

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

INTERVIEWEE: JoAnn Sesher Webb

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: August 16, 2013

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is August 16, 2013. This is Therese Strohmer. I'm at the home of JoAnn Webb in New Bern, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. JoAnn, could you state your name the way that you'd like it to be on your collection?

JW: JoAnn Sesher Webb.

TS: Okay. Well, JoAnn, let's start at the beginning. Why don't you go ahead and tell me when and where you were born?

JW: I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, May 18, 1933.

TS: And—Now, do you have a large family? What kind of family were you born into?

JW: My sister and I, Mom and Dad, lots of cousins, and aunts and uncles.

TS: Now, are you the younger or older sister?

JW: My sister is the elder of the family. [both chuckle]

TS: Oh, so you're the younger, okay. What did your folks do for a living?

JW: My father owned his own business. He traveled all over the world.

TS: What'd he do?

JW: Well, he owned his own business, and what he did was develop a way to adhere rubber cement to stainless steel, which had never been done before. So he was—had been in England, France, Saudi Arabia, India, Caracas—Carac—Caracas, Venezuela, which is where he died at the age of fifty-two; had a massive heart attack.

TS: Oh my goodness.

JW: So that was tough.

TS: Yeah, I bet it was. So you—When you were growing up in—

JW: Philadelphia—

TS: —in Philadelphia—

JW: —area, yeah.

TS: —were you in, like, the city, in the suburbs?

JW: No, we were in—we lived in Springfield, Delaware County, which was a small town at the time.

TS: Okay.

JW: And that's where I went to high school until the middle of my junior year when we moved to Allentown. My dad moved his business to Emmaus, Pennsylvania, and I graduated from Fountain Hill High School in 1951.

TS: Okay, well, tell me a little bit about growing up in Philadelphia in the—

JW: Springfield? I had a great growing up. We played outside until the sun went down and our parents made us come in, and we had a nice group of people. Even in high school at that time everybody wasn't practically engaged to the opposite sex, and we travelled kind of like—There was a group of us which was never a closed group but we all had fun together, and we'd go to the drive-in movies, you know, and pack into somebody's little Ford coupe and go to the [chuckles] drive-in.

TS: Do you remember what you liked to see at the drive-in?

JW: Oh, just, you know, decent movies that they had at the time.

TS: Yeah.

JW: I would think twice about doing it now, though.

TS: Well, they don't have too many drive-ins left today.

JW: No. There's a few. I think there's some down in—close to Beaufort, South Carolina.

TS: Okay. Well now, you grew up during the Depression years. Do you remember much about that?

JW: Not really. I remember when World War II was declared, though.

TS: Okay, tell me about that.

JW: I believe—I'm pretty sure this is how it hap—I was—I was watching *The Lone Ranger* on—or listening to it on the radio, and I went to my dad and I said, "Daddy, they keep coming on to my program saying the Japanese invaded Pearl Harbor."  
And he said, "What?" And I—quick turned on TV and the radio and then that's when it started.

TS: Yeah?

JW: And I can—My dad went out and tried to enlist in every branch of the service but at the time, first of all, I think he was older than they wanted , and he worked at that time for U.S. Rubber Company and they said, "No, no, no, no. No, you stay with that company; that's what we need."

TS: For the war.

JW: Yeah. So—

TS: So you were about eight?

JW: Yeah, and I—We always had a victory garden in the backyard, and we gathered copper and string and the foil out of cigarette packs and all those kind of things; had the air raid warnings in school, you know, where you got under your desk. What that was going—good that was going to do I never could figure out, but—

TS: Were you scared at all for those kind of events?

JW: I don't—I don't think that we were terrified.

TS: Okay.

JW: We were very cognizant of what was going on, especially when you would be—We walked to school. If you lived within a five mile radius you walked to school. And you would pass a house and there would be a blue star in the window which meant somebody—they had someone in the service. And then we started seeing the gold stars, and that kind of brought it home to us and—

TS: The gold star was when someone had died?

JW: Had passed, yes. And it was—But it was a good life we had. In fact, I was—my gran—my one granddaughter used to ask me all the time, "What did you do when you were kids?" and things like that.

And I tell her that, you know, when the prom came all the girls always got invited, and made—the boys always made sure that somebody got invited and things like that, and she said, "You know, Nana, I'm really envious of you."

And I said, "Well, Shelby, why?"

And she said, "Because you were safe." It rocked me when she said it.

And I thought, "Dear God, what has happened to this country that these kids don't feel safe anymore?"

TS: How old was she when she was talking to you about that?

JW: She was in her teens.

TS: Yeah?

JW: Yeah.

TS: Where was she living?

JW: Hilton Head, with her dad.

TS: Okay.

JW: But when we lived in Hilton Head, and she was a newborn and that, I babysat for her a whole lot because first grandchild—granddaughter, you know. I had two grandsons at the time; the granddaughters are a little different.

TS: [chuckles] There you go. Tell me a little bit more about growing up then; so you played, you went to the movies. Do you remember anything about, like, elementary school? Do you have a favorite teacher?

JW: No, but I can tell you about high school. [chuckles]

TS: Okay, tell me about high school.

JW: Well, actually, in grade school we used to have a fifteen minute break in the morning and you'd go out on the playground; you'd get on the jungle gym and things like that and the boys would play ball—throw balls to each other and all that. And junior high was exciting because, gee, now we're in the same school with the seniors and that, you know, and the football team and things like that.

