom I'm so close?

TS: Right.

MP: We are so different, it's night and day. My politics are more conservative in nature; she is very, very liberal. She is—she was married for twenty years but she now has a female partner, and they're very happy together. She is so liberal, though, I mean we are about this far apart politically.

TS: A hundred and eighty degrees?

- MP: As far as you can get, you are so right. And she is also a pacifist. She has marched in Raleigh and in Washington, D.C.; she marches every time they have a—well, they haven't had one in a good while, but when they had executions, she marches for those. She marched when they were going to put in the nuclear plant down by her; she marches up in Washington. Well, it about killed her, because her youngest son, after he finished college, and he is the super-jock of all time, and cute, and just a great guy. And he worked for about six months doing various things, selling insurance and that sort of thing, and then he came and he said, "Mom,"—and he was captain of the football team and all—he said, "I miss the organization, I miss the things that I saw in sports and all like that. I'm joining the army." Well, it about took her out. But, I think that he joined the army with his eyes wide open, and that's what I would say to my grandsons. Don't do it because you think it's cool. Look at all the pros and cons about it, which I know I didn't do, I know that. But look at everything and make sure that's where you want to go. And if that's what you want to do, then I support you 100 percent.
- TS: One of the big, I guess, controversies in the last year or so has been that repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Do you have any thoughts on that?
- MP: The answer is—I think that it was terrible that a person's sexual orientation should get a fully competent person removed from a role. I thought that was awful. I look at "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" as a baby step towards getting people where they wanted to go. I don't say it was a good baby step, but I don't know what the good baby step was, because I think you had to take a baby step before you could go all the way. Maybe not.
- TS: Right, because prior to "Don't Ask," you couldn't even, you could get—
- MP: If anybody thought that you were gay in any way, [makes noise] gone, you know?
- TS: So it's a process?
- MP: So at least this was part of the process. Like I said, it wasn't the best, but I don't know what the best was.
- TS: Right.
- MP: I truly believe—you know, I mean, having a sister who's gay, I know she's not out there trying to make other people gay. I know she's not out there going after little children. I know—you know, I mean, she's a good person who has a loving partner. She's happier with her partner, more happy than she ever was when she was married. You know, I mean, I think that it should have nothing to do with who you are. Now I think just as with straight people there are some gay people who—who are not very good about what they do, and are not—they're out there looking for young people and all like that, but there's straight people are doing that too. I think you need to judge a person by what they are, who they are, and how they do the role, not by their sexual orientation. So I'm sort of glad "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is gone, but I think there needed to be some kind of baby step, and maybe that was it. I don't know if it was the best one, but I think we needed

something to start going in the direction of looking at people for who they are, not for their sexual orientation.

TS: Well, what about when you hear—what does the word patriotism mean to you?

MP: That has changed. It means, to me, supporting your country. Now I used to say supporting your country whether it's right or wrong. I believe you can still be a patriot and not necessarily agree with the direction we're going, but that doesn't mean that I will do things that could hurt my country. I can disagree with—I don't—right now, with my knowledge, which is not great, of Afghanistan—I don't really think we need to be there, I'm not sure what we're trying to accomplish. And looking back, I don't know that we should have been in Vietnam. Again, what were we trying to accomplish? Who are we to tell Iran if they can have nuclear weapons or not? You know, did somebody die and make us king? I'm not sure. But I do believe that if that's where my country is, I need to support the decision while not necessarily agreeing with and making sure that those whom I elect, [unclear] understand that I don't necessarily agree with this path. But while we're in that path, it means to be supporting the soldiers who are there. I would never do anything to cause harm to come to our soldiers.

TS: At the beginning of our conversation—and what's your sister's name that's in Chapel Hill?

MP: Joann.

TS: Joann. And she's the one who said, "You need to change, Becky"?

MP: Yes.

TS: Okay. So now, you're looking over time and you're just—I forget how you described yourself, the Queen of the Nerds or something like that.

MP: That was me.

TS: Okay. Back in New York, and then—and now we're sitting in Advance, North Carolina. So did you do the, make the changes that you wanted to make?

MP: Yes, I did. I feel like I was—you can imagine how shy I was, and when I tell people that, they go, "No," but I really was. I wouldn't open my mouth for anything. And I learned to be proud of being intelligent. I believe I am an intelligent person, and I'm proud of that. But I can have fun and talk and joke and things too. Yeah.

TS: Do you think—well, what role do you think—how would your life be different if you hadn't joined the Army Nurse Corps?

MP: I can't even imagine what my life would have been. I really can't. I don't think I wanted to go back to Troy. Troy was a wonderful place to grow up but sadly Troy is going

nowhere fast. I mean, it is a dying city. And there's, you know, high taxes and no jobs and there's that in a lot of places, but it's worse there. And I wanted to do things and see things and see other people and—maybe I would have gotten a job in Washington, or maybe, probably not New York City, maybe Washington. I don't know, I don't know, because before I really had time to think about what I'd do after graduation, I already signed up. So it was already set for me.

