

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Kimberly Dawn Mozingo

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: March 19, 2013

[Note: This transcript has been edited and portions will be restricted until January 1, 2038.]

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is March nineteenth. This is Therese Strohmer and I'm at, actually, Jackson Library with Kim Mozingo? Is that how you say your name, Kimberly Mozingo?

KM: Yes.

TS: And we're—to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Kimberly, could you say your name the way you'd like it to be on your collection?

KM: Kimberly Dawn Mozingo.

TS: Okay. Well, Kim, why don't you start off by telling me where you're from; when you were born?

KM: Okay. I was born in High Point, North Carolina, June 10, 1968.

TS: Okay, High Point, and do you have any brothers or sisters?

KM: No, I'm actually an only child.

TS: Are you?

KM: I had a—I do have a half-brother and two half-sisters, but I wasn't raised with them.

TS: You weren't?

KM: No.

TS: So, you grew up by yourself?

KM: Yes.

TS: What did your folks do for a living?

KM: Well, my mother's worked in the textile industry, or you know, manufacturing, her entire life pretty much. My grandmother worked in the hosiery mills when they were here in the '40s and '50s, and then my mother went to work in the hosiery, and then eventually now she works for the furniture industry making swatches for the—

TS: Swatches?

KM: Swatches for the furniture when you—

TS: Oh, right, okay.

KM: So, when you go, like, to a department store and they've got little pieces of fabric that the couches come in; that's what she does; she sews those.

TS: Oh, all right.

KM: And—

TS: So, you live with your mom and your grandmother?

KM: No, no.

TS: Oh, okay.

KM: I live with my mother.

TS: Okay.

KM: I still live with my mother. I had a house fire several years ago and I moved back in with my mother. A long complicated story there. But my father is—my biological father is still alive but I've not seen him in years, and my stepfather passed away a couple of years ago.

TS: Oh, I'm sorry.

KM: Yes; heart attack.

TS: Yeah, that's sad. How's your mom doing?

KM: She's doing well. At the same time that my dad died, my husband left me, so we were both, kind of, going through a really hard time, and this was back in 2004.

TS: Oh, okay.

KM: So, yeah.

TS: So, you, kind of, had to nurture each other.

KM: Right. Well, I was living in Florida. So, my husband left, my dad had just died, so I decided to move back up here to North Carolina, because I'm an—

TS: So, that's how you ended up back here?

KM: Right.

TS: Okay. Had you lived here since you had left?

KM: No.

TS: Oh, really? Okay.

KM: No. I left in 1987 and didn't come back until 2004.

TS: All right, came back home.

KM: Yes.

TS: There you go. So, tell me a little bit about growing up in High Point, North Carolina, as a young girl and, you know, the, I guess, seventies and eighties would have been your formative years.

KM: Right, yeah, I have pictures of me wearing, you know, bell bottoms and those ugly clothes from back then. [chuckles] You know, my family was very, very poor, but I didn't know that when I was really young. We lived in rental houses. We moved from High Point into Archdale when I was, probably, five, which is the next town over and it was more rural. Instead of being a town it was like a bedroom community for High Point.

TS: Okay.

KM: My mother did not want me going to the city schools. She felt that they were too dangerous. And so, we moved to Randolph County and moved to Archdale, and we lived in these, like, really small rental houses. And I started elementary school at Archdale Elementary, and my first week there they tested us in first grade, and I was put in an

advanced class. And so, I was in an advanced class my first three years of school with the same kids. It was, I guess, an experimental thing; this would have been 1974.

TS: Okay.

KM: And then I went through, you know, elementary school, and then I went to another school which used to be called Trinity College; the buildings there, and later it was moved and now it's called Duke [University]. But Duke got its start in Trinity, North Carolina. And so, I went to middle—kind of, middle school there, and then I went to Archdale-Trinity Middle School, which was a brand new school, and I really got into band.

TS: Oh really? What'd you play?

KM: Flute.

TS: Yeah?

KM: Yes, I played flute, and I was always, like, the A student. I was really, really good at education. Sports, no; I was not very good at that all.

TS: Did you participate in sports at all?

KM: No.

TS: No?

KM: No. I could barely walk up a flight of stairs.

TS: [chuckles]

KM: I was terrible at sports; absolutely horrible. So, I was like the—the smart, geeky kid; I was the band geek. So, that was kind of my thing, and once I hit middle school I started realizing, you know, that I wasn't wearing the same kind of clothes that everybody else was wearing.

TS: What were you wearing?

KM: Well, hand-me-downs; that kind of thing. Because my parents were so poor—

TS: Oh, I see what you mean. Okay.

KM: —and it was, you know, a little bit of a reaction from me, and I started noticing that my family wasn't like other families in the way that they—the way that we lived; the way that they behaved. I always think about it—you know, that my family could be on *COPS*, or one of those—you know, those, like, swamp people kind of shows. [chuckling]

TS: Why? What do you mean by “behaved”?

KM: They just are very—you know, I hate to use the term southern redneck, but that is exactly what they are. You know, there was my biological father; his brother went to prison for murder. The other brother went to prison for drug dealing. And my father, kind of, was also dealing drugs. The time my mother was married to him, he used to beat her; knock her down flights of stairs. The cops were always getting called out and—

TS: This is your biological father?

KM: This is my biological father, and my mom left him before I was even, like, six months old. And then she married my step-father when I was about three. My step-father was part Cherokee Indian. He had—They had moved—Him and his parents had moved to High Point for some reason; I’m not really sure why. But he basically—barely had a ninth grade education, and he also worked in the factories as well.

And so, we just lived in these really tiny, little places. I remember growing up in one house that we lived in, there was no insulation. It was a clapboard house and there was spacing between the boards and you could see outside through the boards. There was no heat. There was no air. It did have running water, which was nice, but that’s kind of how I grew up. And so, then I’m going over—and I’m going over to my friends’ houses and I’m like, “This doesn’t look like the way that I’m living,” and I started noticing that there was this difference.

TS: So, what did you think about that at the time? Do you remember? I mean, reflecting back on it, do you realize as a young girl that you had an awareness about it; even at the time?

KM: In middle school I did. I don’t think I did before then, because you’re too young to understand economics and social status, but as I grew up I definitely did. I started really noticing, like I said, other kids were wearing—their parents would pick them up in these nicer cars. My parents had this, you know—a car that had rust all over it, you know, and—that they paid, like, five hundred dollars for, because that’s all they could afford. And my mother was more aware of trying to help me fit in. My father—because my step-father I called my father—he was, you know, just so stuck in—my mother said he died in the 1950s; he was just walking around dead; because he was so stuck in that era. He didn’t understand about trying to help me fit into, you know, high school, and you want to try to fit in. But—so, maybe, I’ve just—that’s why I got into band; so I could be a part of something when I was in middle school.

TS: Right.

KM: But, I mean, I loved school. It was something that I was very good at.

TS: Did you have any teachers that were, you know, mentors to you in any way?

KM: Our band director when I was in high school. His name was Charles Cronham; C-R-O-N-H-A-M. He was, and is—he's still alive; he's like in his late eighties now, but he was really more of my mentor. I had teachers that I loved, but off the top of my head, you know—I had a teacher that was really sweet in fifth grade; her name was Ms. Moring. She was my math teacher and she used to—we would have—once a week you would have to take this test and it was a hundred multiplication—you know, multi—one hundred multiplication problems, and if you could do them in under so many minutes then she would—and you got them all right, she would then take you out for McDonald's, and you would get picked up, like, Saturday morning and—and she would take every—those people that did it out to McDonald's. So, I got to go out—she used to take us out to do that. So, that was really fun. I mean, it sounded like she cared.

TS: Sure.

KM: Yeah, so.

TS: That's really nice.

KM: Yeah, I thought so too.

TS: So, you're growing up. You're in an advanced class—

KM: Yes.

TS: —in your early ages. And then you're in band. Did you—was it marching band at all?

KM: Well, when I was in middle school it was just concert band.

TS: Okay.

KM: Once I went to Trinity High School—which I think I got to Trinity in '82—I was in marching band and concert band, but I played what's called a flugelhorn, which is kind of like a big trumpet, in marching band. And then my sophomore year I played flute. I played a different instrument every year.

TS: Oh, really?

KM: Yes. [both chuckle] And then my junior—

TS: That's not normal, is it?

KM: No, no. In my junior year I played piccolo, and believe it or not, in my senior year I played tuba. We had five people on our tuba line; four girls and one boy. And you don't normally see girls and I'm only, like, five foot three. The tuba was as tall as I was.

TS: [chuckles] Why'd you play so many different instruments?

KM: I don't remember. I think when I first—my freshman year they had too many flute players, so they were having flute players play other instruments, and then my second year he was just like, "Go ahead and go back to flute." And then my junior year he needed piccolo players. So, I had already been in band three years and he wouldn't let the freshmen play piccolo. You had to be an upper classman to do that.

And then my senior year it was me and all my friends and we all said, "Let's play tuba."

He was like, "Sure." Because he—my band director would go around saying girls had the higher lung capacity than boys so they made better tuba players. [both chuckle]

TS: Okay, so he supported that; that's good.

KM: Yes, he did; yeah. So, we had this, like, you know, big guy, and like I said, these four little girls carrying these tubas.

TS: Well, now—so you're in—so when you get in high school and—how was—how were things for you there, like, socially?

KM: Our high school was very different. You see all these movies where, you know, the high school—the band people are considered the geeks. That wasn't the case in my high school. Our football team lost every game; every game. We had the worst football team. We had a pretty good basketball team, but the worst football team. And so, people came to the football games to see the band because we were, like, state champions—it was called the Trinity Blue Crew. We were the best band in the area. Like, people loved the Trinity band. And so, people would come—we won every competition. Every competition we ever went to we won best drum major; best drum line; best wind line; best band of the day. I mean, you should see the trophies that we won. It was insane.

So, our band—our high school wasn't set up like a lot of high schools that you think about. You did have the—the really popular, snotty kids. And then you had the jocks. But pretty much everybody else hung out with everybody. I had friends that were cheerleaders. I had friends that were more of, like, what you would consider the potheads. You know, I had friends all across the board. As a matter of fact, my three friends today are my three friends from high school. We are still friends.

TS: Was it an integrated school?

KM: You're talking about African-Americans? Yes. Yeah. Oh yeah. I never realized it—in a class that I took last semester we read a book called *Blood Done Sign My Name* [Authored by Timothy B. Tyson], where there was some violence, and it was in 1972, I believe. I started my—you know, my first grade in '74 and I did not realize that schools were not integrated up until that point; until I read that book and I started thinking, "This is only two years before I started school," and I was in kindergarten with—you know, that would have been probably '73—with blacks and Hispanics and everybody. It was a

kindergarten for the workers in the factory, so all the children were children of people that worked in the factory and I was the—when we graduated kindergarten I was the kid that had to get up and give the speech to introduce the speaker. So, I've always been very academic. Not a very physical person.

TS: Now—So, you're in—you're in high school, you're in band, and it sounds like you're enjoying high school?

KM: It was a—you know, you have those high school moments where you don't fit in and you're socially awkward, but you know, looking back on it—you know, there were moments, but I did have fond memories of high school, yes.

TS: Did you have a sense of, like, what you wanted to do with your life when you, you know, got out of high school?

KM: I did. I absolutely did. I think it hit me when I was a freshman that if I did not do something with my life I would end up working in the factories like the rest of my family. No one in my family had ever graduated high school; they had all dropped out between the time they were fifteen and sixteen years old and went straight to work in the factories. And I knew that's not the life I wanted; I absolutely knew it.

And so, it might have hit me in eighth grade. When I was in eighth grade my uncle was murdered; my mom's brother. He was ex-army. He had been in Vietnam, and it really changed our family. That might have been, kind of, when I began to see that I needed to do something else with my life.

TS: What happened?

KM: He was a furniture peddler. He would take—he would go around—well, not—

TS: Was he local? I mean, did he live in your—

KM: Yeah, yeah; he was local. He would go to this one furniture factory and he would get furniture, and then he would drive it around and sell it out of the back of the truck and the company would get part of the profits and he'd get part of the profits. Well, he normally went up North and he had decided that winter—it was February of '82, I believe—he decided to go to Texas because it was warmer, and he took a friend of the family with him. And they get down there and they sold some furniture to these guys and they asked him to drop the furniture off at a house. So, my uncle and this guy go to the house to drop the furniture off. Well, these people that had bought the furniture were actually going to rob them, and they kidnapped them. They put them in the back of a van and took all their money, which was something like three thousand dollars at that point, and drove out to this dirt road and told them to get out of the van and start walking; they had their hands tied behind their backs. And then they opened fire on them. They killed—they shot Kenny, the guy that was with my uncle, like, twice in the back of the head once they got

him down. And then my uncle they shot something like eight times in the back and then once in the back of the head once he was down on the ground.

My uncle had an eight year old daughter and a three year old son. But I was—I was—for some reason I felt very close to him, and maybe—you know, thinking back on that maybe is what led me to realize that I needed to do something with my life. That maybe life is precious in a way, and I needed to go out and live it to the—the most and not to stay here. And knowing that he was army and he was Vietnam, and we would see all these pictures of him, that by the time I was a freshman, I knew that’s what I was wanting to do.

TS: What? Go in the military?

KM: Go in the military. I absolutely knew.

TS: Why did you have that—why did you have that feeling?

KM: Because I knew that there was no other option for me.

TS: What about college?

KM: I even mentioned college once to my mother and her reaction was, “People like us don’t go to college.” I don’t know what that means today.

I still question, like, “What does that mean?” but college was not an option because my parents, my family, would not support college. To them—that was completely foreign to them. I was the first person in my family to ever graduate high school, and I knew that that was not something that was an option. They would not have supported it, because you go—you go to work. You know, you go work in the factories and that’s what you do.

TS: So, they didn’t have any kind of concept of what a college—

KM: Absolutely not.

TS: —would do for you or—

KM: Absolutely not.

TS: Did any of your teachers encourage you to try to apply to college or anything?

KM: I’m sure that they did; like the counselors and stuff. But I was so set on going in the military because I knew that I needed to get away. I needed to get away. Being an only child, my mother tends to, kind of, baby me; even now. So, I knew that if I didn’t get away I would live under my mother’s thumb probably the rest of my life. So, I was like, “No, I need—I need to go live my own life and have my own—” My plan was to get in

the military and take college courses while I was in. That did not work out. But yes, I knew I couldn't stay. There was no future for me if I stayed here.

TS: How did you plan—make your plans to go in the military?

KM: Well, I graduated high school in '86 and I had taken—what's it called? The ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery]?

TS: Yes.

KM: And I kind of knew at that point air force was where I wanted to go. Pop culture had a lot to do with it [chuckles] as well. You know, you see all the movies, and like, *M*A*S*H* was really big at the time. So, you know, it was a lot of influx of all this military stuff, and I was, like, really into that. Like, any military movie, I'd watch. I mean, it just seemed like it was a great life even though—like, *M*A*S*H* [television series that ran from 1972-1983 about a mobile army surgical hospital during the Korean War] was always—you know, wasn't necessarily happy, but it seemed like a great life to me.

So, I decided—I started talking to a recruiter when I was in my senior year of high school, down in Asheboro, I remember. And I also remember going down there and there was a group of people that they had come—they were people that were in the military from the local area that were home on leave. It must have been around Christmas, is the only thing I can think of. And they—it was in Asheboro Mall and you could go down there and they would have, like—allow us to talk to them; like, the people that were in the air force to, kind of, under—learn about what was it like being in the air force.

So, I graduated and I, kind of, goofed off a little bit after graduation, I must say. It was probably, I would say, mid to late summer of '86 and I finally went in and said, “Okay, this is what—” you know, you've got to work yourself up to it a little bit, because it was frightful; it was scary. I didn't know what to expect, you know; leaving home and all that.

TS: Besides your uncle, did you know anybody else that had been in the military?

KM: Well, my great uncle had been in World War II. I didn't really know him. We would exchange letters because he lived in Arizona. And then my dad's—my stepfather's father was in World War I. My—my mom's grandfather had also been in World War I. So, our family had a lot of people that had been in the military. No females though. I was the first female to go in, and my—and then my—we found out later, of course, that's my mom's uncle had also been in Vietnam; my grandmother's youngest brother, but we—I never met him. So yes, there had been a history—family history of military service.

TS: And how did you pick the air force?

KM: That was the only branch I really thought of. Navy was possibly another option. Never marines. Not the army. Like I said, I'm not a physical kind of person.

TS: Okay.

KM: So, I think the navy's basic training was really, really long; like sixteen weeks or something. And air force's was, like, eight, so I was like, "Let's go to the air force." But I think that was the route I was going to go in anyway.

TS: Yeah?

KM: And so, I went to see the recruiter. I actually enlisted for six years. So, I had a—you know, I kind of knew that's what I wanted to do, and I had to keep going to the MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station] station in Charlotte, and getting all your testing.

TS: Did you get a bonus?

KM: I actually did not get a bonus.

TS: For signing up for six years, you didn't?

KM: No.

TS: Really?

KM: No. I got to go in as an airman first class.

TS: So, you got some rank.

KM: Yeah, I got some rank but no bonus. None of my enlistments did I ever get a bonus.

TS: That's okay?

KM: Yeah.

TS: Because a lot of times on six years you get that.

KM: Yeah. I don't—I don't remember if I did.

TS: So, you picked—so, tell me about how—did you figure out what you were going to do; the particular job in the military that you were going to do?

KM: I just remember going to the recruiter and filling out all the information and then getting the paperwork that said, "You're going to be an information systems radio operator." I had no—

TS: They assigned it to you?

KM: Yeah, they assigned it to me, and I'm like, "Okay, what's that?" You know, because you get—you got the letters and stuff in the mail or something like that from what I remember. And so I'm like, "Oh boy, I get to talk on radios." [sound of rubbing hands together] And so, you know, you see all these movies with the guys on the—you know, the headphones, and all this pop culture and stuff that—they're talking on radios; "Alpha, Bravo, Charlie." I'm like, "Ooh, that sounds like fun!" So, that's what I did. Well, part of the time.