In senior high, it—I think I was really very fortunate. As I said, you know, the boys always made sure the girls had dates for the movies and things like that, but no, there was very few that were ever really deeply involved, you know. And then, as I said,

I—in the middle of my junior year I had to—I went to—we lived in Lanark Manor [Pennsylvania], which was out of town, and I went to school in Fountain Hill High School, which was right below—Just that fast I forgot the name of the college there. Jim Finley used to go there.

TS: That's okay.

JW: He was my neighbor; he went there; he told me. It was quite a change for me. It was a smaller school, and of course I was the new kid, you know, where the other school I had been there since first grade.

TS: When you say smaller, what kind of school was it?

JW: There were fifty-one in my graduating class.

TS: And how many were in the other school?

JW: About a hundred and something.

TS: Okay.

JW: So it was somewhere between ninety and a 115, I'd say, and just the fact that it was junior and senior high school, and the football team, and all those other good things.

TS: So that's when you moved to Allentown?

JW: I did. The school was between—it was in Bethlehem, actually.

TS: Okay. Now—So what kind of—Was that a hard transition for you at that time?

JW: Only because I was—They didn't offer Spanish, which was the foreign language I was taking, and I had to take German, and it just isn't easy to learn German in the second half of the course. [both chuckle]

TS: Yes. So you had to kind of pick that up.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: Goodness gracious. Yeah, we had some—we had some good teachers, though; there were nice teachers there. But I was still the new kid on the block, you know.

TS: Yeah.

JW: But I did make a lot of friends there, and still in contact with them, actually.

TS: Yeah?

JW: Yeah.

TS: Well, that's really neat. What other sort of things did you do for fun around town?

JW: Oh, I learned to drive. [chuckles]

TS: How did that go?

JW: Well, it went fine until my mother and dad were on vacation and I used the car to go to school and then we played hooky, and I got caught. [both chuckle] But that was okay.

TS: Yeah.

JW: That was okay; no big deal.

TS: Yeah. Where do you go when you play hooky?

JW: I don't even remember; we just went for a ride.

TS: Yeah, just kind of drove around.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: I think we went to some lake or some such thing.

TS: What kind of car was it?

JW: It was a little Plymouth. It was the sweetest little car and good to drive—easy to drive. So it was fun. I was, you know—

TS: So now, did you have any sense of—Let's see. What year—years are you in—in the late forties, early fifties?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: I graduated in '51.

TS: Okay. So you had—The presidents we had then—So for—during the war was [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt, and then [Harry S.] Truman, and then we had [Dwight David "Ike"] Eisenhower. Do you have any memories of those presidents at all?

JW: Vaguely.

TS: Vaguely?

JW: Yeah. You know, you—you hear the speeches and everything else and it [unclear].

TS: You weren't too—You weren't too focused on those kinds of things at that age.

JW: No, no.

TS: What kind of things were you focused on?

JW: Just what was going on around us, basically. I mean, we used to sit there and talk politics, and we were going to solve the world, you know. We were going to solve all those problems.

TS: What did you think was wrong?

JW: Just the usual that you hear on—over—It's hard to say, because some of the things I'm still hearing to this day, and it was always—it would go from there to another subject to another subject to another subject.

TS: Yeah.

JW: We had a good time.

TS: Okay. Well, you had—Did you have any—You said you had some good teachers. Was there any in school that you really admired or looked up to or that mentored you in any way?

JW: When I went to school in Springfield, we had a Latin teacher that was as strict as they come. I love to tell this story and I probably shouldn't but I'm sure she's not still with us. Buddy Lowery[?], God rest his soul, was on the football team, and Bud was pretty tall kid, and he was in the front row. And, of course, school chairs are not real comfortable, and desks; you know how they—what—the way they used to be anyhow. And he was always putting his legs in front and she tripped over them. And she told him, very pointedly, to keep his feet under the desk. Well, he didn't. So she went to the closet, got a two by four, and dropped it right on his feet—

TS: Ow.

JW: —which cracked the rest of us up. Bud didn't think it was too funny, but we did.  
[chuckles]

TS: Did he keep his feet under the desk after that?

JW: Oh yeah, he did; he kept those feet under the desk; things like that. And we had another teacher that we used to call Sitting Bull because he was always tilting back in his chair, you know, like this [demonstrates]. And if you passed a note, he'd throw chalk at you, he'd throw the erasers at you, and if you really gave him a bad time you joined Webster's Club, which was you found twelve words of ten to twelve letters, know how to spell it, pronounce it, and use it in a sentence. And I've got to tell you, you did that once, you kind of watched what you did in his class.

TS: So were you a member of that club?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: Good teacher. We all were. [both laugh] You know, we all were. And Mr—Oh, just that quick I forgot his name; math and advanced math; Mr. Weaver. He was the coach for the wrestling team. You just walked in there and you knew—We used to have to go to the board and prove theorems, and you never know which one he was going to ask you. He'd point to you and—you know, and give you one and you never knew which one it was. It might not be the one you studied last night, could have been the one from a month before, and you had to get up there in front of that class.

Consequently everybody in the class was pretty good about knowing exactly what he wanted you to know. And he never raised his voice. He used to talk about like this [demonstrating a low voice]. I never heard that man raise his voice. You walked in and you sat down and you said, "Good morning, Mr. Weaver", and that was it.

TS: You just started working, right?

JW: You just started working, and you started learning quick. He was a good teacher.

TS: Now, as a young woman in—at this time in high school, did you have any ideas about, you know, what your future looked like?