TS: Well, who are your heroes today?

MP: Wow. My sister. She is really neat. I mean, she worked her tail off to get her degree and then a few years later worked her tail off to get her masters and for a while I wasn't sure she was going to make it. Well, now she's about finished her PhD. I mean, I'm really impressed with her, so she certainly. My dad will always be, always, always be. Stewart is a very special person. He has—we have a really good team but, you know, I remember some of the people I worked with saying, “Well, let me check with my husband if I can do that.” I never have to check with Stewart, I mean, you know, we work together on things, but he would never say, “No, you can't do that.” And, you know, I think about growing up and raising our sons and he did at least half the job because I was going to school and doing other things and, you know, he really—as far as people in the news, things like that. I thought Sally Ride was amazing. I think that's great that she was up there. I like Governor Chris Christie, I want to see more of him, you know, and hear more of him. I think as a conservative, things aren't going too well for us, you know. We need to get somebody else because I believe Mr. Obama, who I don't care for, is going to be elected again. I don't care—don't dislike him as a person, I don't care for his policies. But I think he'll probably be re-elected. A lot of people, there's a lot of really good people around.

For many years, Stewart and I were not active at all in our church and about three years ago we just decided to get active in church again. And we go to church in Mocksville, very small country church, you know, and I've met some of the kindest, nicest people I will ever see in life there. You know, and you say “I need to be more like that.”

TS: Well, you had said also at the beginning something about how you had moved away from the Catholic Church too and that had not gone over well with some of your family or something.

MP: Well, yeah, it was hard for them, yeah. My father and my aunt were very Catholic, I mean, very, very Catholic. I remember for years after I stopped going to the Catholic church, we would go down and visit my aunt, she had retired in Charleston after my uncle died, and we would go down and visit, and she'd always say, “Well, you can go to church with me,” And I always went to church with her, and she was very hard of hearing, and the priest was so nice, he got so he'd laugh and say, “I think we've met.” We'd always get there and she would say—you know how sometimes deaf people—and I can say that because I'm deaf now too—but deaf people talk really loudly sometimes? And she would say in a voice that carried over the whole place, “Father, this is my niece. Please pray for her, she's fallen away.” And I'd think, “Oh my God.”



It was hard for them, you know, when you've got a family that's been Catholic forever and both my sisters, you know, were still Catholic, although only one of them is now—Joannie's not, Joann. She's had it with the Catholic Church, sort of the—they're even worse than "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." There it's like you're going to hell. So she just recently—actually, her pastor knew she was gay, she was very active at her church over in Chapel Hill, and he sort of said, almost "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," "Let's not talk about it." Because she said, you know, "You may not want me to be doing all these things with the church anymore because I'm gay." And he said, "Let's not talk about that. Let's talk about other things you can do that are so wonderful for this parish." And so she continued—well, he got transferred and the new guy came in and let her know that she was probably going straight to hell. And she said, "You know, I think it's time for me to find someplace else." Just a lot of things happened, you know, after John XXIII had allowed women to do so many things and then all of a sudden the new Pope is like, "Take women home, get them in the kitchen," you know, and I just, after a while, and I can't believe the Catholic Church doesn't believe in divorce and yet I have seen some marriages that were so awful, why in this world should a person stay with that? And no birth control? Well, you know, a person can have many, many children. I just decided a long time ago that it was not where I wanted to be, and Joann, at the time, said, "Think about it. You don't have too—just think about it." Well, she's funny, because she said, "I've thought about it, too." Because it's just the last year or two that she has stopped being a Catholic.

TS: Do you think though it sustained you in the time in Vietnam, the faith that you had?

MP: Probably, because some of the beliefs will always be there. I mean, I strongly believe in heaven, I believe that a person who does the right thing will get there, so, yeah, probably, some of those were very helpful things.

TS: That's actually not a question I ask very often, but I was wondering, like, was there a lot—were there church services?

MP: Yes.

TS: Did people regularly attend?

MP: Not too many. There was a church service every Sunday and if I was not working I went to it, and there would probably be maybe twenty of us there.

TS: But it was still—so it was available.

MP: Oh, yes.

TS: Well, we've talked a nice time this afternoon and I don't have any more formal questions, but is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to add?

MP: I don't think so.

TS: No? You're sure?

MP: You've heard about everything!

TS: Have I? Everything? I doubt that! I don't know. Well, it's been nice to meet you, Becky. I appreciate you letting me come to your house.

MP: I've enjoyed this afternoon. I didn't think I'd be talking this much. [chuckles]

TS: Well, I appreciate it. I'll go ahead and shut it off now, unless you want to whisper anything else to the tape.

MP: No, no.

TS: Are you sure? Okay. All right.

[End of Interview]