TS: Yeah. Well, tell me about when you first—when you left and you—was it the first time you were ever away from home, that you went to basic training?

KM: Oh yes. Yes. We had went—my family, like I said, wouldn't have a lot of money so we didn't travel; we didn't go places. We would go to the beach—down to Carolina Beach, and I was really always attracted to, like, military sites too. Like, I loved Fort Fisher

down at Carolina Beach. So, it was something about that life, or the military, really, really stuck with me. But yes, I—it was—it was just something that I thought I had to do.

TS: Well—So, you get to Lackland [Air Force Base].

KM: Right.

TS: And, you know, you get off the bus, probably, right?

KM: I can't remember if we flew or we were bused.

TS: Yeah.

KM: I don't remember.

TS: But, I mean, when you—when you pull up to the barracks and stuff, you're usually on a bus.

KM: Okay.

TS: And then you have the—the TI [Training Instructor] there, right?

KM: Right.

TS: Do you remember getting yelled at, or all that? What was that like?

KM: Terrifying.

TS: Was it?

KM: Absolutely terrifying. I got there in February, and ironically I'd—my first day of active duty military was February 3, 1987. My uncle was murdered February 3, 1982. So, it was the anniversary of his death that I actually went into the military.

I remember getting off the bus, and they're asking us to line up, and of course everybody's standing around looking like, "Do—Do what? Do what?" And you—they want you to line up and they're yelling and it's nighttime. It's—I don't remember what time of night but it was late.

And so, you're lining up, and then you're having to march to your dorm, or where you're going to be living. And all of a sudden you're in this big open dorm with, like, forty different women that you don't know. You don't know anything about them, and you're told to store your stuff and go to bed. And then at, like, six o'clock the next morning, here comes them banging on the doors and coming in to wake you up. And that was the day that they actually gave us, like, our uniforms. You had to go down and get them issued to you. And I didn't have any kind of tennis shoes or anything like that, so they kind of yelled at me for that. Like, "You don't have any better—" because all I had was little boots, and they're like, "You don't have any better walking shoes or shoes?"

And I'm like, "Absolutely not," so they let us go down the PX [Post Exchange], or BX [Base Exchange], to buy essentials. And so, you got to go there, and I had to buy shoes because I didn't have any.

TS: So, you weren't running in your boots at that point?

KM: No, they're not combat boots. These are just, like, civilian, kind of, little boots that laced up the front; eighties, kind of almost like—probably thinking Chuck Taylors; those kind of things. So, they were not—not appropriate, but it was all I had, so—

TS: But, I mean, why did they want you to buy tennis shoes? Did they have you run in those?

KM: Yeah.

TS: So, they didn't issue you any tennis—

KM: Well, we had—

TS: —tennis shoes?

KM: Yeah, they—no, they didn't; you had to go buy them.

TS: Oh, okay. So, it was on your checklist of stuff you were supposed to bring?

KM: Probably, and I didn't; yeah, exactly. [chuckles]

TS: Okay.

KM: But yes, we had to go get our uniforms down at the—the thing, and they gave you all that. Then you had to set up your locker, where everything had to be organized.

TS: How'd you do with all that?

KM: I was fine with it. I have a touch of OCD [Obsessive Compulsive Disorder], so I was fine with keeping my—everything, like, perfectly folded and perfectly in line.

TS: How was it being in a bay with, you know, forty other women, being an only child?

KM: It was different. You had to be guard one night. You did it—I think it was two hours, and you would have to walk around with your little flashlight, making sure everybody's in bed, and not let anybody in the dorm. And, you know, basically, I would just have a book up at the little podium thing at the front of the—where the door was, and just be reading. And every ten minutes you're supposed to walk around. You did that for two hours and you wake—woke up the next person, who did it for two hours.

While we were in basic—it wasn't on my watch but another girl's watch, a girl had went in the bathroom and tried to slit her wrist.

TS: From your squadron?

KM: Yeah, from our squadron. And she tried to slit the wrists with—her wrist with the—the little scissors that they gave us, which are not really sharp. They're basically, like, school scissors, and she had went in the bathroom and tried to slit her wrists. So, that was a big thing when we were there.

I just remember, you know, having to get up in the morning and go downstairs and eat chow. You had to line up and you got two glasses of water and your food, and you had to go—and you went to a table and you couldn't sit down until the table was full. Then you sat down. Then you had to drink one glass of water before you could even touch your food, and then you could eat with the other glass of water, and you had, like, fifteen minutes; it was very quick.

Then you went out and you lined up outside, and then you basically spent the majority of your day in class, you know, reading. You had to learn all about military life and that kind of thing. And then you would spend that part of the afternoon, like, marching and learning all those maneuvers.

Then at the end of the day, for, like, an hour or so around five o'clock, you could go down to where they had the soda machines and snack machines and the phones. And then you could call your family and talk to them, and you got to do that for about an hour and it was like a relaxation zone. The T.I.s weren't allowed to go in there; it was just the people in basic training, and you could just veg out for a little bit down in this little part of where the dorm where. And then at the end you had to march back up, but it gave you a little bit of a reprieve.

TS: When did you do any running?

KM: Oh boy. [chuckles] We ran—pretty much, like, after the marching maneuvering you would start running and exercising and that kind of thing. I was terrible at it. I'd never—I could do any other kind of exercise, but I was a terrible runner. I have large breasts and I didn't know anything about, like, a sports bra at the time, so it would kill me—absolutely kill me to run. As a matter of fact, I failed the running in basic training. Failed it.

TS: Completely?

KM: Completely failed it. But what they did to try to help you pass was at the end of the day they would take out the people that didn't pass around five o'clock, and you would start running on the track, and then all of a sudden they would start playing the national anthem at whatever time they took the flags down. So then you had to stop for however long that took to catch your breath, and then you could continue running at the end. So, it kind of helps you make your time, so that—

TS: It broke it up for you.

KM: It broke it up for us, and they did that deliberately, so I have to thank them for doing that or I'd never gotten out of basic training. [chuckling]

TS: How was the obstacle course?

KM: I actually loved the obstacle course. I was very good at it. So, I can do stuff like that, I am just not a runner.

TS: Right.

KM: And there was one thing where you had to climb—there was a—like, a pool-type thing and you had to climb upside down on a rope across this thing. So, I get across it and they're like, "You stand there in case somebody, you know, falls; you dive in and catch them."

And I'm like, "Okay, but I don't swim. [laughs] We're both going to drown if I have to catch somebody." But nobody fell in, thank goodness, while I was standing there. But I was really good at it. Once we were finished with it I'm like, "Can we do that again, because that was fun?" That was amazing, yeah.

TS: How about for the shooting; the marksmanship?

KM: I was very good at that too.

TS: Yeah? Had you shot a weapon before?

KM: Never. Never had shot a weapon. I actually was a marksman. I did get my marksman medal in M-16 and 9-mil[limeter] while I was in.

TS: Oh, you shot both of them?

KM: I did. Yeah, I did. That was—I didn't shoot 9-mil until much later in my career—

TS: Oh, you didn't. Okay.

KM: —but yeah, yeah, I really enjoyed shooting the guns. It's very cathartic. [laughs]

TS: Well, good. So, how about academics, that was—

KM: Not a problem. Not a problem. I've always been very academically inclined. So, yeah, I didn't have a problem, shoot, studying and learning; that came really easily to me. It was just the running that I had a problem with.

TS: No one helped you get a sports bra or anything?

KM: I'm probably—I probably had one at some point.

TS: Yeah?

KM: But yeah, it was just never my thing. Once I ended up at Hurlburt Field [Florida]—

TS: Yes?

KM: —we did a lot of exercising, and so yeah, by then I did have a sports bra.

TS: That was, like, later in your career.

KM: That was much—that was my last assignment.

TS: Okay. But then—So after basic you went to Biloxi [Mississippi]?

KM: Right, for tech[nical] school.

TS: Tech school. And how long were you there?

KM: Six to eight weeks.

TS: Okay, I see.

KM: I think it was March that I got there. I'm pretty sure we were just bused over from basic training, from what I can remember, and—

TS: How was that experience?

KM: It wasn't the best, actually.

TS: Why not?

KM: While—The first two weeks that you're there you can only wear your uniform; you're not allowed to be in civilian clothes, but after you've been at the base and tech school for two weeks, then you can wear civilian clothes off duty when you're not in class. Well, after the first week that I was there, I lost my ID. I don't know where it went. I still, to this day, don't know what happened to it. But I came back with it to my room and my roommate was packing up and leaving because she was graduating, and I still think somehow she—it got—

TS: She packed it up?

KM: She packed it up. Somehow it got gone. So, I had to go to the first sergeant and I had to tell him, you know, "My ID's gone."

Well, he said, "Well, for your negligence, you have to do another two weeks of uniform. You cannot wear civilians for four—" so I was there for four weeks without being able to wear my civilian clothes. So, that was a little stressful.

There, again, the academic side of it was fine. We would get up in the morning and everyone would meet in, like, the courtyard, and you would march from there to where your school was. So, you would march to one building and the people that went to school in that building would peel off, and then you would reform and you would march to the next building. Our building was way out so we were, like, the last group. And we went to school to learn how to operate radios; that's what we did; how to tune them; how to talk on them. You had to learn that military alphabet; Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta; that kind of thing. How to encode them; how to do—you know, tune—turn them on and power them on and power them off; how to set up antenna if you were doing, like, a portable unit. So, that's what I did while I was in tech school.

TS: Did you enjoy it?

KM: The radio operating part was fine. I really did not enjoy setting up antenna or any of that. I was like, "Let somebody else go do that. I'll go and just talk on the radio; that's good; I'll do that part."

TS: [chuckles]

KM: I was just never very good at trying to figure out how to point the thing, you know, because most of these were line of sight.

TS: For that azimuth and all that?

KM: Yes. Yeah, we didn't have—we did have, like, satellite radios, but that was a little later in my career, too, so a lot of these were point of sight radios. So, you had to, like, set the

antenna up and point it in a certain direction and I was just never very good at it. [both chuckle]

TS: So, when you got done with—there, did you have a dream sheet or anything that you filled out for where you wanted to go for your assignment?

KM: Yes, I did, and—

TS: Where'd you want to go?

KM: England was my very first choice.

TS: Yeah? Why did you want to go there?

KM: I wanted to travel, and I was a big fan of, like, English rock bands at the time; Duran Duran, Depeche Mode; The Cure, which I'm still a big fan of.

TS: I'm sure with, like, late eighties.

KM: Yes. I'm a product of the eighties.

TS: Okay.

KM: And so I was like, "Oh, I want to go to England." That was my first assignment and I remember I was talking to my mother, and I'm in the lobby of the dorm talking to my mom and they came in and said, "Assignments are here," and they handed mine to me. And I remember just squealing in delight because I got England as my first assignment. Yes.

TS: What'd your mother think about that?

KM: She was happy. She was really happy for me.

TS: Yeah.

KM: She was, you know, terrified for me and missed me, being an only child and all that, but she was happy for me.

TS: I forgot to ask you what your parents thought about you joining the air force.

KM: My parents were for it. I think my mom realized that—that I needed something more than what I could get in High Point. My biological father was not happy. He called my mom after he found—I don't remember how he found out, but I remember him calling my mom and saying, "No daughter of mine is going to go hang out with a bunch of niggers," because that, to him, was what military was.

And my mom's like, "Just shut up," and hung up the phone. I mean, I never talked to him, but she was livid at him. Because I'd only seen him, like, four or five times in my life, and he's calling up being the usual redneck that he was.

TS: Wanting to control your life when he hadn't been part of it?

KM: Exactly, exactly. And I just—you know, my mother—I only went—I only saw him a couple times in my life. He would call up occasionally and be like, "Oh, I want to see her."

So, my mom's like, "Okay." And she would drop me off at his house [Comments regarding KM's relationship with his wife restricted until 1 January 2038]. I get on the phone and call my mother and say, "Come get me, please." So, yeah, I didn't have much to do with him at all; at all.

TS: [pause] So, you're in England.

KM: Yes!

TS: [chuckles]

KM: I went home for a couple weeks.

TS: I wish I could videotape you because your facial expression just totally lights up the whole room when you—when you're talking about England. Okay.

KM: Yeah, it was fun. It was—I—I went home for a couple weeks—

TS: Okay.

KM: —before I went to England, and then I think—I think I went to Atlanta, and flew from Atlanta to England, because from what I can remember we didn't have, like, an international airport here at that time, or whatever. And it was a civilian flight; it wasn't a military flight.

But I did have a problem when I landed in England; didn't have any English money. And I'm, like, standing in the—this one area they told us to stand in, and there would be a bus to come pick up the military people that were there. And so, just, "Wait here," and this bus would come and it would—it would drive around to all the bases there in the south of England and drop you off where you needed to be, like—

TS: Like a duty[?] bus?

KM: Right. It was, like, [Royal Air Force] Mildenhall, [RAF] Lakenheath, [RAF] Greenham Common; I can't remember the others.

TS: And that's where you were at, right?

KM: I was at Greenham Common. And so, I walked off. I go to the bathroom and I had started my period, and I'm wearing, like, tan pants. And apparently I had started a while back, and I'm like, "Oh—" and I'm eighteen, nineteen. I didn't have any money. And they had the machines in the bathroom to get, like, pads and stuff, but I didn't have any money. So, I had to tie a little thing around my waist, had to go up to the money exchange thing, get money, go back to my suitcase, get clothes. That was my initiation to England. [chuckles] But that was pretty—I remember that today, like, "Oh, that was the worst experience."

TS: Well, it can only get better after that, right?

KM: [laughs] Yes, it does in a way; it does in a way. So, I get to Greenham and I meet the guys that I'm working with; there's five of us; four guys and me. I was the first girl to ever sh—be there.

TS: Oh, really?

KM: Yes.

TS: At this late—like, '87, right?

KM: Yeah, in this particular office I was the only girl to ever come in. It was two sergeants and then two airmen. So, there was actually two sergeants and three airmen, counting me. And it was—Greenham Common was a ground-launched cruise missile base. I got there in June of '87. Never been away from home, and remember, like, I get into the dorm and, you know, I started working and I had to take my testing to get up the next level of—I think I was a one when I got there and I had to take—

TS: For qualifying levels. Did you have, like, four categories?

KM: Yeah, it's like one, three, five, seven, and nine, was what I—what I had. So, I had to—I think once you get out of tech school you're a one, and then you have to study and take all these tests to come up to a three, and all that. So, I was studying for that and I unfortunately started dating one of the guys that I worked with. His name was Dale. We ended up getting married but that's—that's a little later.

Greenham was an interesting base. It was very tiny. If you really wanted to go shopping you went up to either Lakenheath or—

TS: So, it didn't have, like, a commissary or—

KM: It did, but it was tiny.

TS: Tiny?

KM: It was—I mean, we had a BX [store on the base] , but it was tiny.

TS: So, you didn't have a lot of—

KM: No.

TS: —things to choose from?

KM: Yeah, we just had a little—tiny, little clinic.

TS: What was housing like?

KM: I lived in the dorms. The dorms were okay. The dorms were all right. That was my first year there. Once I got married, of course—there were dorms off the base; right off the base there were some dorms. I lived in the dorms on base.

TS: Was it a mixed gender dorm, or just was all women, or what? How was it set up?

KM: The one I was in was all women; it was all girls. And it was—it was interesting. I had a roommate.

TS: Were they like quads or how—

KM: No, no, they had—the rooms were—

TS: Like a—a real barracks style?

KM: Yeah, the rooms were different.

TS: Okay.

KM: Like, at each end—there was two stories and at each end you had one big room, and there was a shared bathroom. And depending on your rank you could have that room by yourself. So, like, a lot of the sergeants that were living there—single females—had those rooms. And in the middle there were—I think there were four rooms on opposite side. The ones on this side were tiny, and you could have that room by yourself, and then the ones opposite were—you shared with somebody. And I had a roommate for part of the time I was there, and then they—I got the room opposite. I mean, it was like a closet; it was so tiny. But I had that room by myself.

TS: Right; which we always want.

KM: Yeah, it was really—I think you had to, like—you couldn't be—from where the bed was the door would open; there was no room to walk between. I mean, it was itty-bitty. But I

had my own sink in there. I didn't have my bathroom but I had a sink, so I could, you know, brush my teeth in there and didn't have to worry about—

TS: Fighting everybody else for a space.

KM: Yeah, yeah, so—and that was after I'd been there probably about six, seven months. But Greenham was interesting. Because it was a nuclear missile base, we had protestors outside the gates. They were British citizens, they were women, and they would camp—that's where they lived. They had these little pup tents, and they lived right outside the gate, and if you went out the gate in a military vehicle they would throw piss at you; rotten eggs.

TS: They would?

KM: Yes! Paint. If you were in a military vehicle. Now, they didn't touch you if you were in your personal vehicle leaving the—leaving the base, but military vehicles, yes, they did; absolutely. Because they were peace demonstrators against nuclear weapons, so—and they would break—somehow they would get into the base, and I never figured out how they were able to do this, because the base was surrounded by a fence with barbed wire on the top. Then there was another—several rows of barbed wire on the ground with another fence with barbed wire around the top. So, I don't know how they got in, but they would break into the base and paint 'baby killer' on your buildings. And you would hear them singing all these peace songs as they were running around the base, and the MOD—the Ministry of Defense Police—would have to come and chase them down because the American police couldn't touch them because they—

TS: They couldn't?

KM: Yeah, because they were British citizens.

TS: Oh, and they were off—they weren't on the base, they were off; outside the perimeter?

KM: No, this—they were on the base.

TS: Oh.

KM: They would break in.

TS: So, the Ministry of Defense came to chase them, even on the base?

KM: Yeah.

TS: Oh, that's interesting.

KM: Because they're British citizens. The American police—or Military Police could not touch them because they were British citizens. The only ones that could actually tackle them and arrest them were the MOD Police, even if they were on the base.