JW: Yes and no. Yes and no. I think at that—at that time people weren't as dedicated to—I mean, we didn't start in third grade getting pushed to do something, you know. I was taking a college preparatory course—is what—because we had that, and the business, and then the guys had shop, you know, type of thing, so they—that's the only classifications there were at the time.

Not sure. You know, it's hard to make a decision like that because you're still—At that time, I don't think that teenagers were as independent as they are now; the



majority. You were still living at home; your parents—you still did what your parents expected you to do.

When I got out—When I graduated I—my dad said—told me—gave me some money and said, "Go visit your relatives in Pittsburgh because it's probably going to be the only two week vacation you get for a long time," and he was absolutely right. So I went to Pittsburgh and visited my cousins, and my aunts, and my uncles, and my grandmothers and all those good people, you know, and had a good time. And when I came back I had to get a job, so I went to Hess Brothers, which was a fabulous, fabulous store at the time. I worked from September or Aug—August, I think it was, and I worked first in the hat department, and I wasn't wild about it because you had to model the hats. And then they—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You didn't like doing that?

JW: Well, it was fun but I don't really like wearing hats anyhow. Then they put me in the jewelry department, which was a lot of fun because we were on the first floor. The only problem was that they also had where they demonstrated cosmetics and things like that, and I think I spent more money buying than I did earning, at the time.

And come Christmas I said, "You know, this is not for me; I don't want to do this the rest of my life."

Now, my dad loved to fly and he had his pilot's license, and more than once he and I would sneak out and go—He didn't have his own plane. He—He had intended—The property he bought was a farm with twenty-two acres, and he was going to put a landing field in. He wanted to buy his own plane and my mother, of course, was having a fit because she was scared to fly. So I just went out one day, and went down to the recruiters and enlisted. When I got—[chuckling] When I got home—

TS: Why did you do that?

JW: Because I wanted to go in the air force. I just thought that that was the thing that I should do.

TS: Yeah?

JW: I thought this has got to be better than what I'm doing now, and I really—I was really interested in it. I had a cousin that was in the air force in World War II.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Male or female?

JW: Actually, I had two of them. Both males.

TS: Both males, okay.

JW: One was a pilot. The other one—I don't know exactly what Earl did, but I had two that were in the service. And of course, we were so conscious of who was in and who wasn't in during World War II. So I enlisted and I went home, and I opened the door and threw my hat in, and then my father sat there and gave one of the, "Come in here; what'd you do now?"

And I said, "Two of the best-looking guys you've ever seen in your life are coming out here to talk to you tonight."

And my mother just glared at me [chuckles], God rest her soul. They came out, and my mother was against it, but my dad wasn't because my mother could be demanding. My mother was having a hard time letting go of the apron strings for both my sister and I.

And so, she finally agreed and said, "If you don't pass the physical, you have to go to college."

I said "Okay, that's a deal," because I knew I was going to pass the physical, [unclear] anything else. So I did and I left from Philadelphia.

TS: Tell me the story before you enlisted about the—wanting to be a stewardess.

JW: Oh I did; I always wanted to be a stewardess.

TS: So what happened with that?

JW: Well, in the militar—What happened was that when I—

TS: Because didn't this happened before you actually enlisted in the military?

JW: No.

TS: No.

JW: No. No, no, no, this was after I was in Lackland [Air Force Base].

TS: Oh, at—Oh, okay. So you—Okay, so when you went down and enlisted you picked the air force because—

JW: That's what I wanted to do.

TS: Did you consider any of the other services?

JW: No.

TS: No?

JW: Not really.

TS: Mostly because of the planes, or—

JW: Yeah.

TS: Uniform, anything?

JW: No, it was just the idea of being in the air force, because I thought the air force was really neat.

TS: Now, was that what your cousins were in?

JW: Yes, both of them were.

TS: Okay.

JW: Both of them were.

TS: Okay. So your—your mother's not so crazy, but you passed the physical, your dad is supportive be—Why?

JW: Very.

TS: And why—why else was he supportive?

JW: Because he fel—he said to me one time—he said, "It's the only way you're going to break your mother's apron strings."

TS: And you signed up for two years?

JW: Three.

TS: Three years, okay.

JW: That was a three year enlistment at the time.

TS: Now, had you been away from home much before you went to Lackland?

JW: Not particularly. But I've got to tell you that when I—we were waiting to get on this train to take us to Lackland Air—Lackland Air Force Base, there were several of us, and they handed me this package and I said, "What is this for?"

And they said, "They're everybody's orders," and that, "You're in charge of them."

"What are you, crazy? I'm the youngest one here." But I did. But we—And we stopped in St. Louis [Missouri] on the way down and went to the—What the heck do they call it now? You used to go there to meet, you know, if you were in the—if you were in the city and had time to spare. The name escapes me but I'm sure that you know what it is. Not the American Red Cross, but—

TS: USO? [United Service Organizations, Inc.]

JW: USO, thank you.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: The USO?

JW: That's the one that I'm thinking of. So we had a good time there.

TS: Yeah?

JW: But then we just—We were only there for a few hours.

TS: How were you travelling?

JW: Train.

TS: By train, okay.

JW: We had little cubbyholes, you know, we could sleep in. It was—It was an easy trip down. And every—Of course, we were all excited and talked a lot and things like that. So that was fun and we got—

TS: Now, were you—were you with all other women?

JW: Yeah.

TS: Okay. So you got to Lackland, and what did you think about Texas and—

JW: Well—

TS: Now, what time of year is this that you were there?

JW: February. [chuckles]

TS: Okay.

JW: Oh, God. That's the worst time to go to Texas, let me tell you.

TS: I don't know, maybe August is not so great.

JW: Oh, I said it's the only time you can get a third-degree burn during the day and freeze to death at night.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

JW: But when we got down there, we were moved into new barracks, which were brand new, and there was about three hundred women, and I'd say, a rough estimate, probably about four or five thousand guys down there at the time. It was a lot of men down there at the time.

We had a great instructor. I met some really fine ladies there, from all over the country. We had a little girl from Hawaii, and she was the cutest thing going. She was so tiny that she kept stretching her neck to try to get—she wanted to get in so bad, she would stretch her neck and do stretching exercises so she'd be tall enough, because you had to be five foot, five [inches], and within a certain weight limit, you know. And she got—she got her Class "A"s, and she looked like she might have had her father's coat on, because the arms were so long—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: It was really quite big?

JW: —and the skirt was dragging on the floor; she was as cute as Christmas. She did a good job; nice job. And I met another girl from Arkansas, and the young lady—and I'm not going to use any names because she could still be alive for all I know—but we had KP together because we all—all the women had KP [kitchen patrol].

We were scraping the trays, you know? And she started to cry. I turned around and looked at her. I didn't realize at first that she was—she just had tears—a stream of tears running down her face, and I said, "What's wrong? Are you hurt? Has something happened?"

She said, "My family doesn't get meat. And if we get it my dad gets it because he's the wage earner, and we—we might not have meat for weeks, and what I'm dumping into this garbage can would feed my family for a year."

I was stunned. I mean, I grew up in an average neigh—you know, middle class family. And I just—I was flabbergasted, I really was. I thought to myself, "There's people in this country that don't get meat to eat, or enough food to eat?" Because you didn't hear a lot about it at the time. I just—I could have cried for her. I really could, because this girl was so upset at the waste.

She said, "If I could just package it up and send it home," you know?

TS: Yes.

JW: I'll never forget it. I have—You know, that was sixty years ago for heaven's sakes, and I have never got—forgotten it. When I hear about people in the Ozarks and things like that, I can say, "Okay, they're not—they're not doing any better than they were when I—when I was a kid, so there's something wrong, somewhere."

TS: What other things did you do at basic training? You had your KP.

JW: Yeah, and we marched.

TS: How'd you like that?

JW: I loved it; I really did. And I—Everyday, every ti—we marched everywhere. Wherever we went, chow hall or wherever it was, you marched. So she said—pointed to me and said, "Take your flight." So I did.

TS: Who—Who pointed to you?

JW: Our TI—the woman that was in charge; our TI [training instructor].

TS: Okay.

JW: So I did, and I marched them over to chow hall. She turned around and looked at me, she said, "JoAnn, you did a great job and you were the only one out of step." [both laugh] I could have gone through the ground right then and there.

And we got all our shots, and when you—they would give you your shots, they'd tell you when you went out you started pounding on yourself, and then you went back to the barracks and you scrubbed the floors because it kept that arm moving and those shots [unclear].

But when we walked out there were a bunch of guys laying on the ground, and their TI was kicking them, because he said, "None of those women have passed out from these shots." Well, if you think we didn't rag those guys?

TS: So they had passed out?

JW: They passed out; they keeled over from the shots. [both chuckling] It was too funny; it was too funny. And, you know, we did all the things that the military does. We did—We never got on—too—too exhausting, like the marines do, thank God. I mean, good for the marines, but I personally was not into that kind of thing. And then we were—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Did you have to do—

JW: —finally allowed—after about almost six weeks of training—that we were allowed to go over to the rec center on Sunday in our Class "A"s and our Class "A" shoes, which looked like something my aunts used to wear. But we went over and we danced until none of us could dance anymore, because the ratio of men to women—you never sat down. I don't care how good or how bad you were, you never sat down.

TS: You could always get your ticket punched on the dance floor, huh?

JW: Oh, yeah. And this—I was dancing with this young man from Brooklyn; I'll never forget it. You have to remember the year that this was. He said, "You're pretty good at this." He says, "Do you dirty dance?"

And I stopped right then and there. I said, "I beg your pardon?"

He said, "You don't know what it is, do you?"

I said, "No, and I don't think I want to know either."

He says, "Okay." [laughs]

TS: What was it?

JW: Dirty dancing. Do you remember the movie, *Dirty Dancing*?

TS: Oh, the movie that came out—

JW: Yes, yes, yes.

TS: —twenty years ago or so?

JW: Yeah; yes. Well, apparently they were doing it in Brooklyn a long time ago, honey.

TS: [chuckles]

JW: But I was so—I said, "Excuse me? I don't know what you're talking about."

TS: This was '52 then, right?

JW: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Okay. So you—Sounds like you enjoyed basic training.

JW: I did.

TS: Did you do any running?

JW: Yeah, we did things like that, you know, and some calisthenics and things like that.

TS: Did you have any obstacle course?

JW: I—Not that I remember. We had—We had a lot of stuff that we had to write, you know, and learn. First—Of course, the first thing they tell you is, "You may think you know better than we do, but we're going to do it our way, so don't bother to tell us what we should do."  
So I—"Okay."

TS: So you were good, you didn't—weren't challenging anyone or anything like that?

JW: No, no, absolutely not.

TS: Did you do any kind of weapons training at that time?

JW: No.

TS: No?

JW: No, I think they were afraid to give us a gun. [both chuckle]

TS: Now, what were your friends thinking about you joining the air force?