TS: Did that make you nervous?

KM: Yeah, because they would have announcements; "Everybody stay where you are. Don't go outside." I mean, they would never physically harm you. They were—They would not come up and start beating up American soldiers, but, you know, you would hear announcements like, "Everybody stay," and you'd hear them. I remember one time they woke me up. It was probably one, two o'clock in the morning, and I hear singing, and you see all the—the flashing lights and you know, "Oh, here they go again," you know. You could see—you could hear the cops chasing them around the dorms and stuff. And you would go to work and there'd be paint all over the buildings, and it would say "baby killer". It was just—it was—I thought that's how military life was. This is my first base, I thought, "Okay, well, this is what I have to put up with. All right."

But I did get to travel while I was over there, which was a lot of fun.

TS: Yeah, I was just going to ask you. What kind of stuff did you do on your off time, then?

KM: Hung out with Dale, who was my boyfriend, and we went to England—oh, England, excuse me, we went to London a lot. It was a forty minute train ride to London. So, you would get these passes, and you would pay for them, and it would be a—like, there and back, one ticket.

TS: Round trip, kind of, on the train.

KM: Exactly, yeah. Yeah, and people would actually—that lived there, would park there, and they worked in London. So, you know, they would park their cars at the train station every day and then, you know, take the trains back and forth to London. And so, you'd go there and you could eat at McDonald's and Pizza Hut and Taco Bell.

TS: You go to London to eat at McDonald's?

KM: [laughing] McDonald's.

TS: Okay. Did you go in the pubs or—

KM: Yes, of course; of course.

TS: Okay. Well, the first thing you mentioned is McDonald's.

KM: But, you know, that's what I'm saying. I mean, there was a McDonald's and a Pizza Hut downtown where we were living. You know, we would go in the McDonald's downtown to get, you know, a burger and there would be the peace demonstrators that were camped

out in front of the gates over here at this table, you know, eating their lunch. It was very strange.

It was a beautiful country. Oh my gosh, it's so green. It's so lush. But it is cloudy a lot, so you don't see a lot of sunny days. But we did get to—we did go to London, and we did go down to, like, Salisbury Plain and see Stonehenge, but Dale really didn't like to travel—excuse me—did not like to travel, and so I didn't get to do as much traveling as I wanted because, you know, I'm with him and I'm going to please him, and so I always did what he wanted to do. The same with my second husband, too. I never really got to do what I wanted when I was in.

TS: So, what kind of things did he like to do?

[Comments regarding KM's relationship with her husband restricted until 1 January 2038].

TS: And he was in the military?

KM: Yeah, he was in the military; we worked together, yeah.

TS: So what did you do?

KM: Nothing at the time. It was later that I did stuff, once we left England.

TS: Did you ever tell anybody?

KM: Later.

TS: Yeah?

[Comments regarding KM's relationship with her husband restricted until 1 January 2038].

KM: I didn't have any friends.

TS: No?

KM: No.

TS: Just Dale?

KM: Just Dale; that was it. Everything he wanted to do I did, so yeah, I didn't have any friends. After—

TS: And you were working—you were the only female at that unit.

KM: At that time; at that time.

TS: Okay.

KM: Another girl named Rebecca came in the—I think I had a year left, or less than a year left, and she came in, so there was another girl there. I think Todd left. I can't remember. Somebody left and then she came in. So yeah, there was—there was—me and Dale and Todd, by this time, were senior airmen because we'd be in for three years at that—at that point. Or not three years, but I was able to move up to senior airman by the—by the time I left.

TS: And what rank did you say Dale was?

KM: We were—he was an airman.

TS: Okay, So, you're—he was actually lower rank than you?

KM: Right, because I came in as an airman first class.

TS: That's right.

KM: But, you know, we basically just—he wanted to hang out and just drink and party and that's—I mean, I was twenty years old; I was very young; very naïve, but yeah—

TS: How long did you stay married to him?

KM: A year.

TS: A year?

KM: Yeah, just a year.

TS: And how did that go when you weren't married anymore? I mean, did you initiate it or did he?

KM: It was, kind of, a joint—a joint thing.

TS: Yeah?

KM: When I left—we left England, he had kept telling me he was going to leave me, and I'm so stupid I'm going, "No, we need to stay together."

And we came—once we left Greenham, we came back and we stayed with my parents, and [comments regarding KM's relationship with her husband restricted until 1 January 2038]. We had a joint assignment to—what was it? North Dakota. I can't remember the name of the base.

TS: Minot?

KM: No, it wasn't Minot.

TS: That's South Dakota, isn't it?

KM: I don't remember.

TS: I'm forgetting the name. [Probably Grand Forks Air Force Base, Minot and Grand Forks are both in North Dakota. Ellsworth AFB is in South Dakota.]

KM: I don't remember, but either way, we had a joint assignment.

TS: Like a temporary duty assignment?

KM: No, permanent assignment to North Dakota.

TS: Okay.

KM: And he was from South Dakota, so when he left he went home. I'm in North Carolina.

TS: Okay.

KM: And my mom's best friend was going through a nasty divorce and she had one of those answering machines that recorded two way conversations. [Comments regarding KM's relationship with her husband restricted until 1 January 2038]...and eventually that's when I went up to Pease Air Force Base [New Hampshire]. They cancelled my assignment to North Dakota and send me to Pease.

TS: What happened to him?

KM: He went—He reported to North Dakota thinking I'm still coming, because he doesn't know, and they—once he got there they revoked his security clearance and he basically—the rest of his military career, which was like a year, or however long he had left, he was the base operator and he had to—because even while I went to Pease, he was still calling me at Pease because we're trying to get the divorce settled, [comments regarding KM's relationship with her husband restricted until 1 January 2038]

TS: What—So he got restrictions and reduced in—did he get reduced in rank or anything like that?

KM: I don't remember.

TS: Yeah? But he didn't have to serve any time?

KM: No.

TS: Like, he wasn't charged with anything?

KM: No. No.

TS: What do you think about that? I mean—

KM: I think how stupid and foolish I was to marry him. [chuckles]

TS: Well, I don't mean—I don't mean that at all. I just mean that—how the military handled that when you did tell them; when you showed them the evidence.

KM: I—yeah, I think that—you know, looking back on it, I think that they probably could have done more, but this was in '89 and I think that at the time it was still, kind of, the good ol' boy network. I appreciated that they—what they did do. [Comments regarding KM's relationship with her husband restricted until 1 January 2038]. So, I was—I think I was fine with it. Just keep—just keep him away from me.

TS: That was enough resolution?

KM: I think so, yeah; at the time, yeah.

TS: Well, did you—when you were in England and you're—so you immediately started dating Dale, but did you ever have any, like, sexual harassment up to this point? Not at all?

KM: Not while I was there, no. That assignment was really interesting. You know, the two sergeants that were in charge of us were both, like, staff sergeants, and then we had a master sergeant that was above—he was above several offices. They were both married, they were really nice guys, and they never, you know, treated me any differently than anybody else. We worked in an office that dealt with a lot of classified—lots of classified information. When I got to England I was actually in a—when I got there they told me—they said, "Okay, you're going to get a specialty code once you leave here," because I wasn't working radios as much there.

TS: And this is in England?

KM: England, yeah.

TS: Okay.

KM: When I first get there they said, "You're going to become a combat crew communications specialist," which was a subfield of the radio operator. We operated radios only during exercises; that was it. The other ninety percent of the time that I was

there we dealt with classified documents; communication classified documents. The encode/decode, authentication documents, that would—that were given to the nuke [nuclear]—the missile crews when they went out.

So, they would come to us and we would issue them all of their classified documents in this big old trunk thing, and then they would take that with them and they would go out in the field. And so, our job was to make sure all that classified stuff is maintained, controlled, documented, and you cannot make a mistake on it; absolutely not, because you could go to prison if you did not do your job there very effectively.

So, we had something like, I don't know, ten safes. You would open the safe and you had an inventory sheet for every drawer, and you had to inventory it every time you opened it. Even if it was just to open it to grab one thing, you could not just do that. So, you had to dial the combo, you opened the safe—and we were in secure buildings, too, so you had to go through security things to get into where we worked. And you would open the safes and then do all the inventory.

And then the things expired. Sometimes it was weekly, sometimes it was monthly. So then you would have to open up—pull out the old stuff, fill out the form, shred it, you know, put the new—then do a inventory, put the new stuff in. It was—it was a lot of stuff, and you didn't want to misplace anything because—

TS: Is this where OCD came in handy? [chuckles]

KM: Probably, yes, yes. Because I had a top-secret clearance, and I also had a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] top secret—a COSMIC—it was called COSMIC TOP SECRET ATOMAL [Classified information restricted to NATO-Atomal]. Wow. [laughs] Which was a NATO top secret clearance, as well.

TS: I've not heard of that one.

KM: Yeah, COSMIC TOP SECRET ATOMAL. I know; whatever. But—So, I had, like, a really high security clearance because I had to deal with all of this communication stuff, and it was basically documents that they could encode/decode messages through clear radios. And of course, if they got a message back they could authenticate it to make sure it was real, and that kind of stuff. So, that's what I dealt with ninety percent of the time that I was at Greenham Common. And because I did that, you get a specialty code that's on your transcripts, or your record, to say you're qualified to do that job.

TS: Right.

KM: So, I loved it. That was, like, the most amazing, and I did it—three out of my four assignments I did that, because I had that specialty code, so when it came up to say, “Okay, you need to leave. You've done however many years. We've got to send you somewhere. Okay, she's got this specialty code. Guess what? She has to go here.” So—But it was fun.

TS: Did it limit your assignments, then, because there's only so many places you could go where they had that?

KM: Well, I don't think so, because, I mean, when I went to Ramstein [Air Base, Germany] it was radio operator completely. There was no—

TS: Oh, so you didn't use that specialty code?

KM: No, I didn't use that specialty code when I went to Ramstein, but I did use it there. And then the exercises. Oh my gosh.

TS: In England?

KM: [chuckling] Yes.

TS: How were they?

KM: Oh my gosh. Oh man. Being a nuclear missile base, we would exercise, probably, every other month for, like, sometimes a week long; three or four days to a week; just depended. And we always had to wear our chem[ical] suits when we did our exercises. Yes! Because we were, of course, at a nuclear base, so we were pretending that we were getting shot with nuclear weapons, so you always had to wear your chem suit.

So, by the time, you know—well, part of the time I was there, and then when I married Dale I'm living off base. So, there was a big parking lot next to one of the hangars that you parked in, and anything on, like, the family side of the base, was non-play [not part of the exercise—KM clarified later]. You could go to the BX. You didn't have to do all—you know, be in your chem suit there, but once you got to this parking lot buses would come pick you up, and there would be a sign that would tell you what level you were in; yellow, green, or red. And so, you could look up and go, "Okay, we're—we're in condition green, so I just need to have my chem suit with me." But if you got there and you were in condition yellow, you had to put your chem suit on to get on the bus. You could have everything on but your gloves and your hat—your thing.

TS: Was it those rubbery gloves?

KM: Yes, and they smelled.

TS: I was wondering how you could open the safe with them—

KM: Yeah.

TS: —and get the stuff out.

KM: Well, we didn't do that during the exercises.

TS: Oh, you didn't?

KM: No, we had already—by the time—the beginning of the exercise we would have issued all of our encode/decode, the missile cruise would head out. They went out to Salisbury Plains, which is actually where Stonehenge is, but it's actually a huge military complex for the British military. And so, our guys would go out there and play games with the British military, and it was these big trailers, and they would have fake—they didn't take the real nuclear missiles out; they would have fake ones that they would have in these trailers that lifted up, and it would hold four nuclear missiles. The idea was it was ground launched cruise missiles, and they could drive all over Salisbury Plain and the—the “Russians” couldn't find them because they're—

TS: Because it's mobile?

KM: Because they're mobile; exactly. And so, it was one of those you probably see on TV where it would raise up and then the missiles would shoot out. Then you would have another truck that would go out with them that's, like, the communications truck. Then you had these Humvees that went out that stationed on top of the mountains, or the hills out there because it's line of sight, so that the base could talk to those guys—

TS: So, it was, like, signal intelligence?

KM: Exactly. And then those guys could signal down into where Salisbury Plain is. So you had all these things going on. So, they would all be gone, so we'd already issued that. But what we did during these exercises were we were the radio support on base to talk to the—the guys sitting on top of the hills; the mobile radio operators who were then talking to the missile crews. So, because it was line of sight you had to have all this—these people. This is before digital technology.

So, you would get on the bus and then the bus would drive you around and drop you off where you—where you worked. Well, where our radios were, were inside the missile bunker. So, our office was on one side of the—the base, and then the radio site was down in this missile bunker, so you had to go through all the blast doors and you had to get in there.

And if you got caught out in the open and they went into condition red, you would then have to throw your helmet on, throw your gloves on, and dive into the nearest ditch. The whole time you're in condition red, which could be two hours—so you're laying in this ditch for however long, it could be July and you could be burning up, and it could be December and you're freezing. So—And then as soon as they went back to condition yellow, then you could get up, walk around, and—yeah.

The worst experience I ever had in this was, I'm in the bunker, right? We go to condition yellow, so we had to put our chem suits on. So, we put them on. So, I'm talking to radios, talking to all the guys and everything. Well, then we go to condition red, and my relief had just got there; we worked twelve hours shifts. My relief had just got there; we go to condition red, which means I can't leave, okay. They're not going to open the

bunker door to let me go. And I'm like, "Man, I've already been here twelve hours. I'm stinking." You know, I've had this chem suit on—so I'm in this chem suit.

So, I decided to go and crawl in the back and just lay down because I'm, like, sleeping. Well, nobody comes and wakes me up, and, like, eight hours later they find me and they're like, "Hey, you can get up now." And it's been condition green for hours. So, I've had this chem suit on, with the helmet, the whole thing, just passed out in the back for, like, eight hours.

I'm like, "Thanks." And I had to come back to work in, like, three hours, so I'm like—you know? Like, "That was great guys, thank you very much." [laughs]

TS: Well, you would have been in England, like, as the—Eastern Europe is, kind of, crumbling.

KM: A little bit, yeah.

TS: Right, when they were doing—a lot of people were coming across the border at that time, and things were breaking down. Because in '89, right, you were there?

KM: I left in June of '89.

TS: So, right, in that summer, I think, is when things were starting to—do you remember anything about that at all?

KM: I just remember them being really cautious. You know, the base officials trying to be really cautious about what was going on. But other than that, I don't remember much else about, like, what was going on. I really got more of an impact of that when I went to Ramstein in Germany—

TS: Okay.

KM: —which was like two years later.

TS: Oh, right, because then you got the end of—

KM: Or a year and a half later.

TS: —the Soviet Union during that—

KM: Right. Well, the [Berlin] Wall fell a couple months before I got to Germany.

TS: Okay.

KM: Yeah.

TS: Well, what—is there anything else you wanted to talk about, about England?

KM: My mom used to send me bags of Cool Ranch Doritos. [both laugh]

TS: There's always something that, you know, we miss.

KM: Yeah, they didn't have them over there, so my mom would, like, send care packages of Cool Ranch Doritos and Sir Pizza. Pizza boxes that were empty, but at least I could smell them.

TS: [laughs]

KM: I mean, really, it was great.

TS: Seriously?

KM: Yes! Yes! She did. And so, I would get these bags of Cool Ranch Doritos, and they were crumbled. I mean, they were just little tiny pieces, but I didn't care. But yeah, I couldn't get that. But one of the interesting things about it is that you could drink at sixteen over there. So, I turned twenty-one a week before I came back, and I'd been drinking the whole time; you know, you go out to the pubs and stuff. So, I came back and my mom's like, "How great does it feel to be twenty-one?"
I'm like, "Eh," you know. I've been drinking over there.

TS: Been there, done that.

KM: Been there, done that.

TS: How was the food?

KM: Oh, it was great.

TS: Yeah? Did you really like it?

KM: I really liked the food. I—The people, not so much actually. The British were very, you know—they would look at the Americans and say, "Oh, those colonists," you know. They still thought we were a colony.
And you're like, "No, we've been a country for a couple of years now." But they would call the Americans "colonists" and stuff, so.

TS: Where—Where—When you say "the British", was that everywhere or just in certain areas you went to or—

KM: Pretty much, yeah.

TS: Really?

KM: Yeah. Yeah. You know, you had some really nice British. Some of the guys, of course, of base, were dating some of the British girls and stuff like that, which has its own reputation. You know, anywhere there's a military base you always have the girls that want to marry the military American to get back to the United States, and so you had a lot of that going on. You know, Ramstein was also bad for that; England.

TS: Well, do you want to talk about Pease Air Force Base and how that was when you were in New Hampshire?

KM: Sure. I left Greenham and, like I said, I went home, and that was, kind of, a—they assigned me there to get away from Dale. And it was a bomber—bomber and something else base. The problem with that was it's right on the coast of New Hampshire, so they're not even going to be able to get the bombers off the ground before the Russians can destroy the base, so it was closing. Greenham Common closed right after I left.

TS: Oh, it did?

KM: Yes, it did. So, I get to Pease and they're like, "Yeah, it's closing."
And I'm like, "Oh!" You know, I'm thinking I had the worst luck. I was only there for about a year and half. I was one of the last people to come into the base, because they were already going to close it, so there was nobody coming in after me. There might have been a few people after me, but not very many.

TS: Yeah? So, what was your experience like at this base?

KM: It was different. I was going through the divorce at that base when I first got there. It was—everything was—they didn't even have a room for me. They were trying to find places to put me, and so I was doing—I was housed not in the—with my squadron. I was housed in, like, the logistics squadron building because they didn't have a room where I needed to be. And the—the contract with Pease Air Force Base was something like sixty—sixty percent of the base had to be from New England.

TS: You mean the workers?

KM: No, the military. It was some kind of contract with the base that over two-thirds of the base had to be people from New England.

TS: Really?