JW: Well, some of them thought it was a great idea and said they wished they'd done it.

TS: Yeah.

JW: Yeah. But—Well, the night we graduated from high school, this fellow and I went out together, because he didn't smoke and drink and neither did I. So, you know, night of graduation we ended up getting engaged.

TS: The night you graduated from high school?

JW: Well, not the night, but we went together for a while, but he went in the navy and he was on an aircraft carrier while I was in Lackland Air Force Base and we wrote to each other



and said, "You know, this isn't going to work, this long-distance romance." But he and I have—We have stayed good friends. He and his wife have come to visit us and—

TS: Well, that's great.

JW: Yeah. He and Jack get along fine because I've gone to class reunions up there in Fountain Hill. He's married to a lovely young—lovely lady right now, and I was happy for him because he was, but it was just too funny.

TS: Well now, tell me the story about—When you enlisted, what was the job that you were supposed to have?

JW: When they did the sit-down and they talked to you and decided what you were going to do, the young man that I was—that was—

TS: The recruiter?

JW: —recruiter that I was with—I don't know that you call him a recruiter, but they're the ones that went through all your—

TS: Paperwork?

JW: —paperwork and everything and decided. And he said, "I've got a perfect job for you, and I—he said, "as a stewardess."

He said—And I just looked at him and I said "Doing what, please?"

And he said, "Well, you know, when the—when these officers—higher officers fly and that, there's stewards and stewardesses on board to take care of it."

Well, I just—I was happier than happy. I was so excited about it because I said, "I get to fly. I get to travel," which is one of things that I was really looking forward to.

He said, "You'd be perfect for the job, JoAnn." He said, "You'll be okay." And I—So when I got up to leave, as I was walking away—

TS: This is in Lackland?

JW: This is in Lackland, and when I got up to leave, he said, "You are twenty-one, aren't you?" I should have lied.

I turned around and I said, "No, I'm eighteen," and he tore the papers up because you had to be—a woman had to be twenty-one at the time to be on flying status, which I still think was discrimination. [chuckles] I'll never get over that. So I was—I was very disappointed; very disappointed.

So they sent me to Roslyn Air Force Base [New York] to be scope dope [slang term for an Airborne Interceptor Navigator] and a—a plotter behind a plotting board, which was fine; it was a small base.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: A scope dope, is that what you said?

JW: What?

TS: Scope dope?

JW: Yeah, that's what we used to call the guys in Early Warnings [Radar Station], you know, that watch the—

TS: Yeah.

JW: —radar doesn't bother me, bother me, bother me thing.

TS: [chuckles] Okay. Now, how are you—Did you get to go—Actually, during basic training was there anything particularly difficult, mentally or physically, that you had to do?

JW: Not really.

TS: Not really?

JW: No.

TS: But you were enjoying it?

JW: When you're young you can do anything.

TS: Was it pretty much what you expected?

JW: Yes.

TS: Yeah?

JW: I knew that there was going to be a lot of discipline, I knew that from the get-go, but I had a lot of discipline at home too.

TS: So there was no problem for you.

JW: To this day I still say, "Yes, sir" or "No, Sir" and "Yes, Ma'am" and "No, Ma'am." That's okay. There's nothing wrong with it.

TS: So it was a good fit for you—

JW: Yeah.

TS: —for that time. Now, how did you—at Roslyn did you get to pick where you wanted to go? Did you get a dream sheet that you said, "I'd like to go to these areas?" No?

JW: They didn't do that then.

TS: No?

JW: The needs of the air force comes first.

TS: Okay.

JW: Actually, I enjoyed it there. There again, I met some really great people; met my husband there. And worked behind a plotting board and we were not even allowed to tell our families what we were doing, because it was all very hush-hush. Don't forget this was—Berlin Wall and all that other stuff, you know, was going on, too, some—and this Korean thing and everything else, so we were never allowed to tell anyone exactly what we did, but we were—we covered—oh, Lord—I think Boston— almost all the whole eastern seaboard.

TS: This was on Long Island—

JW: Yeah.

TS: —the Roslyn—

JW: Yeah, it was the old Irving Berlin estate.

TS: Oh, is that right? That's where the air station was at?

JW: Yeah. Half the people didn't even know we were there.

TS: Can you talk about what you did now?

JW: Sure.

TS: Well, tell me more about that; that sounds really interesting.

JW: Well, we worked swing shift, and we worked behind this two—two-story plotting board, and of course—

TS: Two-story?

JW: Yes. It was a big thing, we worked—we either worked on the top platform or down on the—on the—

TS: So they had different levels that you—

JW: Levels, yeah.

TS: Okay.

JW: And you—

TS: Was it like a grease board, or— [A grease board is a wipeable board that uses grease pencils]

JW: You wrote backwards; you had to learn to write backwards.

TS: So it was a clear—

JW: So the officers sitting up on the dais could read it, because they can't read backwards.

TS: How was that?

JW: [laughs]

TS: How did you do that?

JW: I got in trouble, too.

TS: How'd you get in trouble?

JW: Oh, God, you're not going to believe this. I don't know if you want this story or not—

TS: Yes, I do.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: —but I'm going to tell it anyhow.

TS: [chuckles]

JW: You know about the phonetic alphabet, right? So this kid, Buzz, was working down on floor level, and his call sign was P—Peter, right? I'm up there with the air sea [?] rescue officer, working with him, and of course, I've got a voice that will carry from here to

there, so I said "Hey, Buzz." He was writing forward for him, so I said "Buzz, your Peter's up backwards."

TS: [chuckles]

JW: Well, let me tell you—You want to talk about dead silence, in this whole building? And I'm looking at everybody like, "What's the matter with everybody?" Well then, they got hysterical.

TS: Yes, I'll bet. I was going to say, when did the laugh come?; that had to be pretty funny.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: I thought I was going to die, I—because that girlfriend that worked up on the status board, and I said, "What did I say?"

And she said, "You really want me to tell you that, JoAnn?"

I said, "Is it what I think it is?"

And she said "Yeah." I thought I would die of embarrassment. They—It took them twenty minutes to stop laughing. And poor Buzz, his face is, like, beet red. [both chuckling] But we never talked that way.

TS: Right.

JW: I didn't have brothers.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You—You—You weren't thinking of it in any kind of term—

JW: In any kind of terms, and furthermore, we never—as kids growing up, we never talked like that. It just wasn't in the vocabulary of the people that I was around, and I had no brothers. So maybe that was—maybe that's a downfall, not to have a brother; I mean, they can teach you something. But it just was—One guy looked at me, he says, "I have never met anybody as innocent as you are. Where have you been all your life?" [laughs]

I said, "Oh, dear." But—

TS: Tell me a little bit about, like, how many—about how many women were working in this field with you?

JW: In the facility?

TS: Yes.

JW: There were, I think, two—275? I think there were about two hundred, 225 there at the base. They worked everywhere; in crypto[logy], all the other areas around the base, in the office, things like that.

TS: Was it an intelligence unit?

JW: I—If they were, we didn't know it.

TS: Yeah.

JW: I don't know. It just—We were—We were in our—our little group, because as I said, we worked three days on, twenty-four [hours] off. You would go in at seven and get out at three, and then the next shift was three to eleven, and then you were back to eleven [to] seven and that, and then we'd get—after twelve days we would get a three-day break and I was close enough to Allen— from where—there—I could drive home from there. It was within in the radius you were allowed to leave.

TS: Right.

JW: So I used to always bring people home with me. My mother would get up and step over the bodies in the living room. But she liked it because there was somebody in the car with me coming home. I had my own car.

TS: What kind of car did you have?

JW: A '39 Hudson.

TS: How did you like it? What color was it?

JW: Green, and it had cast iron fenders. And—Because of Allentown—used to be Mack Truck—there was a little—one of those little Mack—Mack dogs on the—on the front of it. Everybody used to say, "Do not park next to me, JoAnn."

TS: [chuckles]

JW: "That thing's got cast iron fenders on it." But it ran, and that's all I cared about.

TS: Yeah, that's interesting. So you—In the facility that you worked at, about how many women work—women worked with you?

JW: Let me think; it was Connie, was on the status board. There was me—There was about six. There were about six of us.

TS: About six. And then how many men were there?

JW: About twelve.

TS: Yeah? So half? You were about half?

JW: Yeah; something like that. It was just all good guys, all good—you know, good people; very, very little trouble there, which was really nice. And it's like living in a small town, rather than in a big city where half the time you don't even know your next-door neighbor. So it was good. Then I met my hunny bunny.

TS: Yeah? How long did it take before you met him?

JW: Well I—Unfortunately, as I told you before, I was in Mitchell Air Force Base for—Hospital for—from November 15 until the third of January.

TS: Which year was that? Was that the first year you were in or the—

JW: No.

TS: Second?

JW: No, it was in—it was in '53.

TS: Fifty-three?

JW: Fifty-three to '54.

TS: So what—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: Which is—

TS: We didn't do this on tape so go ahead and tell me the story of what happened.

JW: I had—They—Well, we were working the night shift, and I had been in the chow hall and then went up to work, and I got this excruciating headache, and I said to Captain Schmidt[?], I said, "May I go to the ladies' room and lay down?" I said, "I have a horrible headache."

He said "Sure, go ahead," because night was not nearly as busy as daytime. So he asked—After a couple of hours, he asked this friend of mine to go in and check—He said, "You better go in and check on her, see if she's okay."

She came back and she said, "You better call the medic, there's something wrong with her."

So we had a great medic. Oh, he was—he'd been in the service forever. He came in and he said, "JoAnn, can you walk up the—" He woke me up and he said, "Can we—I get you up the stairs?" Because we had to go—we didn't have an elevator or anything like that, we went up these stairs—two stories—and I couldn't make it up the steps. So they took me back over to the dispensary where they gave me an APC capsule —All Purpose Capsule; that's what they called it then.

TS: What is that?

JW: That's supposed to take care of whatever's wrong with you.

TS: Okay. You know what was in it?

JW: I think it was aspirin.

TS: Okay. Maybe so. [chuckles]

JW: That's the closet I can—And then they sent me back to the barracks. I went to bed. Then my roommate came in at seven o'clock in the morning, and called the dispensary and said, "You better get over here because I think she's dead."

So the doctor came over this time, and he said, "She's either got polio or meningitis," because polio was very prevalent then, and I was out cold; I was absolutely out cold. They took me by field ambulance—that was fun—to Mitchell Air Force Base and they put me on quarantine when they found out what it was, and I was there.

TS: Tell us what it was.

JW: Eastern Equine Encephalitis, and I had seven spinal taps, and I was in quarantine for almost three weeks. I was in a coma for probably a week to ten days, which is why they called my family and said, "She's not going to make it. We don't think she's going to make it; she's really sick." My temperature must have been off the [unclear]. I had very good care there.