KM: Yes. So, like, on weekends nobody was around, because everybody lived—my—my second husband, he lived five minutes from the base; he grew up there, and you know—or ten minutes. He lived in Maine, but it was, like, between Maine and right on the border.

Yeah, so it was, like, on the weekends it was like—there was only, like, twenty people around because those were the only people that didn't live within a couple of hours. Almost everybody else was from Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine; yeah.

TS: So, you met your second husband here?

KM: Yes, I know. When I first got there I worked in an office. There again, there was a master sergeant, a couple sergeants. I was a sergeant E-4 by this point, and—so, I started hanging out with one of the airmen that worked with me. I think she was a senior airman; I can't remember. And she had a big clique of people that she hung out with, so I just started kind of hanging out with them.

And Dale—excuse me—Shawn was my second husband, and he had a girlfriend at the time, and we would all just, kind of, hang out together. But he and his girlfriend broke up, and we were just hanging out, and then we started dating, which was in March of 1990. We got married in April of 1990; six weeks later we got married. So, yeah, we didn't date very long, but I had known him for—like, since June, up to that point. I had went through a really—I had a horrible first—pretty much, I don't have very fond memories of Pease Air Force Base. The job was still the combat crew communications.

TS: And you liked that?

KM: Of course, I loved that.

TS: Yeah.

KM: That was—That was my favorite. I loved doing that job, dealing with the bombers crews and—I want to say tankers. I want to say it was bombers and tankers there. So, you know, the crews would come in a get their stuff, and we would issue it to them. Yeah, that was great. But personally, I had a really tough time there.

TS: What happened?

KM: Well, I was going through the divorce, and you know, Dale was calling me up at work and—you know, and everything, and it was just going through all of that. While I was living in the logistics dorm I was raped. I had been studying. There again, you got to take your next level, and I was studying something; I don't remember. And the guy across the hall from me, because it was a mixed—mixed dorm, guy across the hall from me had knocked on the door, and I had been drinking. Not a lot; I'd probably had two beers or something. And he comes in—

TS: Was it, like, a dayroom that you were in?

KM: No, it was my room.

TS: It was your room.

KM: It was my room.

TS: Okay.

KM: You had—You had a room, and then there was a bathroom, and then you had, like, a suite. So, you had two rooms and a bathroom in between. Your suitemate had to be female, so there was another female on the other side of me.

TS: I see.

KM: But across the hall there were males, so you had—and that was how my dorms were at Pease; it was male and female like that. But the bathrooms had to be shared by the same sex. And the guy comes in—and, you know, I opened the door because I've known him; he lived right across the hall from me and hadn't been there but a couple months, and he attacked me while I was in my room, and raped me. I never reported it; never did anything, because I felt like I had been drinking—I mean, I wasn't drunk. Like I said, I had, like—I was sitting in my room, studying, having a beer. But I just, kind of, let it go.

And then a few months later I was having a divorce party, and I had started dating Shawn's roommate; my second husband's roommate. He had been gone on TDY [temporary duty], and I had a big divorce party because my divorce from Dale was final, and I got drunk. I mean, I got really, really hammered. And—I can't think of what the guy's name was now. Can't—It doesn't—I can't even think of what his name was. Greg; that was his name. And he had come back from TDY and he was like, "Yeah, I don't want to date you anymore. You're not pretty enough for me;" that same night. And I just went and got drunk.

I was like, "Oh my gosh."

So I went back to my dorm room. Now, by this time I'm living in the dorm that I should have been living in. They had—after—shortly after that incident happened, which had nothing to do with it, they moved me into the dorm that I was supposed to have been in but they didn't have room. So, they got room and said, "Okay, you can move in."

So, I moved back—and I had a roommate at the time—and I went into my room to, kind of, just pass out. And of course, the door wasn't locked and my roommate—one of her friends—came in. I don't remember this because I was passed out, but he came in and tried to rape me while I was passed out. My suitemate had come down to check on me and walked in and caught him, and he grabbed up all of his clothes and ran out the door and took off. But she reported it to the first sergeant, who then moved my roommate out because it was her friend, apparently, and moved her to a different so I would have a private room so I didn't have to deal with that.

TS: Well, what did they do to the guy that ran off?

KM: I don't think they ever found him. I don't know—

TS: But they knew who it was, right?

KM: I don't know that they knew who it was. I don't—I don't know, because I was passed out. So, to this day I refuse to drink. I might have a beer occasionally, but I'm like, "No, I—no, no"; will not—will not put myself in that position—or that I had. I mean, you have to realize I was twenty-one.

TS: Right.

KM: I was very young—or twenty. I was very—whatever; however old. Or however old I was at the time; I was twenty-one. So, you know, my personal life—and after that I just got really angry. You know, I had a lot of personal problems.

And then Shawn started showing an interest in me, and he was very sweet and very kind, and you know, I just fell for him hook, line, and sinker, and we got married.

TS: Did you see him, kind of, as a protector, too, maybe, in some ways, you think?

KM: Probably; probably. I think I saw him as someone that—he was very kind. He didn't—He wasn't like Dale. He was just very caring at the time. Now I look back on it and realize he was also very manipulative, but, you know, he was very controlling in a different way, which I didn't see at the time. So, you know, my—we did travel a lot when we were up in Pease. He and I would go and he—we never got to go to Boston, which was really irritating, but you know, I got to go visit with his parents who lived, like, ten minutes from the base, and, you know, it was just—it was different. Yeah.

TS: Well, do you mind if I ask you about the one—the—so at this—at this place, this person that you knew raped you, and then this other man that you—they weren't aware of attempted to. The one that did, did—and you said you didn't say anything; you didn't tell anyone.

KM: Yes.

TS: But did you continue to live in close proximity to him?

KM: Yeah.

TS: Did you work with him at all?

KM: No, no, because I was living in the dorm that was for logistics people.

TS: Right.

KM: So, I didn't work with him. He lived across the hall. And it was probably, only like, maybe a week or two after that when I got moved to my dorm because an opening came up.

TS: So, you didn't really see him again?

KM: I probably did. I probably just didn't think about it, you know; I don't remember.

TS: Did you—Did you ever, like, seek any kind of counseling or—

KM: No.

TS: No?

KM: No, not at that time, no.

TS: Was that anything that was encouraged in the air force at that time?

KM: No.

TS: This was still a period where you say it was not really—

KM: No, not really.

TS: —sexual abuse—

KM: Yeah.

TS: —and violence.

KM: Yeah, not really, absolutely not. I was just—I mean, I just remember I got angry. Like, I wouldn't even talk to people. I was so angry and so just destroyed about it. And I became very promiscuous during that period, too, I think just trying to let loose; I don't know. And then, of course, when I met Shawn it was like, "Okay, now that's the person I'm going to marry and he's going to take care of me." And he was military; he was air force at the time as well. So, I totally thought I had found that one person that was—you know, we had a lot in common, we were both military. I thought, "This is going to be great."

He was a—He was a comm—He was information systems computer specialist, so he did the computer side of it and I did the radio side of it.

TS: And that was, kind of—a new kind of field opening up at that time too.

KM: Yeah, right.

TS: Well, it would have been open for a little while, but changing quickly, I'm sure.

KM: Yeah, because by the time I got to—when I left there and I got to Ramstein I’m dealing with satellite radios, where my first base I’m dealing with HF [high frequency] radios. And here it is, only two or three years later, and I’m like, “Satellite? Well, this is cool.”

TS: [chuckles] Yeah. So, you—you talk—you talk here—is that what you’re talking about here?

KM: Yes.

TS: Yeah? Where you felt, like, not sure of your own safety, I guess, in some ways?

KM: Yeah.

TS: And your mental—

KM: Yeah. Yeah. I went through a lot—a lot of stuff at Pease Air Force Base.

TS: Yeah?

KM: I mean, I don’t look back on it and—like I hated the base, or anything like that.

TS: Right, on.

KM: Because it was—

TS: You don’t come across that way.

KM: No, no, it was—I mean, the only problem I had with Pease was it was in New Hampshire. It snowed a lot. [chuckles] So, it would be—it was so cold. I mean, it was so cold, and there would be, like, three or four foot little snow drifts outside the dorm, and I’m like, “You know, I’m from North Carolina, man. This is not good,” you know. It was—It was an interesting—you know, interesting place. The best steak sandwiches they had off base. There was a place called D’Angelo’s that you’d get the best steak sandwiches in the world. I miss D’Angelo’s to this day.

TS: I think the best sandwich place, actually, is in Monterrey, California. A place called Compagno’s.

KM: Okay.

TS: I haven’t been there since, like, 1980, so—[laughs]

KM: I know, you miss it. I’m like, “Man, I miss it.” And there was a place downtown that—that was called the Oar House—O-A-R House—and it was a restaurant, and it was a—like a four star restaurant, and Shawn’s parents were friends with the people that

owned it, so we could go eat there any time we wanted and didn't have to pay, and the desserts were just to die for. And I had my first Monte Cristo sandwich there, and I love Monte Cristo sandwiches now [chuckling]; like, it was the best. And the downtown area outside of Pease was very quaint; very New England. So, you know, it was really kind of nice.

TS: How are you feeling at this point? So now you've been in, like, three years?

KM: Yes.

TS: And you're a sergeant?

KM: Yes.

TS: So, you've been promoted well.

KM: Yeah.

TS: And do you feel like you—how were you treated professionally, you know, at this point?

KM: I think I was treated professionally fine, because there was already, like, two females in my office when I got there. One was, like, a staff sergeant, and the other one was, like, a senior airman, and I was an E-4 sergeant; not a staff sergeant yet.

TS: Yes.

KM: So, yeah, I think professionally I never had an incident where it was—until I got to Ramstein, where I felt that, you know, I was sexually harassed for being a woman.

TS: Oh, okay.

KM: Right.

TS: What happened there?

KM: I had a master sergeant that was there that was, I think, really anti women. He was—He just—He didn't like women very much, and then of course—

TS: In what way; how did he show that?

KM: I remember when I—my first evaluation that I got with him was really low, and the senior master sergeant—or the chief master sergeant was like, "No, you can't give her this low of a grade," and I was the only one he gave that low of a grade to.

TS: Were there other women in—

KM: No, not at that point.

TS: Okay.

KM: There—like I said, after I came in, a couple other females in came shortly after me, but at that point it was all—it was still all male; there was, like, five of us, I think.

TS: And this is the base that you're at after Pease, right?

KM: Right, I went to Hurlburt Field [Florida].

TS: Okay.

KM: When I got married to Shawn, Shawn had an assignment—I think I had an assignment to Ramstein, he had an assignment to some crazy place on the other side of Germany, and we were able to get a joint—they changed his assignment to joint, so he joined me at Ramstein. And we flew over—we flew over into Reykjavik, which was interesting.

TS: In Iceland?

KM: And it was a military flight.

TS: Is that Iceland, right?

KM: Yeah, I think so. It was pitch dark, I don't know. I just remembering landing; like, "Where are we?" And it was a military flight so you had to wear your uniform. And we landed, I want to say, in Frankfurt, and then we went from Frankfurt and then we drove down the—one of the guys that he worked with—was going to be working with, picked us up, him and his wife, and then drove us down into Ramstein. And we lived off base for about a year and a half; we didn't live on base. Had a big old house in the middle of this town, and then we moved into a smaller place, and then eventually got base housing, which was on the fourth floor with no elevator. [both laugh] I had to walk up and down stairs every day.

TS: So, how was that—you—well, go back to what you were talking about; this first sergeant—who—wasn't the first sergeant. Who was it that rated you poorly? This senior master sergeant?

KM: The master sergeant.

TS: The master sergeant. Okay.

KM: Right. He was my direct supervisor, and my job at Ramstein—I worked in the United States Air Force European Command Center; USAFE Command Center, which is four

stories underground. In the middle—you walk up and there’s this little tiny itty bitty, like, building, like a shack. And you walk in, there’s a guard there, and you have you show him his—your ID. And then there’s a gate, and you buzz in and you walk down, like, four flights of stairs. And then you walk down a long hallway and walk through these blast doors. Yeah, I worked in some really crazy places.

And this Master Sergeant [name restricted until 1 January 2038], and then there was a chief master sergeant, and the rest of us were all, like, sergeant, maybe a few airmen. And he just was very condescending to me. I remember one time I had talked about some kind of movie I had at home. He grabs me by the front of my shirt and yanks me to him and said, “I want that movie. You need to bring it to me,” in front of, like, all these other people in the office.

And then I remember another time I came into work and I had by BDUs [Battle Dress Uniform] on, and he was like, “Your BDUs are wrinkled.” And he called me into an office and had the captain—one of the captains there come in and say, “Rate her uniform; how wrinkled it is.” I was just crying hysterically; like, this guy was just—he was just really antagonistic toward me.

But the chief was more like, “Yeah, you can’t—” He ended up getting in trouble for it; I mean—of his attitude totally. They did away with the radio operators there and we went to another spot on base, and he was sent somewhere else. Like, he—They were like, “Yeah, we don’t want him in our radio shop. We want him—” and so, he worked for the squadron, just as, kind of, like a—actually, I don’t know what he did.

TS: Yeah? But it—It seems like there’s this habit of just moving them away, not necessarily—

KM: Oh no.

TS: —giving them any punitive—

KM: No, no, definitely not. It still was, kind of, the good old boy network.

TS: Yeah?

KM: Yes.

TS: Well, did you have anybody that you would consider a mentor?

KM: No.

TS: Not really?

KM: Not really, no.

TS: Not at any point in your career?

KM: There was a tech sergeant that I worked for when I was at Hurlburt Field—Tech Sergeant Klingensmithpi—that I did like a lot. He was—He was a really good guy. He had to get out. He tested and didn't make master at twenty, so he had to get out. So, I felt really bad for him. But I did like him, and like I said, the two sergeants that I had my very first assignment with were really nice; were really good guys. I'd have to say everybody I worked with at Pease was really great.

It was just when I got to—you know, when I got to Ramstein, I had to work with that one master sergeant. And we worked along the officers that were in the command center, there was always two of them working, and then the radio operators, so there was three people. And—oh, there was an NCO [non-commissioned officer], also, in there, and you worked shift work because the command center's open all the time. And when we would have exercises at Ramstein there was the command center itself, the room, and then you would look down and there was this big huge room with all these generals. You'd have twenty-some generals running around down there; crazy; the four star generals and stuff. And so, that was—I always tried to hide in the radio room. I don't want to come out when the generals were down there.

But we didn't—we wore BDUs; we didn't wear blues. And we had satellite radios, so you're doing things—and they're encrypted, so it's all free and clear radios so you don't have to encode it as much, and you're typing it and sending it off. But the—the guys behind me would send things through, like, the telephone lines and that would be encrypted. So, they were using those encode/decode documents that I had dealt with before, but I'm not doing that job there. It's basically satellite stuff, so.

TS: So, it's just changing with technology then, in some sense?

KM: I think so. It—The radios were huge though. I mean, the casing things for the radios were probably about seven foot tall, about three foot wide.

TS: Yeah?

KM: And that's just one of them. There was, like, eight of them or something. They were huge, and you had to go over—you had to switch—it wasn't at midnight, but when the time changes you would have to switch the time. It was—it was a lot of stuff. But I—you know, that was—that was fun, because it was all typing. So, you got to know what was going on all over Europe, because you're the command center for Europe.

TS: Right. How was that?

KM: That was fun. You got to know a lot of details you probably did not want to know.
[chuckles]

TS: Maybe not.

KM: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. Well—So, it seems to me, just in, you know, you're—actually, like, your face just lights up when you talk about your job.

KM: Yeah.

TS: It seems like you really love doing your job.

KM: I did. I did.

TS: That's neat. And did you feel like—look—you know, when you think about when you were growing up and the kind of opportunities you had in the air force, did you think about that at the time; like, being able to go to England and Germany?

KM: Oh yes.

TS: Did you?

KM: Because, you know, I would—my mom—I'd be talking to my mom and I realized at that time that I'm having life experiences that no one else in my family had, and I'm growing beyond my limited family experience. I'm—I'm more adventurous than they are, I guess, and so I was experiencing things and learning things that they just did not have a concept of. Different foods; I mean, just as basic as that. You know, my parents would be meat and potatoes and very Southern-type food, and they did not progress outside of that much. And so, here I'm coming home going, "Let's go eat some Vietnamese and some Thai food and this food and German food."

And they're going, you know, "We don't know what that is."

I'm like, "But try it. You might like it."

"We don't even know how to pronounce it."

TS: Would they try it?

KM: My mother did. My mother was very adventurous. My father, no. [laughs] My dad was not. He didn't even eat pizza. He was definitely a meat and potatoes guy.

TS: Yeah? Well, how about your friends when you came back? Did you see that—any kind of change in how you could relate to them now? You know what I mean?

KM: I didn't really see much of them when I came back. I saw my best friend, who I'm still really good friends with, and her and I would talk. She actually came to Pease to see me. Her and my mother came up on Christmas to see me. But my two other friends, we had always said when growing up that Sheivon was going to go in the Marines and Sherry was going to go in the [U.S] Army and I was going to go in the [U.S] Air Force. Well, Sheivon married a guy in the Marines, Sherry married a guy in the army. I was the only one that went in the air force.

TS: That actually did the air force—

KM: That did the air force, yes.

TS: —and did the service.

KM: Yes.

TS: So, you had—you had talked about military with them—

KM: Yes.

TS: —[unclear] growing up?

KM: Yes.

TS: So, they weren't surprised when you went in the air force?

KM: No, no. I don't think anybody was really surprised. [chuckles]

TS: Well, did you—you have something in here about “wouldn't let me stay”. I'm not sure what that refers to, in Ramstein. What's that about?

KM: Oh, yes. I had a problem with my jaw, and they were like, “We need to break your jaw, and we need to realign everything.”

TS: Oh, with your jaw?

KM: Jaw, yes. And they said, “We need to break it and we need to realign everything.” And they said, “But if we do that you have to stay for another three years, because it's going to take that long for us to fix all of this.”

So, I went to my first sergeant and I said, “Look,” you know, “this is the situation. I need to stay for another three years.” I think I had six months left or something.