My dad and mother were on a business vacation trip to California and they stopped at my cousin's house in Texas. She said "Uncle Bill, you need to call home right away." And he—they of course thought it was—my dad's mother lived with us at the time.

My mother said he came—he called home, came out of that bedroom, she said, "I hope I never see that look on anybody's face again."

He said, "Get in the car." He drove from Texas to Long Island in thirty-three hours or something like that. By the time they got there, because there had been this almost week-long lag before they could—You know, you didn't have cell phones then.

TS: Right, the communication was a lot different.



JW: Yeah, and—

TS: So they didn't know you were sick for quite a while.

JW: No. And then he called, I guess, and they said, "She's—The coma's broken and she's going to be okay." But I was still in the hospital at the time, and he came up at Christmastime and took me home. He was allowed to take me home, but I had to go back to the hospital for some final tests. There were two girls from my barracks over at the hospital at the time, and when Wes came in he said—He was the medic—they said, "Who is that?" They didn't recognize—That's how bad I was.

TS: Oh, they didn't recognize you at all?

JW: They didn't recognize me. They took one look at me and said, "Who is it?" Thanks. But, "God, thank you." The good lord, thank—I really—I was very blessed because my family doctor here said that I was the only person he knew that ever survived it. That's how deadly it is.

TS: Do they know how you picked it up?

JW: A mosquito; that's how everybody picks it up. Who knows? If there's horses around, and you get into an area where there's horses and things like that, there's always the chance that they'll—They get infected—It's really quite interesting. They get in—The horse gets infected from a bird, and then a mosquito bites the horse, and then the—and then the mosquito bites other human being and—

TS: That's how it's passed on?

JW: Yeah.

TS: Well now, you talked briefly about living in the barracks; do you want to tell us about what that was like, at all, after coming from a, you know—I'm sure— Did you have your own room in the house—your house growing up, or did you share it with your sis—

JW: My sister and I shared a room for a while, but there were three bedrooms there so, you know, she couldn't stand it any longer; being the older sister she got her own room. Yeah, it—but I didn't—that didn't bother me at all. There was—

TS: Was it like an open bay, or what was it like?

JW: There were two—two girls to a room.

TS: Okay.

JW: Which wasn't bad at all, and we had, you know, washers and dryers and things like that and the chow hall was right next door. The main gate was up the other way, so—

TS: So it was kind of like a BOQ [Bachelor Officers' Quarters] is today—

JW: Yeah.

TS: —a little bit? It wasn't like a—There weren't enough girls, maybe, for a big barracks?

JW: We had two barracks with women.

TS: Yeah, but there were two—two to a room at that time, huh? Okay.

JW: Yeah. Some of the others might have been four, I don't know, but the rooms on the ground floor, they were—there were just two of us to a room, yeah.

TS: Two to a room. So what—Was that—What kind of furnishings did you have?

JW: Military furnishing. [both chuckle]

TS: Like your locker and—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: Well, you know, you had your dresser. No, we had dressers with, you know, the small mirror over the top of it. There was a full-length mirror out in the hall, and then we had the laundry room, and a room where we could sit and talk; you know, that kind of thing.

TS: Like a dayroom.

JW: But, shoot, when we weren't working we were at Jones' Beach swimming or—or something like that, and you know, go out a lot.

TS: Didn't spend a lot of time in the barracks?

JW: No. No. We had an NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] Club. That's the first place I ever met Jack.

TS: Tell me about that; tell me about meeting your husband.

JW: Well, of course, he got there before I got out of the hospital, and my girlfriend's telling me about this good-looking guy; you know, this guy from Louisiana. And I was studying—studying with a group at the NCO Club and he walked in and I thought to

myself—Well, Jack just strut when he walked. I don't think—It wasn't conceit, it really wasn't, but it just—the way he walked; carried himself. And I thought "Well, there's an arrogant somebody-or-other." And we met. And we dated.

And then, I think what really turned me on the most, we were sitting there with this whole group of people in the NCO Club one night. We had a fellow there that was—could tell a joke better than anybody I've ever heard in my life, and he started to tell this joke. Well, Jack had heard the joke before and started to laugh, and he—he got everybody in that place laughing, and the poor guy is trying to tell his joke and none of us heard the end of the joke because everybody in the place was laughing.

So he—he drove a buddy to Colorado, and that's when my dad died. We got word that my father had died in—in Venezuela. In fact, that was a mess because they called me and said to go over to the chaplain's office, and I went; you know, "What's going on?" It never—never entered my head.

TS: Right.

JW: And he told me that my dad had died, and had a massive heart attack. He had a coronary thrombosis, actually. I just looked at him and said, "My dad wouldn't do that to me," and walked out. Then they had all the AP's [Air Police] looking for me all over the base, and I had gone to the NCO club, had a beer, you know—Remember the little beers?

I'm sitting on the log that keeps your car from going in and they came looking for me, and I went in to the CO's [commanding officer] office and he said, "JoAnn, your cousin—" the one that was in the air force, flew for Eastern airlines and he lived on Long Island—"has come to pick you up to take you home." My dad was fifty-two. Hard. So I went home.

I called Jack. I said, "Jack, my father's died." I don't know why I called him; he couldn't do anything, you know? But eventually we got married, and he had enough leave time coming that he could get out so he could—he could get out early. That's why I—I got out at the same time, because he was going back to LSU [Louisiana State University].

TS: So you got out early because—

JW: Of marriage.

TS: Because of marriage?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: They said I couldn't re-enlist if I got out on a marriage discharge. I said, "I'm not planning on it," but— [laughs] You know, you didn't think about getting divorced then.