And my first sergeant said, “No.” He said, “The only way that I'm going—would allow you to stay was if your husband stays.”

TS: But he didn't work in the same—

KM: We worked in the same squadron.

TS: Same squadron?

KM: We did work in the same squadron, and he was like, “Yeah, that's the only way that you can stay, is if he—he reenlists and stays. But we don't want just you to stay.”

TS: So, what—would your husband reenlist then?

KM: No.

TS: He wanted to get out?

KM: He got out. He got out after Ramstein, yeah. So that was really devastating. I was, kind of, like, I don't know what I did for this first sergeant to just be like, "Yeah, we don't want you." So, that was a little hurtful too. And I had only been in that squadron for about a year.

The first two years I was in the command center, and then they decided to do away with the radios down there, and there was another radio site on base at Ramstein but it was off base; it was up on top of the hill. And so, those of us that were working there now had to go work in this other site. So, we had to drive a military truck up this hill; up the hill. It was a really steep incline and, especially in the winters, sometimes you didn't make it because it was—you couldn't get up there. And so, you might be stranded up there for two or three days, and you had to carry your M-16 around and walk the perimeter of this—of this radio site. And there was huge antenna off in this field with all these sheep. [laughs]

So, you had to walk this perimeter and you just had your building, and it had a—you know, it had a shower facility in there, and you had a big kitchen, but then there was the room with all the radios, and you—there again, it was all shift work. When I worked for combat—when I worked in the combat crew communications it was all during the day unless you had an exercise or something.

But this was all shift work because you had to man it twenty-four hours. So I loved the midnight shift, because you got up there at eleven o'clock, you relieve this—this—the swing shift, they went home, and you had to—you would check the gun, you're all set, nobody was up there until eight o'clock in the morning. And you rarely had a radio call, so we would have our one chair, then the other chair in front of us propping our feet up. I'd have my jacket around me and I would be asleep. I am—I would be gone for, like, six hours. And we would watch movies, because there was nothing to do. We'd turn all the lights off and me and the other radio—because there had to be two of us, we'd just be like, "Good night," [chuckling] and we'd pass out. Now, you couldn't do that during the day—

TS: No.

KM: —and you could do that for the swing shift, because swing shift was, like, three to eleven, or two to eleven. So, after five when all the sergeants and everybody—you know, all the master sergeants left, you could just be like, "Okay, it's time to chill out," because nobody could come in because the gates are locked.

TS: So, what, you were just waiting for radio traffic, or?

KM: Yeah, you're just waiting for radio traffic, and at night it was rare.

TS: Yeah?

KM: Rare that you had anything going on. So, nobody could come in on you because the gates are locked. They had to buzz to get in. Then you would go out there with your M-16 and open the gate and let them in. So yeah, you were just up there by yourself. We'd just sit up there and sleep and watch movies. [chuckles] Your military at work.

TS: There you go. And what kind of living arrangements did you have when you were in Ramstein?

KM: We lived off base, and—

TS: Okay, did you live in like—on the economy?

KM: Yes, we did.

TS: How was that?

KM: It was really fun. We lived in this really tiny town outside of the base. Germany is really interesting. You have a town, and then you have a big open area, and then you have another town, and then you have a big open area. It's not sprawling suburbs like we have in America. So, the town was there, and then there would be, like, fields all around it, and we lived there. It was probably about ten, fifteen minutes outside the base, and a lot of Americans lived off base. And we lived in this really big house. It was really cool; really old. And then we—we ended up moving from there because it was costing us so much fuel-wise to heat it, and we moved to this smaller place.

But we got our cats. I bought—I got three cats while I was in Ramstein, and I flew them from Ramstein back to America, so they're German—well, they're passed away now, but they were all German cats.

TS: That's sweet. There you go. Well, what—did you do anything, like, travel-wise when you were in Germany?

KM: I did. When I was in—when I was in Greenham Common, when I did my honeymoon, which was with my first husband's parents, we went to Paris, and we went to Luxembourg and Belgium and Switzerland and Holland.

So, by the time we get to Ramstein, I'm married to my second husband and he was—I said, "I want to go to Italy and Greece. I've always wanted to go to Italy and Greece."

He was like, "No, I want to go to Paris." So, we ended up going to Paris, of course, because I always let him get his way. And so, we went to Paris, but there again, he really didn't like to travel. We went to Heidelberg. That was pretty much about it. I didn't get to come—I didn't fly home at all while I was in Germany.

TS: Did you do any of the *volksmarches* [non-competitive 6 mile (10 kilometer) walk.] at all that they had?

KM: No.

TS: No?

KM: No. No.

TS: The castles; go to any of the castles?

KM: Well, right outside the base is Landstuhl, and there's a big castle up on a hill right there, so we would go up to that little castle all the time, which I think dated to 1200.

TS: And you had the festivals, like the wine or beer festivals?

KM: No. No. So that's what I'm saying; I didn't really get to travel and do much while I was there. But part of the time I was there was the first Gulf War, and they did not want you traveling.

TS: Oh, well, tell me about that then. How—what was that like for you when that experience happened?

KM: It was rough because you couldn't—to get on base was—because I lived off base at the time—was really tough, because they would—they had an M[?]¹—they had a Humvee with a gun pointed at the gate at all times, and when you came in they would do the—the looking under your car, and you had to have—you had to make sure everything was—your ID was right there, everything was fine, to get in. And so, there would be a long line to get in the base.

TS: And it took a while to get in?

KM: And it took a while to get in. And you would come in and there's that gun pointed at you, and you're like, "Wow, okay." But just to get on base it took a long time during the first Gulf War.

And then, of course, I'm working in the command center, so I'm hearing about what's happening, kind of, on the ground almost immediately, because they're reporting it back, you know, because the command center is the one giving the orders to go do what they need to go do. So, I'm sending out radio messages to tell these people, "Okay, you need to go do this and you need to go do this." Most of it's encrypted; I couldn't tell you what it said. But that's what my job was, so I was kind of right in the middle of it. Behind the scenes, but in the middle of—

TS: Did you feel like there was more tension when you were doing your job then, or did it seem like the same level of intensity, or how did—

KM: There was definitely more tension.

TS: Yeah?

KM: There was more communication, more messages going back and forth, and the generals were always around. You know, a lot of times you wouldn't see the generals down in there unless there was a big exercise. But during that first Gulf War, you know, when it was coming in from Kuwait and all that, yeah, you saw those generals a lot. And even getting in up at the top, then you had to show—you had to show your ID and you got another badge at that point. So, it was, like, a two badge system to get in after—when all this was going on.

TS: Yes.

KM: And just constantly messages back and forth. And then we were getting reports, and then we'd have to report that to generals, so it was a lot of just running back and forth and making sure everything's, you know—you're there and you're ready to go when you walked in the door.

TS: Did you—Did you ever feel nervous about, you know, being in—you know, like, because you're at a time when there's a lot of transition. I mean, because you had the end of the Cold War essentially, and then the Gulf War, and so all of this is going on. How did you feel about that? Did you have any political sense about what was happening in the world?

KM: I don't really think I did. I think that I was more focused on my job and where I was, you know, more than the political context of what was happening outside of that. This is before the internet. This is before all of that so I'm not really getting a good grasp of what's going on in the United States at this point, because I'm in Germany, or I'm in England. You know, I didn't really have an issue with the fact that there were nuclear missiles on that base; my first base at Greenham Common.

TS: Right.

KM: I was like, "Okay, there's nuclear missiles here. What the big deal?" So, you know, being at—being at Ramstein, and it had been attacked before—I don't remember exactly when, but someone had drove their vehicle and almost tried to hit the main building there at Ramstein, and they had put barricades up around it. This was several, several years before I got there. They had also had the big incident with the airshow there that killed, like, three hundred people; or however many people. [There were 70 fatalities in this incident in 1988, and approximately 1,000 injuries.]

TS: Did that happen when you were there?

KM: No. It happened before I got there. Two planes collided in midair, and then one of the planes crashed in the crowd and killed a bunch of people.

But what happened right before I got there was a C5 [Lockheed C-5 Galaxy, a large military transport aircraft] had ended up crashing and burning. It had—somehow one of the engines went in reverse and it literally flipped over. And when I got there you could still see the guts[?] that it had dug into the ground and through the trees; it was all still there, because it had only happened a couple months before— [In August of 1990.]

TS: Before you got there?

KM: Before I got there.

TS: Oh, wow.

KM: And then, of course, The [Berlin] Wall had fell a few months before I got there as well, so, you know—I got there, so all these things had happened before, so I think people were a little—a little uncertain when I got there. And then, of course, now all of a sudden the Gulf War is going on, you know, so that was probably a year after I got there.

TS: Yeah. Did you have—did you have any feelings about, like, the political leadership at that time? So, that would have been the first President [George Herbert Walker] Bush.

KM: Not really. I've never really been very political. I've gotten more political as I've gotten older; I think more aware of it. But at this point I'm in my twenties, and I'm in the military; I'm in Germany. I don't really think that I was thinking about politics or presidents or policies. I think I thought about, "Well, we've got this military. We always need this military. We'll always be here. So, I have job security." I really don't think I thought about it much.

TS: Did you think at all about—like, did you have any particular people that you looked up to. Like, not necessarily heroes but along that sort of line?

KM: I looked up to the men. I've been a really big supporter of World War II, and I really looked up to those men that fought. And I look up to anybody that is willing to serve their country. So, I don't—like, we would—I'm a master's student now, and we discussed about—in class, you know, they were talking about nuclear—dropping the nuclear bomb, okay. And I'm like, "You don't attack the person. You don't attack—" Who was it—Paul Tibbets. "He was doing his job. You can attack the policy, but you don't attack—"

TS: The pilot, you mean, that did —

KM: Right, the pilot of the Enola Gay who dropped the bombs was Paul Tibbets. I'm like, "You don't attack the military person. You can attack the policy all you want, but don't attack the person that's serving for their country." And that is something that, you know, I respect and honor. I even respect, you know, the Germans that were fighting in World

War II. I don't believe what the cause was, but I respect that they chose to fight for their country, regardless if I believe in what they're fighting for. And so, that—that, to me, is probably who my heroes are; is anybody that's willing to do that.

TS: To put their life on the line?

KM: Put their life on the line for what they believe in, whether or not I agree with it or not, but you're willing to sacrifice and fight for a cause that you truly believe in. You know, that's amazing. So, that's probably who I really—and that's a whole lot of people, but you know, just that type of person that's willing to do that.

TS: Well, then after you were not allowed to stay at Ramstein, then you got new orders—

KM: Right.

TS: —to go—where'd you go next?

KM: I went to Hurlburt Field, which is in Florida, which you think, "Ooh, Florida, great." I cried. I did not want to go to Hurlburt Field at all. I really wanted to come back stateside, so I was really happy about that. And I remember my first thing, I called and I was like, "Hi," you know, "I've got orders to come there." And they started telling me what the assignment was like, and I hung up the phone and I tried everything I could do to get out of that assignment. I did not want to go to Hurlburt Field.

TS: What was it that was not attractive to you?

KM: It was—It is a Special Operations base. They deal with Special Forces, so they deal with the Rangers and the Deltas [Delta Force] and the [Navy] SEALs [Sea, Air, Land Teams]. Hurlburt Field is, kind of, the air force support command for all these other special ops groups. They provide C130 gunship support. They provide communication support. But they're telling me, "Yeah, we run three miles a day, and we do all these exercising, and it's basically like you're in the army."

And I'm like, "No. I do not want to go there," because the whole time I had been in all these other bases we didn't have exercises at all. Like, you did not form out in a group and go exercise. You did it on your own. You had a yearly evaluation that you could walk three—three miles in forty-five minutes. I'm like, "I can do that," okay?

But they're like, "Up here we run three miles every day. We meet at eight o'clock in the morning—or seven o'clock, and we do all these calisthenics, and then we go running."

And I'm like, "Oh my God." [laughing]

TS: So, you weren't able to get out of that?

KM: Was not able to get out of it.

TS: So how—what happened [chuckling] when you got there, then?

KM: Well, my ex—my husband at the time, Shawn—he had left Germany and went home and visited his family and was at—was in Florida trying to find us an apartment. I stayed in Ramstein for about another month. Flew the cats over, and then I show up and we had found an apartment, and I reported to work.

TS: Now he's out of the service?

KM: He's out of the service at this point.

TS: Okay.

KM: So, I reported to work, and it was the biggest group of sexist hooah males that I had ever run across. There was very few women in the unit at that time, because they didn't want women in the unit. Now, this changed by the time, in 1998, when I got out. There were a lot more females.

TS: But you're there—you go there in ninety—

KM: Three.

TS: Ninety-three?

KM: Right, I—

TS: So you stayed there five years?

KM: Yes, I did. [coughs] There is probably—there's probably a hundred people in our squadron. We had radio maintenance and radio operators, and there's probably about a hundred, and we had a major that was our commander, a senior master sergeant, and then there was a master—I'm sorry, chief master sergeant. Then we had, like, either a master sergeant or senior master sergeant in charge of the maintenance and radio operators.

And there was probably five girls out of a hundred. One girl was a weight lifter, so she was very hooah. I mean, she—I mean, she actually went to rappel school to learn how to rappel out of a helicopter, so she was very big. The other girl was a marathon runner that was there. And then I think one of the girls was a radio operator—I mean, a maintenance girl, and there might have been another girl that was a radio operator, and me.

And you show up and the very first talk I had was my senior—I was just a—I was still a sergeant, E-4. I got promoted while I was there to E-5. But I remember showing up and my—he takes me in his office and he's like, "We deploy all the time," because whenever these Special Forces guys go out, we go out as their communication support. So, where they go we go. So, you could have the Deltas over here and you could have SEAL teams over here and you could have, you know, combat crew communications air

force guys here, and we would send out four or five communication—like, three radio operators and one maintenance guy to go this way and, you know—and these pockets of groups going out. And he sits me down and he says, “What happens on TDYs stays on TDYs.” Okay.

So, he’s basically talking about whatever these guys did out there, you don’t talk about when you come back. And he’s not talking about the mil—the SEALs or Deltas, what their missions are, which we know we don’t talk about because they’re classified. He’s talking about the—

TS: Personal conduct?

KM: —personal conduct of the guys when they go out; you don’t talk about it when you come back. And I never went TDY, because the girl that was in charge—she was there for a little while; the one that’s the marathon runner. She was married to another guy in the unit. She was a master sergeant and he was a tech sergeant, and they—she left after about a year or two after I got there, and she did all the—the classified issuing. The exact thing that I had done, but she was not trained to do it; I was.

So, they were like, “Well, you don’t want to go TDY so we’ll put you in her job.”

I was like, “Yes!” So, that’s what I did the majority of the time I was there, so I really—I mean, I loved—I loved doing that. I had the office with all the safes, and I’d issue all the classified stuff. I was happy.

TS: So, you didn’t deploy?

KM: I never deployed when I was there, partly because after I got there—I had fallen sick at Ramstein and they didn’t know what was wrong with me. I kept having really bad dizzy spells, and they’re testing everything. I would go to the clinic and they would be like, “She’s got a tumor behind her eyes.” I mean, they’re testing me for everything. So when I get to Hurlburt Field I go in and they send me to the ear and nose, throat specialist over at—I can’t think of the base; oh well. The big base that’s there.

TS: Is it Patrick [Air Force Base]?

KM: No.

TS: Homestead?

KM: No; even bigger.

TS: Yeah?

KM: [laughs]

TS: I’m out. That’s the extent of my knowledge.

KM: I cannot remember the name. It'll come to me. [Eglin Air Force Base—KM clarified later].

TS: Okay.

KM: And there's a big old hospital there. So, they sent me over there to the ear, nose, throat, and come to find out I had, like, severe allergies. They tested me and they're like, "You have really bad allergies," and it had developed into asthma, so I really couldn't deploy. They're like, "Medically, you can't deploy. Okay, we'll put you in this job."

And I'm like, "Yes! I'm happy. I can do what I want to do, and it's exactly what I've been doing."

TS: Whatever happened to your jaw; the issue in Germany?

KM: They never did anything with it.

TS: No?

KM: I have a severe overbite. Yeah. And it's actually rubbing the skin away on the top of my jaw. You're shaking your head like you understand what that means. Yes. And so, they never were able to break it. Every time I started doing the process, things would come up. I had—I had, I think, three surgeries when I at Hurlburt Field; I think; three or four—I can't remember—on my sinuses, and then I had my tonsils out. And I had broken my foot when I was at Ramstein, walking down some stairs, [chuckles] of all things.

TS: It's the way to do it. It's the way you do it. That's how you break things.

KM: Yes, and they had to have surgery to fix—I had to have surgery at Hurlburt to fix that. So, the whole time it was, like, I couldn't deploy because I'm under doctor's care, and I'm having to have this surgery because I'm having all these medical problems.

TS: How'd you feel about your medical care while you were in the air force?

KM: I loved it. I thought they really took good care of us. You know, I had been on birth control since my first assignment. The funniest thing that ever happened to me though, I'm at Greenham Common and I got a rash because I had been taking some kind of antibiotic for something; probably had, like, an infection or a cold or something. They're like, "Here, take this antibiotic."

So, I go to the doctor and I walk in. I'm like, "I have a rash, you know, I need to figure out what it is." So, I go in and I'm sitting there and the guy comes in.

He goes, "Okay, take off all your clothes and put this little—this little gown thing on."

I'm like, "It's a rash on my arm! Not that kind of a rash." [laughing] So, it was an allergic reaction to the medication. It's like, "Not that kind of a rash."

TS: [chuckles]

KM: But I really enjoyed my medical care when I was in. I thought that I got really good care. I had to have—which is something they do in the military; they always pull your wisdom teeth. So, like, one of the first things they did when I got to Hurl—when I got to Greenham Common, was like, “Oh, you got your wisdom teeth? Let’s start pulling those suckers.” So, I don’t know why the military dentists love to pull wisdom teeth.

TS: I think it’s training. [both laugh]

KM: Let’s get some training here. Let’s knock those things out.

TS: Yeah, I think it is, actually.

KM: [laughs]

TS: I don’t know. That’s just my opinion.

KM: But I had a breast reduction when I was at Hurlburt Field, because my breasts, they kept getting larger and larger, and it was hard for me to breathe and run and do all the exercising that they wanted us to do. So, they looked and they said, “Yeah, you need to have—” because I was having so much back pain, and they said, “Yep, let’s get her a breast reduction.” So, I had an operation on my foot. I had a breast reduction. I had two surgeries on my sinuses. So, they were just like, “Yeah, this girl is falling apart. Let’s not send her on any deployments.”

TS: What about the running? How did you do with that? Did you have to—

KM: Not so great. I started out having to, like, basically walk it, and then I started running a little bit. They wanted us to do thirty minute—three miles in thirty minutes, and I barely made it one time. I think I did it in thirty minutes and, like, thirty seconds, and everybody was congratulating me. They’re like, “You did it.”

I’m like, “I’m dying, but yes,” you know, so—and we did it all year round, so you’re in Florida and you’re running out there and it’s, like, a hundred degrees and, you know—but I was also doing—going to the gym, like, after work and doing step aerobics and trying to stay fit. I was—When I got out of basic training I probably weighed, like, a hundred pounds. I had lost, probably, ten pounds. And by the time that I got to Ram—Hurlburt Field, I was probably about a hundred fifty pounds, so I lost—you know, after my surgery that I had, I lost quite a bit. I was probably was about a hundred twenty five, hundred and thirty pounds. Wish I could go back to that today, but yes, I lost quite a bit because we were always exercising out there; yeah.

TS: In the humidity too.

KM: The humidity, too, yeah.

TS: Now, you mentioned that this was more one of the sexist bases that you were at.

KM: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

TS: How did you handle that? I mean, did you have—did they personally—did you experience it personally, or what was it like for you?

KM: I didn't really experience it personally, I guess. I worked—One of the master sergeants, we were out exercising one morning and we were all trying to do push-ups, and he yells, out, "Oh, you all look like a bunch of girls," and it really angered—by this time, there was probably about fifteen girls in the unit, because girls kept coming in, and it really angered some of those girls, and there were charges filed against him and we had to go talk to the base—I can't think of the name of the office, but we had to give our testimony about his attitude, and he—they—he got a formal charge of sexual harassment in his record. His name was Master Sergeant [Name restricted until 1 January 2038]. The commander that was in charge also got—got something, and I can't remember why. He was—because the master—the major that was there had left and we had gotten this lieutenant colonel, and he also had a charge put in his records. So, you know he probably never made full bird [colonel] after that.

TS: So do you think that they were coming—as they're coming in contact with more and more women, they just were acting as they always did, but then they don't see there's this cultural change they have to go through.

KM: Yeah, I think so. I mean, the office that I had where all my safes were, it was—Tech Sergeant Klingensmith's office was one side and mine was the other, and then there was, like, an open room. And it was secured, so there again, I always worked in these places you had to have all these passes to get into, and you had to have a code to get in—

TS: Like a cipher code?

KM: Yeah, like a cipher code, to get in that particular office, and there was—one, two—three guys that worked in there. And there was one guy that I just—he was such a sexist little pig. I just could not stand him. He—He just—He was just always so smarmy and smirky. And there was another guy who was married, and a girlfriend that he had had in the past showed up, so he dumps his wife to go back to this other girlfriend. It was horrible. I mean, the wife would—was coming by talking to the commander, like, "What is going on?" And it was just—there was all kinds of sexual misconduct going on in that unit.

TS: Yeah?

KM: Especially when they went TDY. Especially for TDYs.

TS: You just heard about it then, right?

KM: Yeah.

TS: That I thought it was supposed to stay there, right? [chuckles]

KM: Well, they—you know, you can't keep some things private.

TS: Yeah?

KM: There was a radio maintenance girl who came back from TDY. She found out she was pregnant, but she didn't know who the daddy was, because while she had been TDY she had had sex with three different guys. One of them was married—and they were all in our unit, and one of them was married. She ended up—She ended up giving the baby away. One of the guys that she had been seeing was a tech sergeant, and he—she didn't want to baby so he took the baby and raised it. But she just gave it up and said, "I don't want it," and—

TS: What about the men—or whoever was the father? You don't know?

KM: We don't know. He just decided he wanted the baby, so he took it and she left, and she was gone after that. I don't know if she got out of the military or—but, you know, stuff like that happened all the time. And then you're hearing about—that there were women who were going TDY who were prostituting themselves, selling sex. Because they're at these places and there's only, like, ten women and there's, like, five hundred men, so they're like, "Hey, it's a good way to make some money." So, I'm hearing this as they're coming back.

TS: Who are you hearing it from?

KM: The guys who are coming and talking about it as they come back.

TS: So, when you read about things, or hear about things—talking about sexual harassment or sexual misconduct, and rape is really in the news a lot—

KM: Yes.

TS: —what do you—I mean, does that resonate with you in some ways? Do you—

KM: Oh, yeah.

TS: What do you think when you are reading about these things going on? You got out in '90—'98, so it's, you know—

KM: I look at it—

TS: —fifteen years past.

KM: Yeah, I look back and I'm just completely surprised that—first of all, that that—that macho, good old boy mentality is still out there. You would think after—you know, it's 2013, that would have died away. But I think it is somehow perpetrated through the military system when you go into basic training.

You know, when you go into basic they remake you. They tear you down and the remake you to be strong and to—you know, to be a military person, and I think part of that is that kind of mentality that you're—you're macho. Even women, I mean, they teach you to be that military person. But the males, they teach you to be macho and aggressive. And then they see a woman, and even if she's in uniform I think they—these males can sometimes think, “Well, she's not—she's inferior because she's not a male.” You know, because they teach that in basic training.

TS: When you had your basic training, was it mixed gender?

KM: No, our squadron was all girls. The dorms that we lived in, there might have been males on the other side, but in ours—

TS: In your bay?

KM: In your bay it was just women. We did not have mixed gender. I don't know about today, but then it was very separate. And, you know, I think that that's part of just the way—because, I mean, that's what they do in basic training, is they remake you, because you've got to become that soldier, and—but sometimes that can turn—it depends on—I mean, it also depends on that person's personality, too, and the way they were raised. But you get on the, you know, you're going to be this soldier, you're going to be macho, you're going to do this, and then you put them in—out there, and with women in these units that—and especially when I was in it was just—

TS: Do you think leadership had any role to play in how a unit functioned on that level?

KM: Oh yeah, especially when you had those master sergeants that—you know, in 1998 they've probably been in since '78 or '80. You know, they're—they're serving—they're at their twenty year mark, and so they're at a time when there wasn't a whole lot of women, and there again, I think that—that military attitude had come into play a lot, and now they're working with women and they don't really know how to relate to them as soldiers; they're seeing them as women and not as a part of the whole—a part of the team, because they did not want women there. When I was at Hurlburt Field they absolutely didn't, and as I—when I was leaving there was just more and more women coming in, and I remember some of those senior master sergeants and the commanders and stuff were just like, “Oh my gosh. We do not want these women here.”

They just—because, I guess, they're dealing with—especially at Hurlburt, you're dealing with all these Special Ops people, and so they walked around thinking that they were Special Forces, which they were not. And we had to walk around and say, “Hooah,”

all the time. Okay, we're air force, so okay, but they really thought that they were, kind of, these Special Forces kind of guys, so they had that chauvinistic, kind of, macho attitude that—it was just—

TS: Do you think it was markedly different from the other places that you were at?

KM: Oh yes. Oh yeah, because I did not experience anything like that when I was at Greenham Common. I really didn't experience anything like that when I was at Pease.

TS: Was it just more blatantly open?

KM: I think it was blatantly open, and I do believe that it was partly because of the base; because it was Special Forces. You know, these guys are out there hanging out with the SEALs, and you know, these Rangers. We dealt mostly—Most of the ones I saw were mostly Rangers. The—You know, they would come in and give their encryption, and you know, the SEALs would walk in and give—their radio guy, or whoever, would walk in and get his encryption. He was a little dude. They were little. I could not believe how tiny—they're no taller than me and I'm five foot three. Because you're thinking they're these big muscle guys. The Rangers were really big and muscular, but these—the ones I saw, the SEALs, were these itty bitty, little dudes. [chuckles] I'm like, "But they could probably kill me with their pinky," but you know.

So, I think it had partly to do with the mission there, but I just, kind of, did my thing. Like, "I know this part of it. I will do my encryption part." I was actually—when we would have inspections—I think it happened once or twice; I was the Command's Outstanding Performer, because I knew what I was doing on that job; everything was perfect. And, you know, they would come in and inspect—they couldn't really get into the safes, but I could talk to them and they could inspect everything else that I had; like the inventory sheets and that kind of thing.

And they were like, "Wow. You really know."

I was like, "Yes, I do."

And I was also their—I was the training manager. [chuckles] I had lots of jobs. So I did that job but I was also the training manager, so I tracked everybody's training, and that's where I had to shoot a nine-millimeter. So, not only was I doing my—I guess twice—every two years you shot M-16, but we also had to shoot a nine-mil, and that's where I got my marksman for both. Well, I had my marksman for M-16, but I got my marksman for nine-mil.

But I was also training manager, so any kind of, like, training—it didn't matter what shots you needed, I had to track that. I had to track, you know, all this first aid training; whether or not you needed to go to survival training, which luckily I never had to go to; or rappelling training; whatever; I had to track it.

TS: Did you ever—Did you ever do any kind of special training yourself?

KM: No.

TS: No?

KM: No, I was pitiful. No.

TS: [chuckles] That doesn't make you pitiful.

KM: [laughing]

TS: It just—

KM: I was like, “Nope.”

TS: Did you ever—Is there any, kind of, award or recognition that you received?

KM: Other than being, like, the Command's Outstanding Performer, yeah.

TS: Yeah, well, that's a great recognition.

KM: It was a great recognition. I'm trying to think if I ever got anything else. I wasn't really at my other bases long enough to really do much, actually. [chuckles] You know, considering Hurlburt—at Greenham I was only there two, and then Pease, only there a year and a half. And then, you know, Ramstein was just so big.

TS: Right.

KM: But yeah, there I was—I was Outstanding Command Performer.

TS: Now, at some point you reenlisted. You had to—

KM: I did. I reenlisted after—I think I had to reenlist after Ramstein—or while I was at Ramstein I had to reenlist. Because when you come back—when you take an assignment—you have to have so long left on your enlistment to take an assignment. You can't leave and only have ten months left because it doesn't—it's not beneficial for the military.

And I was expecting to make it a career. I really, really was. I did not plan on getting out after twelve. I really planned on staying in for twenty. I probably would have stayed at Hurlburt Field. I mean, it was—I mean, it's Florida. There's a beach, like, right across from the base. We bought our house there. My husband had struggled to find a job when he first moved there. He finally got a job working in a auto repair place. He was, like, the customer service guy, and then he eventually went to selling cars. And then he went from there, started working in the—what is it called—the—

TS: Financing part of it?

KM: No, he completely got out of the car industry. He went to work in the hotels—

TS: Oh, okay.

KM: —down at the beach, and by the time that we divorced he was all—he was an area supervisor. He was in charge of, like, twenty different hotels for this company, and they did it—it was—what they did was, people bought the condos and then they rented them out through this company, and they managed all these—

TS: Like a property management company?

KM: Exactly, and he was an area manager. And this place—this property management company was huge, and they would manage the entire complex. So, they were the ones that did all the housekeeping, and they're the ones that did all of the booking. They had the front desk people; running of any restaurants or anything like that; but the condos were individually owned, but they managed them and helped rent them out, kind of thing. And so, he was in charge of, like, twenty different hotels by the time we divorced in '98.

TS: So, why did you decide to get out?

KM: Well, I'd been in for eleven years, eight months, and they told me at that time—they said, "Well—" I said, "Well, I'm probably—You know, I want to reenlist."

And they said, "Well, if you reenlist you'll have to take a remote tour to Turkey or Korea for, like, a year to eighteen months without your husband," and I just was not willing to do that. At that time, also, I think I had had enough of it.

TS: Like the wrong time to have to enlist?

KM: Yeah. I think—

TS: Like, the timing of it?

KM: The timing of it, and, you know, just thinking about all the—the sexism I was facing. I was thirty years old, and I just, kind of, felt like I needed a new chapter in my life, so I chose to decide to get out, because I didn't want to go on a remote tour, TDY, like that by myself. I really—I was attached to my husband. There again, I really didn't have a lot of friends; it was all about him. [Comment about first husband restricted until 1 January 2038]. But yeah, I just decided I didn't want to do that, and so I chose to get out after twelve.

TS: Before you get out you went through a hurricane?

KM: Oh, we went through many hurricanes.

TS: Yeah? How was that?

KM: [coughs] Living in Florida you go through lots and lots of hurricanes. The biggest one we went through was Opal, which I can't remember what year that—'95, '94; I don't remember exactly. We watched it, kind of, get in the Gulf [of Mexico], and, you know, in Florida you watch hurricanes. I mean, that's what you did. You know, all of a sudden they're in there coming that way; you'd be glued to the TV for days trying to figure out where they're going to come in at.

And—So, Opal had come in—it went across—and this is after Andrew that had tore up, you know, South Florida.

TS: Yes.

KM: We lived in the panhandle. I lived about an hour, probably, from Biloxi [Mississippi]; an hour and a half; probably three hours from New Orleans, so we were in the panhandle; the northern—north-western part of Florida. But—So, Opal had come across South Florida, and it just, kind of, sat out there in the Gulf and literally did loop de loops out there. It just, kind of, did figure eights, and just, kind of, kept building up and building up and building up. And then all of a sudden it made a beeline right for the panhandle of Florida. It was a Category Five hurricane, which is the highest category. It was like a hundred—what is it; a hundred and sixty mile an hour winds or something like that?

But it hit something right before it hit land and it got knocked down to a—just a four, [laughs] so they evacuate the base. They call everybody and they're like, "Leave. We need you to leave. You need to go." They evacuate all the hotels. They evacuate everything. And we went with my husband's boss, because he was selling cars at the time. We went to New Orleans and we headed—we headed west with our cats; we packed them up and off we went. And we were building our house at the time, and so I was terrified that my house was going to get blown down.

Opal came in at Pensacola, which is the naval air station; is at Pensacola. Came in at Pensacola; that's where the eye came in at. Problem with hurricanes is, on the right side it swirls like this, so the heaviest momentum and the heavier winds and the storm surge is always on the right; because that's where it swirls up and then, kind of, comes down, and it swirls up. So, that meant that the heaviest part of it was going to be Navarre, where we were building our house, Hurlburt Field, where I was stationed, and Destin, which is where my husband worked. So, we stayed—we stayed in New Orleans for, about, a couple of days. We got to come back. You had to show your ID because the National Guard's out. We're like, "Well, can we get in?"

They're like, "Well, some of the roads are gone, but you can—" you know, you have to show your ID at these checkpoints.

TS: Right.

KM: And so, we got into our apartment; we had no power. The apartment was still there. It was—the carpet was wet, but the apartment was still fine; like, right in front of the door had gotten wet. Our house, we drove—when we drove by we could see our house, and it was like, "Okay, it's still standing," because it was like the frame of it was up, and I was like, "Okay, it's still standing. We're good."

But the—we couldn't get to where my husband worked because there was no road; it was gone. And we had to go around the world; back in then come down and go over this bridge. And the place that he worked at that time, there was no first floor any more. Where all the offices were and where all the restaurant and stuff was, was sand. You could literally walk and go right up to the second floor, because the storm surge had brought all the sand in.

We didn't have power. I remember we would go—we would take a bath in the pool because we didn't have any power; there's no water.

TS: Right.

KM: So, we were taking baths in the pool. And I had to go back to work and we had to go around the base and clean everything up. There were downed trees and limbs everywhere, so we had to go out and, kind of, clean up the base, which was a lot of fun. I got to visit parts of Hurlburt Field I never knew existed!

TS: [chuckles] Yeah.

KM: But—So, I mean—And that was just the big one and there was just ones all the time. You were constantly having hurricanes—

TS: Yeah?

KM: —while you were down there. And of course, they learned their lesson after Andrew, so once a hurricane was coming, the planes and everything on the base left. Because the commander at Andrews Air Force Base had decided, “Oh, we're going to leave everything here,” and it got destroyed when Andrew—when Andrew—

TS: I had forgotten about that, yeah.

KM: Not Andrews; whatever the name of the base down there was.

TS: Was it—Was it Patrick?

KM: It might—I don't remember.

TS: It seems like that was in my head for some reason; that one of those got slammed pretty good. Maybe it was Homestead [Air Force Base]. I don't know; one of those.

KM: It might have been Homestead, but they decided, “We'll just leave the planes,” and then when Hurricane Andrew came in, yeah, there was no planes left. So, they were really meticulous about—and they flew them up to, like, Fort Benning [Georgia], or someplace like that.

TS: Far away.

KM: Far away, to try to get them away from the hurricanes. [laughs] But just being there in Florida, it was just, you know, all these hurricanes, but it was—you know, you could go to the beach but you had all the tourists there. But you had—what was so interesting there is you have the naval air station there in Pensacola. Then you had Hurlburt Field. Then you had that other base that I can't think of the name of it. Then you had Tyndall [Air Force Base].

TS: Eglin [Air Force Based]?

KM: Eglin. It was Eglin, yes. And then you had Tyndall, so there was so many bases right there. So many military; so many bases.

TS: Yes.

KM: So, it was—it was just inundated.

TS: Now, you have something down here about testing for staff sergeant.

KM: Yeah, I tested when I was at Hurlburt Field. I really didn't—I never really cared. I hate to say that, but it was, like, all the other times I tested when I was a—because I was a E-4 sergeant. I was just like, "Eh." I knew I wasn't going to make it, because you had to have so much time in grade[?], so much time in. I'm just like, "Eh. I'm not going to make it. I'm not going to make it."

Well, finally I was like, "Okay," I've been in something like seven years at that point. I'm still an E-4, you know. It might have been just six, or right at seven, and I was like, "I've got to study. I've got to make this." And I studied for months and months. I think I aced both tests.

TS: Yeah.

KM: When came time for promotion, it was like they call us up—you know, because the list comes out who got promoted. And I took the day off because I'm like, "I don't want to be at work, because if I did make it I'm going to cry."

TS: Right.

KM: And they call us up and they're like, "You need to report to the—the room," or wherever we had to go. And I knew what it was. I knew I'd made it. And I was like—like, the next month I made staff sergeant. I mean, because you had to wait. If you made—you tested and you made it, the cycle came out and said, "Okay, these are the people that got a high enough score to make it."

TS: Right.

KM: Well, based on your time in grade, was when you got actually promoted. So, the highest time in grades got promoted first; like, the next month. And then the next month will be the next group of people, and so on and so on. So, if you were—didn't have a whole lot of time in grade or time in service, you didn't get promoted for, maybe, a year; you know, until closer to the next cycle—

TS: Right.

KM: —because you didn't have all that. Well, I was, like, the next month. Man, they were like, "Here's your stripes." [chuckling] And I made a lot of—I had a lot of medals when I was in.

TS: What did you get?

KM: Well, I had the overseas medal. I had the First Gulf War medal; the Persian Gulf War medal; I think is what it was called; marksman. You know, good conduct medals. So, I don't remember all of the ones I had.

TS: Do you have any kind of joint service?

KM: I don't think I did.

TS: I was just wondering since you were at a command at that last one.

KM: Yeah, I think I—I think I had a NATO medal, or something like that, from being NATO.

TS: The [unclear]?

KM: Yeah, the something—something like that; service overseas medal, and good conduct, and all that. So, I had pretty good—had a pretty good amount of medals when I got out. So, you know, I look back on it and just think it was a great experience; it was fabulous.

TS: How was your transition when you got out?

KM: That was a little rough, because I didn't really know—my husband, like I said, had this really good job, and I went to work as an office manager for a landscaping company. I worked there for quite a few years. It was—it was different. I was so used to that military structure. And of course, I wasn't making a whole lot of money. It was—It was quite a bit.

And then I became a retail manager for Eddie Bauer. I quit working for the landscaping company and decided—I started working just as a—like, a retail person—salesperson for Eddie Bauer, and within about three months I was promoted to manager—it was co-manager; I wasn't the big manager. But I worked there until I left to come back to North Carolina.

TS: Did you find that there's a different sense of urgency about work in the civilian world than there was in the military?

KM: I think so. I think so. I think there's more sense of pride in the military.

TS: About your job, you mean?

KM: About your job. Yeah, I think so. I also think that there's more sense of—I don't want to say getting it right, but that's, kind of, what I'm thinking of. You know, more sense of—that you need to do it right, and you need to do it well, in the military than outside in the civilian world.

TS: What about a sense of team—teamwork?

KM: More in the military, definitely, than outside. I think in the civilian world sometimes it can be all about stabbing people in the back, trying to get rid of them because you don't like them. And they can. In the military you can't do that, but in the civilian world it's like, "I'm going to run this person off because I don't like them," and you know, they do everything they can; where in the military, you can't. I mean, I worked with some really mean people in the military; don't get me wrong, but—

TS: But you have to learn how to get along.

KM: You got to—you got to deal with them because, you know, I work for the National Park Service now, so it's very much, kind of, like the military. Yeah, there might be people I work with that I don't like—I'm not saying there is, but there could be, but I can't do anything about it, because I can't just say, "Well, I'm going to run them off." It's Park Service, you're assigned there and that's what you have to do.

TS: Do you think that you were—having grown up in the way that you grew up, that this structure of the military, and maybe even the hierarchy of it, where there's a sense of, like, you know what—what you have to do to get, you know, to the next level or whatever—

KM: Yes?

TS: Do you think that that was something that was beneficial to you in a way, because that made you enjoy your work and things like that?

KM: I think it was beneficial to me to get away. And I think it was beneficial for me to be doing something that I was proud of, because I knew that if I went to work in those factories, that was not going to be something that I would be proud of. Not that there's anything wrong with it. Excuse me.

TS: Right.

KM: But I knew that this gave a chance to make a name for myself and to be—kind of, get away from that track that my family had—was on.

TS: Well, you had a different world view about possibilities in your life.

KM: Oh, definitely. Oh, completely. I mean, I think one of my aunts—I think the farthest she's ever been away is South Carolina, to Myrtle Beach; that's it. They don't travel. They don't experience new things. And they're still like that. And what's interesting is my aunt is my age. My mom has two siblings that are much—after the brother that was murdered, her sister's six months older than me, and her brother's only three years older than me, and yet they're still within that—they all work in the factories, they don't go anywhere, they don't experience new things. And so, you know, I looked at that thinking, they're my age and they're dropping out of high school and they're going to work in the factories. So, I saw that. And then, you know, I'm hearing all these experiences that my uncle had when he was serving in the army in Vietnam and I'm like, "That's, kind of, more what I want."

TS: Do you think that was, kind of, the spark for you that helped you see that there was something more—

KM: Oh yeah.

TS: —available, because otherwise, maybe, you wouldn't have—have seen this larger world around you.

KM: Oh, definitely. I definitely think so. And I think pop culture had a lot—

TS: Yeah?

KM: —a lot to do with it.

TS: Duran Duran? [chuckles]

KM: Yeah. Well, I think pop culture in the sense that *M*A*S*H*—

TS: Oh right, *M*A*S*H*, that's right.

KM: —or—I'm trying to think of other movies.

TS: I'm just thinking about you want to go England and—

KM: [blows nose] But pop culture in the sense that, you know, you see all these movies, you see all these things that are very World War II related, and this image of these World War

II soldiers as being the good fight, or these good soldiers, or ideal, or however you want to think of them. And we still, kind of, think of that generation like that today, in a way.

And—But, you know, one of my favorite shows, which came out right when I first joined, was called—well, there was *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, which was about the—the guys that were the Corsairs; the Marine guys under Pappy Herrington; I think that was his name. Pappy Boyington, I’m sorry; Pappy Boyington. And then there was the one on Vietnam; the TV show on Vietnam.

[*Baa Baa Black Sheep*, later known also as *Black Sheep Squadron*, is a television series which aired on NBC from 1976 until 1978, about a U.S. Marine Corps aviation squadron.]

TS: *China Beach*?

KM: No, not *China Beach*. It was the one that came out right before that. Darn it, I have it on DVD at home and I can’t think of what the name of it is.

TS: You can add it in the transcript. [chuckles] There you go.

KM: Yes. I can—*Tour of Duty*; *Tour of Duty*. I knew I’d remember. [television series on CBS, aired 1987 to 1990.]

TS: Okay. I don’t remember that one.

KM: And it’s about a squadron in Vietnam; a patrol—a army patrol squadron in Vietnam. So, I was very interested in stuff like that, and it just—there was something about that life that I just—it really spoke to me, and I think it spoke to me more because it was so different from what I had been living and I knew this was going to change me if I did this.

And it wasn’t easy. It was terrifying. I mean, being—I think I was eighteen years old, leaving home for the first time. I had no, really, life experiences. No social experiences; very limited. And I get into a situation where I’m around people from all over the country making fun of my little Southern accent, and you know, just—and then you—you’re moving to these different bases and you have to adjust. You have to be able to adjust very quickly. If you don’t you’re going to flounder, and I think that has helped me in all of my other endeavors. When I take on something it’s like, “Okay, I can adjust to this.” You know, “I’ve done all this other stuff. I can do this.” And I think that has definitely—

TS: Do you think that that kind of military culture of having to do those kind of changes, too, but also the job, where you’re put into situations where—I mean, you had a very critical job at a very young age, and—and so you’re, kind of, pushed to take on responsibility.

KM: Yeah.

TS: Do you think that shaped you, too, for that?

KM: Oh yeah. Because when they're telling you, "You make a mistake, you're going to prison," [chuckling] it makes you grow up.

It makes you know—I mean, and you're terrified. I remember the first couple of months when I was at Greenham, oh my gosh, I was terrified of those safes and all those documents. By the time I'm at Hurlburt Field I'm like, "Eh, it's just a document," you know. I'm still very conscious, though, that I have to be careful and that everything's got to be perfect, but it—you lose that fear because—

TS: And the intensity of—

KM: Yeah, you lose it a little bit. But when you're opening up safes and you see top secret documents and you're having to make sure you don't lose them and they're all accounted for. And I was very, very good at that. I can take anything and organize it perfectly; perfectly. It's a skill that I have. One of my few, but it's the one skill that I do possess, so I was very, very well equipped. And I don't know, thinking back on it, if the training for that job gave me that skill, or I had that skill to begin with, and it helped me with my job; I'm not sure.

TS: Maybe you had—you know, you had those kind of skills and they, you know, brought that out—you know, brought the best out of you—

KM: Yes. Yeah.

TS: —in the type of jobs that you were doing.

KM: Probably. I mean, I was fine with the radio work. But I—I have to tell you this though. It was so funny. Like now, when I see stuff about radio operators, it makes me cringe; absolutely cringe. Like—just, like, chills go up the back of my spine.

TS: Why?

KM: Because they always get it wrong. [chuckling] They always do it wrong.

TS: What do you mean?

KM: In movies or TV shows.

TS: Oh, okay.

KM: Okay, they always get it wrong. Because when you're a radio—professional military radio operator and you're doing something on the radio, and you say, "Alpha, Foxtrot, Charlie," and then you say, "Over," okay? That means that the other—you're not finished with your conversation. The other person now can speak, okay?

And if they do whatever they're going to say, and they say, "Over," that means they're waiting for a reply from you, okay? That's what "over" means. You absolutely—absolutely never say, "Over and out." You never do it. Because "over" means you've got something else to say.

If I'm talking to someone—if I go, "Alpha, bravo, foxtrot, out," that means the conversation is done, okay? I'm not expecting a response from the other person that I'm talking to. So, to say, "Over and out," is just—

TS: It's contradictory.

KM: It's contradictory, exactly.

TS: [chuckles]

KM: And so, every time I see it in a movie or something I'm like, "Ugh." It's just one of those things that just sends a chill up my spine.

TS: Well, I learned something. There you go.

KM: Yes. Yes. So now every time that you see that in as—

TS: I will now. Thank you very much. That'll be something I'll have to worry about.

KM: [laughing] —you see—Yeah, every time you see a TV show or a movie, and the radio operator says, "Over and out," you're going to think exactly what I'm thinking. I'm just like—it sends chills up my spine; it really, really does. Like, I cannot believe—

TS: Well, did you feel like a trailblazer in any way?

KM: I think I did once I got some up into rank and some airmen came in that were younger than me; I felt like I did. When I was at Greenham, we got another female. I think I might have been there a year maybe. And so, I became kind of close to her; trying to, you know, mentor her. Nobody came in after me, of course, at Pease because it was closing. And Ramstein, I don't remember that many—too many females that were airmen.

But, you know, when I was at Hurlburt, I was the training—I was the—I was the—I did all the classified stuff, but I was also the training manager, and I was also, like, the security manager, making sure that people went through all their security trainings. Not getting their—not getting their clearances, but they had to go through stuff about espionage training and that kind of thing.

TS: How to burn things. [chuckles]

KM: And how to do things, exactly, so I was their trainer for that. So, I was very much a mentor for a lot of the new people coming in, and I've always been, kind of, a really—I always feel like a—I'm going to say this, but I've always felt like I was very helpful to

new people because I remember my being in that situation, and how stressful and hard it is. So, I was always willing to try to help the new—

TS: So, you acted as a mentor?

KM: I did. I acted more as a mentor, I felt like.

TS: Maybe it—is that also because maybe you don't feel that you had that mentoring—

KM: Yes.

TS: —for yourself, too?

KM: Right. Right.

TS: Did you do it for men and women?

KM: I did it for anybody.

TS: Yeah?

KM: I had an airman that I was the supervisor of. He decided to renounce his American citizenship and move to Canada. He was absolutely against American policy. He wanted to give up his military career, renounce his citizenship, and move to Canada. I supported his decision. I may not have agreed—there again, I may not have agreed with it, but I supported his decision. I stood by him while he through amazing amounts of harassment from a lot of those—this was at Hurlburt Field—a lot of those sexist guys that were around there that would just a harassing him and calling him names and everything. I really supported him. And he did end up doing it. He did end up leaving, because he had to go through the base commander and just all this stuff to—

TS: What was the reason that he wanted to renounce everything?

KM: He just felt like he didn't agree with American policy anymore; political policy. And he just could not be in a—in a country that did the things that American was doing. I don't remember the specifics of what was going on at that time.

TS: So it was, like, '93 to '98, sometime?

KM: Right.

TS: Okay.

KM: Yeah, so he did and I stood—I stood by him.

And then I had another airman who was gay that worked under me, and, of course, I knew it, because he had—he had talked to me about it. I did not tell anybody else because, there again, I didn't feel like it was place. He did his work fine. But he felt that he could come and confide in me about, you know, some troubles that he was having.

TS: Well, what did you think about that experience for homosexuals, because you would have been in before "Don't Ask, Don't Tell".

KM: Yes.

TS: And then "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was implemented—

KM: Right.

TS: —kind of when you were at the last station.

KM: Right.

TS: So, what were your thoughts on that?

KM: I didn't really have—when I was at—when I got to Pease, there was a female staff sergeant there who I always suspected was homosexual. I didn't really have a problem with it. I don't have a problem with it today. And when I was at Hurlburt Field, there was another guy there who I suspected was homosexual. We just didn't talk about it at the time. You know, I just—you know, I just didn't—I was okay with it. You know, I was absolutely okay with it; didn't have a problem with it. But I saw how those guys that I was stationed with—you know, because this guy, Danny was his name; the airman that worked for me that was homosexual. He—He was, kind of, effeminate, and so you could see how the other—he would come to me—that's why he came to me, because these other guys were, kind of, picking on him, because he was more effeminate and that's, kind of, why he told me, and I'm just like, "Hey," you know, "They're just jerks. Just ignore them. You can't help when there's jerks around," and you know.

TS: So, what do you think about the repeal, then, that they did in 2010?

KM: Of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"?

TS: Right.

KM: I think—I think people should be free to voice whatever they want to voice, and so to tell them, "You—You can be in but you can't talk about it," I think is kind of—yeah, I think that's putting a—almost like a second class citizen standard on these—those particular airmen who are homosexual, and I think they're serving—they're willing to serve their country. Who cares what their sexual preference is? As long as they're willing to get out

there and fight and do what they've got to do, I don't have a—like I said, I don't have a problem with it. Even, you know, in my civilian life or anything like that, hey, you know? So, I kind of wish it was—but there again, you've got that old boy mentality, is that people are afraid of it or something. I don't know.

TS: What about the issue of women in combat, then? Because—So, with you working at this Special Ops base—

KM: Yes.

TS: —I'm sure that was a discussion.

KM: Oh yeah. That was one of the reasons why they didn't want women there, was because when we would deploy, like I said, you would have this—a Delta unit's going out, and we would provide communication support. And we would go with them and they would be, like, maybe six to ten radio operators and two or three—depending on the size of the group going out, and you might have a couple of women. But, no, you're not out there with the Delta guys as they're performing their mission; you're at the base; you're behind the scenes, kind of thing, but you can still be attacked.

I do not have a problem with women in combat. I think, if that's what you want to do, I'm perfectly fine with it. I just think that, you know—how are you—you're going to still have to fight through that old boy mentality of proving yourself, and you may have to really prove yourself out there.

But there are women, you know, helicopter pilots, and there are women that are doing that kind of job; maybe not out there in the infantry troops but still out there getting closer and closer to that front line. And I think in a way, just like any kind of social change, it's got to be done in small increments. You cannot make a change overnight for anything that's been written in stone, and the way the social norm has been. You've got to, kind of, move a little forward; “Okay, they accepted that. Now let's move a little forward; accept that,” and then just keep going from there.

TS: Did you feel like, as a women, every time you moved to a new base that you had to prove yourself again, differently from the men that you were working with?

KM: [pause] I think a little bit, yeah. I think a little bit of that, because when you would come in, you know, you were always, kind of, judged a little differently than if you were male, especially if you were cute. Not saying that I was, but I'm saying if you were attractive in a way, you definitely had to prove yourself, because they would look—one look at you and you would have, you know—it really didn't matter how you looked when you were in the air force. It—You were in a base and there were, you know—there might be one women to every ten or fifteen guys; you had all these guys swarming around you because you were the only woman there.

So, there was that, and so you did have to, kind of, prove yourself a little bit while you were doing your job, and you had to be very, very careful, you know, when you were in your personal life because you could get a really bad reputation for dating, because you

had all these guys; “Oh, I’ll date you, and then I’ll date you, and then I’ll date you.” And so, you had to be really careful because it could come back and bite you. And it wouldn’t really affect the males; it would always affect the females—or in my experience.

TS: How would it bite you?

KM: Well, you would get that reputation as being slutty or easy, and then your commander would find out about it and then you would get called into his office and be like, “I’ve heard you’ve been—” you know, “Your attitude is not really fulfilling a military attitude.” You know, “You’re being too promiscuous,” or what have you. That never happened to me, but I’m saying, you know, there were other women that I know that had to go through that.

TS: Their commander would call them in for that?

KM: Like the first sergeant or their direct supervisor would call them in and say, “Well, I’ve heard these rumors that you’ve been dating all these different guys and, you know, that’s really not a very professional—”

TS: Did they call guys in for that?

KM: No; that I knew of, no. That’s what I’m saying; it was always the girls. If you got this reputation on base of you’re dating all these different military guys, and it was usually military guys that military women dated; usually. So, you would get, kind of, called in and be like, “Yeah,” you know, “You got this reputation and that’s not really a positive reputation we want for military personnel.” But of course, the guys could do whatever they want.

TS: [pause] Would you recommend military service or the air force in particular to any young person?

KM: Oh yeah.

TS: Man or woman?

KM: Yes. My—I have a cousin in the air force. My—Another cousin of mine who graduated college, she started—excuse me, graduated high school. She started college; she did one semester; she dropped out. I talked to her about a month ago and she said, “Oh, I’m going to go back in the fall.” So, she’ll—she’s been out now for about a year; give or take. And she said, “But I’m also thinking about joining the military.” She said, “I want to get away because, you know, my home life is—” it’s my aunt’s—my mom’s sister’s youngest—oldest daughter. She’s like, “You know, it’s just not good. I need to get away. I need to do something else, and this way I can get money to go to college.”

And I’m like, “Go. You need to go. You need to experience life and get away.” I was all for it. I was trying to convince her to do it. I don’t know if she is, but the fact that

she was thinking about it, I was really like, “Yes!” And she loves to run so she’ll be all right with the physical part.

TS: So, she’ll be good with that, huh?

KM: Yeah, she’ll be good with that. She’s not—she doesn’t like to study, though, but she likes to run, so—and she thought about the air force. She said she didn’t want to do the army.

TS: Have you had any experiences with the Veteran’s Administration?

KM: I haven’t really. I am a ten percent disabled vet. Because of my asthma that I got while I was in, I got ten percent when I got out. The only thing I ever tried to really do was, when I signed up for college I was like, “Okay, I’m ready to go.”

“Well, guess what? Your GI Bill is expired.”

And so, I really don’t have much to do. I did get my house when I lived in Florida, I bought it while I was still in so I did have a VA loan.

TS: Okay, on the GI Bill.

KM: I did. I did.

TS: What about—You had mentioned that you had trouble while you were in trying to complete the education; while you were in. What made it difficult?

KM: Both of my husbands. There again, I was very attached to them, and, like, Dale was like, “You don’t need an education,” and I did not get an education.

And when I married Shawn, Shawn was also like, “You don’t an education. You don’t need a college degree. You don’t need that.” And so, I just didn’t because they—neither one of them supported that for me, and I truly believe that you can do so much school and college on your own but you do need some kind of support to help you get through it.

I didn’t start college ‘til 2008, and I got out in ’98. I decided—I basically woke up one morning—I was a retail manager, at this point, for American Eagle [Outfitters], and I woke up one morning and I had been having—just miserable at work, and I woke up and I was just crying. You know, I just had—I had this epiphany, and I had said, I always wanted to go to college, but I’ll do it someday. You know, “Someday I’ll go.” And I woke up just crying. I’m like, “I hate my job. I hate my life.”

My husband and I divorced—Shawn and I divorced in 2004. My dad had died. And I moved up—back to North Carolina from Florida, and I had gotten a job working at American Eagle. I was living at a house; it burned down; no insurance. So, I had to move back in with my mother. And I just had this epiphany. I’m like, “I can’t—I’ve got to do it. I am forty years old. I’ve got to do this.”

So, I quit—quit my job that day and—that was a Saturday, and went that Monday—I was at GTCC, Guilford Technical Community College. “I want to go to college.” And I spent—I got a job working part time, and I worked all summer getting

everything ready. I started my career at GTCC. I graduated there in 2010. I was, like, an academic award winner; like, had the highest GPA. I won all these awards while I was there.

I started here at UNCG—I actually graduated GTCC with a 4.0 GPA. Started here at UNCG in 2010; my undergrad[uate]; graduated here in 2012 with my bachelor's in history with a GPA of 4.0. If you ever see my email there's a list of, probably, about twenty different, like, organizations I was a member of; scholarships; awards; it's there. I was the highest winner—the highest academic award winners here—I was the highest—I was the history—I won the history undergraduate award. I won it all.

TS: [chuckles] That's great.

KM: I did. I did. And so, I'm very proud of that. And then I'm in my first year right now in my master's studies; master's in history with a concentration in museum studies. And I will graduate, hopefully—I'm keeping my digits crossed—May of 2014.

TS: That's really great.

KM: Yeah, so, you know, all this time I probably should have been in school, because it seems like where I—I fit; you know, that educational part of it, which is, I think, why the air force was such a good place for me, because they are more analytical, I guess; more educational. The air force—

TS: The skillsets that you need?

KM: The skillsets, right; exactly. You know, I would never have made it as a marine. I just—that physical part I'm just not good at, so the air force was where I needed to be, and I got to do exactly—and I talk about these experiences and people just get this amazed look, and I'm like, "Yes, I did. I got to do all of that." And you know, being in my master's class, I'm in class with kids—I say "kids" because they're, like, twenty-two, twenty-three, and they have no life experience, and I'm like, "Pfft," you know, "I work for the Park Service. I work at another museum." You know, "I've got all these museum experiences. I've got all these life experiences. Yeah. Yeah. Just talk to the hand." [laughs]

TS: [chuckles] Well, do you think that your life would have been different if you hadn't joined the air force?

KM: Oh, yes. I think that I probably would be living in a trailer park somewhere, probably with four or five kids, with a husband who walked around with a wife beater t-shirt [slang for a white sleeveless t-shirt]. Yeah, because that's where—that's where my life was; that's what my family life was like. So, breaking out of that life, I had to just completely go off in a completely different direction, and I chose the military because that was the direction that I knew that I could break away and get out of that little niche that my

family's life—because sometimes we do follow in our parent's footsteps; not all the time, but sometimes.

TS: Would there have been any other path that you could have gotten on to take you out of that?

KM: I do not believe so, no. The only other option would have been to go to college, and like I said, my mother was like, "People like us don't go to college."

TS: What's she think about it now?

KM: She's very supportive of it now, especially after winning all these awards and, you know, she's very supportive.

TS: That's great.

KM: I do live with her so she—I get home and laundry is done. I have the toilet paper fairy, because—

TS: You have the support that you didn't have—

KM: I do!

TS: —in the military.

KM: I do. I do.

TS: Right?

KM: I get home and there's the toilet paper fairy. I'm like, "Oh," you know? The bathroom's got fresh toilet paper in it. I'm like, "Yes!" And clothes have been washed and my dinner's cooked and, you know—not that I'm abusing my mother.

But she's like, "You've got more important things to do." I work three jobs and go to grad school, so she's like—you know, my mom's like, "Okay. I'm going to come home and I'm going to have dinner ready," so that I don't have to worry about these extraneous things. So, it works really well. [chuckles]

TS: That's really great.

KM: And she's very supportive. Now she's done a completely one—you know, one-eighty, because she's, like, the young—her siblings' children are now graduating—I'm got a two cousins that are graduating high school this year in May, and the one that graduated last year—or two years ago. And she's like, "They've got to go to college. They've got to go to college. They have to go to college."

And when she found out Destiny—the one that I talked to—was like, “I’m thinking about the military.”

She’s like, “Yes. She needs to go do that.”

As a matter of fact, I’m leaving—tonight I’m going over to see one of my—I call them my nieces because they’re so young, but she’s been accepted here at UNCG so I’m going over to her house to make sure—she says, “I don’t know if I’ve done everything. Can you come help me, to make sure everything is ready?”

And the other one got accepted into Lenoir-Rhyne [University].

TS: Very nice.

KM: So, they’re off to college—

TS: Good!

KM: —and I’m so proud of them; I’m so proud of them. And I’m like, “You’re taking after me.” [both laugh]

TS: Well, do you think there’s anything that a civilian may not know or doesn’t understand about the military; like a misconception?

KM: I do. I think that—especially, there again, we’re going to talk about pop culture. You see all these movies and TV shows, and you have those military soldiers, and they’re always portrayed as being these dumb automaton soldiers. And I think that that’s a misconception that you just follow an order regardless of—I don’t want to say the outcome of that order, but you can question orders that are given to you. Not all the time, but if you believe that it’s the wrong order, you don’t—you know—

TS: Or do you think, maybe, the idea that you can’t be an independent thinker?

KM: Yes. I think that that’s definitely a part—problem, and I think that that is part of the media’s perception of the military; is that you just—you’re automaton; you just follow the orders and you don’t have an individual thought, or you’re not—you know, yes, I was military but I was also—also a very liberal person. You know, I didn’t—I’m not a—I do have some conservative value—I’m a cross between a conservative and a liberal. I have some very conservative values and I have some very liberal values.

TS: Did you have those when you went in the service?

KM: Oh yeah.

TS: But, I mean, both; the mix of both? Did you have the sense of—before you went in the service, of being independent minded? And do you think you are today?

KM: [chuckles] I think I absolutely had to be independent minded. I think that's why I could be able to see that that life that we had had in my family life was not the life that I wanted. I think that you have to—it's a—I don't know how to describe it in a way, but it's like you have to see that this is not what you want and there's something out there beyond that. I think a lot of people, especially in my family, they don't see outside that box. They're like, "We've lived in a trailer park. We were raised in a trailer park. This is how—this is my life, and I can't broach beyond that."

And I look at it like, "Yeah, that might be where you were born, but that doesn't mean where you're going." And so, yeah, I think, you know, I'm very independent minded that way where I'm like, yeah, it doesn't matter where you came from. It doesn't matter; any of that. It matters how you take that and move on, and so yeah, I'm very independent minded even today. I just—I'm willing to try anything new.

And my mother—like, we go to places and she's like, "Oh, I'm not trying that. I don't want to do that."

I'm like, "I don't care if I fail." We went to the NASCAR museum up in Charlotte, and you could do the racing of the cars. I was stoked. Man, I'm like, "Oh yes! I get to race the race cars."

And my mother's like, "Oh no. I'll make a fool of myself. Oh my gosh."

I'm like, "Yeah, I probably will, too, but I'll have fun doing it," you know. So, it's that kind of thing. I'm willing to try things, and I think that if you're not willing to try things, and willing to take that chance, you're not going to be able to go into the military because it is so foreign and so different. Unless you were born as, like, a military brat or something.

TS: And you have to be able to do that adaption that you were talking about earlier.

KM: Exactly; you've got to adapt. You—Because you're moving around so much, and you're doing exercises where things are coming at you; you know, where they're doing all these military exercises; war games, if you want to call it that. So, you've got to adapt quick. You've got to be able to go. And I think that's helped me with my schoolwork, too; just being able to—just to keep going and keep going and keep going.

TS: Yes. Well, what does patriotism mean to you?

KM: Patriotism, oh my goodness. It means so many different things to me, because I work for a National Park Service, right? I work for Revolutionary War Battlefield; that's what I do. I'm a history major. I love the eighteenth century, okay? Especially the Revolutionary War here in the South. So, thinking about patriotism, you know, we talk about this battle all the time, you know; I do it all the time.

TS: Tell me what the battle was because people listening probably don't know what it is.

KM: Okay! Well, the Battle of Guilford Court House took place March 15, 1781, and it was the biggest battle down here in the South, during the Southern campaign of 1780, 1781, between [Lieutenant] General Charles Cornwallis, who was the British, and [Major]

General Nathanael Greene, who was the American. And we are in Greensboro, so Greensboro is named after Nathanael Greene. It was a major win for the British. It was a—Let me put it this way; it was a tactical win for the British, but they lost so many men at this battle, that six months later Cornwallis was forced to surrender to [Major General] George Washington at Yorktown.

TS: Because he couldn't just call up troops across the ocean.

KM: He could not get—Absolutely, could not get any more troops.

So, I am surrounded by patriotism every day at work, okay? That is what I do. That's what I talk about. But we also talk about the fact that—you know, because people come in all the time and they talk about the British being the bad guys, and I'm like, "No, they weren't. They were doing their patriotic duty for their country."

So, patriotism just means, to me, you know, like we talked about earlier, serving your country; serving that cause that you believe in. I don't have to believe in it. Like I said, I don't believe in the Nazi cause, but I can believe and support the soldiers that fought for their country and that cause, and were willing to die for it.

One of my very favorite monuments on the battlefield is a monument to the Delaware Regiment that fought at Guilford Courthouse. There are three men buried there. Their names are John Toland, William Drew, and Cornelius Hagney. See, I can remember that. They died there, and when I'm always doing my battlefield tours I go up—I'm like, "Here's this monument. It's a very tiny little monument out there; it's not very big." But I'm like, "Here are three men that died here. They were fighting for a cause that they believed in, and they died here. They had no idea we would become a country. They never got to see this. But they were fighting for a cause and we should honor that. And that, to me—" it always brings tears to my eyes when I'm out there just talking about it and thinking about it; that these men were here fighting and they died fighting for that cause. So, that is, to me, what patriotism means; if you're willing to put your life on the line for a cause, regardless of what that cause is.

TS: That's a good—good explanation. Nice discussion of the battlefield, too.

KM: Yes. It's a great battlefield, for anybody listening.

TS: It's a great spot where some—bards[?] are right in that section.

KM: Okay.

TS: Where those Delaware Regiments are.

KM: Yes. Right now where the Del—where they found those bodies is now an apartment complex.

TS: [chuckles] Yeah.

KM: And they found them in, like, the eighteen—they were doing something and they found their skeletons and they actually reburied them where they are on the battlefield, yes. But they—they just, you know—and, you know, being out there every day, we talk about these guys that died here, fought there; even the British. The only one we don't like is [General Sir] Banastre Tarleton, who was a British cavalry officer who—

TS: Okay.

KM: We consider him the bad guy, but—but yeah, he—you know, we talk about—I talk about it all the time, and so for me it's very resonant to me. I think about it a lot.

TS: Do you reflect at all on the—well, the Iraq war, you know, we're not officially in that anymore, but the Afghanistan war is continuing on. Do you have any thoughts on those?

KM: I'm so conflicted. Being a historian now, like, studying things, you get to the point where you're just almost antagonistic toward war and fighting, but my personal belief, you know, I think that as long as we feel—as America feels that there is a threat to our national security, I'm fine with it. But I have a serious problem with America trying to be the world's police force, and trying to instill Democratic or Republican ideals onto people that—they don't want it. I think that's where American gets into a lot of its problems. Like, okay, “We're the best. We're the greatest. So, you have to follow us.”

And after World War II that happened a lot, and it was easier for countries to follow the American ideal because many of these countries—or American ideology—many of these countries didn't have governments after World War II. Countries were annihilated. They were getting their supplies and their funding through the United States. So, of course it was easier for them to adopt this American ideal.

But nowadays I think that that has, kind of, backfired, and we have become known as the world's police force. And I think that having people die for a cause that they're not supporting, just like in Vietnam, it does become a—a contradiction there. Yes, you support the men but are you supporting the cause? I don't know.

TS: Well, do you feel like you've, kind of, come full circle back from the young woman, you know, in Archdale and High Point, gone off to see the world, and now you're back and you're completing your education?

KM: I live in my childhood bedroom, [both laugh] if that answers that question.

TS: Well, I didn't mean it quite that way, but okay.

KM: Yeah, I mean—you know, it's like whoever said you can't come home again, well—yeah. I do. I chose to come back here after my divorce. After my husband—he left me for someone else which, looking back on it, in 1998 I should have probably stayed in because, you know, six years later he leaves me for another woman, but—after fourteen years of marriage.

But I chose to come back to North Carolina. My dad had just died. My dad died in February, my husband left me in May, so I was going through all this stuff. I had just been diagnosed as a diabetic. I mean, it was just all this stuff; my mother's alone. So, I'm like, "I'm coming home. I want to come home and be with my family."

So, I chose to move back here, and I don't regret it. My only problem is, once I graduate college I really want to stay here, and being a museum person I'm afraid there may not be a job in this local area that's—with the economy the way it is right now, sounds a little nerve-wracking. Hopefully that'll work out, but I wouldn't—I don't want to leave; I don't want to move. I'm glad that I came back.

TS: Yeah. So, do you have—that's really the end of the formal questions. Is there anything that you want to add about your time in the air force?

KM: That I think if anybody really—it was a great experience, and if you are listening to this and thinking, "Should I or shouldn't I?" I would vote yes. I think you should. I think that—just go out there and experience life and do something completely different. I don't regret any of my experiences, even the bad ones, because they make you grow as a person.

I just remember every morning getting up and putting on that uniform, and you feel so proud when you're walking around in it; especially when you're walking around civilians. When you're on the base, everybody's wearing their uniforms so it's not that big of a deal. But I used to go down to the local mall, you know, after work or something like that and just walk around, and people would stop and look at you in that uniform, and it made you feel so proud that people were, hopefully, being respectful when they were stopping and staring at you, but just that response that you got from civilians. And you would get older people that would come up and thank you for your service. That was just so amazing to me, you know, and I kind of miss that part of it; being a civilian because you're dressed like everybody else. And most people don't know I'm ex-military until I tell them that I'm ex-military.

Matter of fact, at the park on Sunday I had a hundred and fifty Army National Guard guys come in, and when I told them I was [U.S.] Air Force, of course, they were starting to pick on me, like, "That's not a real military". [chuckles] But, you know, it was great to actually see these guys and actually engage in some kind of military talk with some ex-military people, so.

TS: Yeah, you—you miss that, too, right?

KM: You do. There's that camaraderie even—even with the jerks that I was stationed with. There is a camaraderie there that is nonexistent in the civilian world. When I was in Germany and in England, there's nobody's family around. You don't have anybody else there but the people that you work with or that you know. So, you do develop this, kind of, tight knit community there. It—Matter of fact, Ramstein is the largest American community outside the United States. So, like, you would go downtown to, like, the local town, and you'd go in and be, like, to this local German shops and you'd be like, "Sprechen Sie English?", you know, in German. "Do you speak English?"

And they're like, "Yes. Of course I speak English."

TS: [chuckles]

KM: So, I didn't have to learn German that well. And of course, in England everybody spoke English. But you didn't have—People didn't have families. Thanksgiving and Christmas, you didn't go home. Some people did, but most people didn't. So, you just developed this really close relationship with everybody.

TS: Well, is there anything else you want to add?

KM: Nope, I think that's it.

TS: Well, thank you very much, Kimberly.

KM: You're welcome.

TS: Appreciate it very much.

[End of Interview]