TS: Right.

JW: But, yeah, it was—I never regretted it. I never, ever regretted going in. If Jack had been there longer, I would have stayed longer. I probably—Well, he probably would have gotten out and I'd have gone with him, but if it wasn't for that I would have re-enlisted.

TS: Yeah? You enjoyed your job?

JW: I really did.

TS: Yeah?

JW: I really did, and I enjoyed the people I worked with, and as I said, they—when I came up shortly after—before the board, when they were—you know, they decide whether or not you're going to get an upgrade, and Captain Schmidt told them—said, "Look, this woman has been in the hospital for two, two and a half months. It's too soon to even think about it," you know, because they ask you questions that there was no way I could answer.

TS: Oh, I see, okay. So you weren't prepared for a board at that time.

JW: No. No, nothing like that, but—

TS: Did you feel like you had been treated pretty fairly, while you were there?

JW: Oh, absolutely.

TS: Yeah?

JW: Absolutely.

TS: By your peers and—as well as your supervisors?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: Officers, yeah. I got along fine with them.

TS: Did you ever have any ratings done while you were in, or evaluations? Do you remember anything like that?

JW: I got chewed out a couple of times. [laughs]

TS: What did you get chewed out for?

JW: Oh, God, a whole bunch of us went to—Are you ready for this?

TS: Yeah.

JW: Chicago.

TS: Chicago from Long Island?

JW: Yeah, up to Wisconsin, because I was going out with this guy at the time. This was before I was sick. It was too funny. Went up and met his parents, you know, just because he wanted to go home, and whatever, and then we rode—and there was about five of us in this car—and we got back late.

TS: Was there a curfew?

JW: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

JW: Kind of. But we were late for—getting back from—

TS: From your leave?

JW: From trying—Yeah. So you'd get chewed out for that, you know. And we were acting silly about the whole thing because we're so groggy from not sleeping a couple days. Captain Schmidt yelled at us, and he never yelled at us. He was a good guy. He died—I found out he died a couple of years ago.

TS: Now, was he your supervisor at work; Captain Schmidt? Oh, okay.

JW: COC[?] officer. He was in charge of that.

TS: The COC officer?

JW: Yeah, up on the—he was up on the dais—He was way up there, and then there was another officer, and then there was the dais with air-sea rescue and all those other things. But the funny thing is, we used to go out as a group when we got out of work. Captain Schmidt and some of the other officers would go with us, and it was always you were on a first-name basis until you went back through the gate, and then it was "Sir," and when you talked to him it was "Captain Schmidt," and not—Well, then we got some new people in, and this one red-headed kid—I'll never forget him—he addressed him by his first name.

TS: At work?

JW: At work. That was the end; blew the whole thing. Because we used to go out and, you know, everybody'd have a couple drinks, and dance, things like that. Then we'd go back to the base and the minute you went back in the base you were—you were back in the military, and this kid screwed it up for everybody. I felt like smacking him one. [both chuckle] But anyhow. And then when Jack and I got out, we—we stopped—

TS: He was going to school, right?

JW: He went back to LSU, yeah.

TS: Okay. Did you have any heroines, or anything like that at this time; heroes or heroines during this period of your life?

JW: I think that the heroes we had were—were anybody that was in the military—

TS: Now, we didn't talk—

JW: —in World War II.

TS: In World War II? Now—But you were also in during the Korean War. We didn't talk about that too much. Is there anything you want to mention about that?

JW: Well, I thought they should have let [General Douglas] MacArthur go beyond thirty-eighth parallel, and most people in the service just do. It was just one of those things that we talked about. You know, "Why in the heck are they stopping this thing? Why are they—" We didn't win. We didn't win. Not really. All we have to do is look at it now.

TS: North Korea today, you mean, and—

JW: Well, the whole world situation and this whole thing is—and then—then Vietnam, and I personally, and a lot of people I know that were in the military, were horrified at what happened to those guys when they came back from 'Nam; the way they were treated by people that never—never served, never went on a battlefield or anything else. I mean, they had a right to not think we belonged there—maybe we didn't—but that isn't—that isn't the way you treat the people that are in the military and they're fighting the battles; the ones that are facing the guns.

And we won't talk about the bitch that went and got some of them killed up there at the Hanoi Hilton [probably referring to Jane Fonda].

TS: Who are you talk—Who are you talking about? I'm sorry.

JW: I can be sued. I guess.

TS: Oh. Okay. [chuckles]

JW: Yeah, and how many—how many of those well-respected officers in that reported it? And they didn't do a damn thing to her. I'll never forgive them for that. No guts, no glory. And I still think it's outrageous. And now they want to make her a woman of the century? Should have been shot. Between you, me, and the gatepost.

TS: Okay. So what—I was going to ask you a little bit about the sixties, with—you mentioned Vietnam. Before that, you know, when—do you remember when President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy was shot?

JW: Yes. I couldn't—I was like a lot of other people, too stunned to even know what I thought. I just could not believe that anybody would do that. I just—Today I don't even want to listen to the news anymore because all I hear is this person shot and that person shot, and that—and these kids are killed and, I mean—We have no leadership. It's the way I feel about it. We have no leadership anymore. People think they can do whatever they want to.

My son-in-law hunts. He's got rifles in his house and he's entitled to those. I know a lot of people that have guns, but they don't go shooting anybody. I think the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] is responsible for a lot of things that go on in this county.

TS: Why do you think that?

JW: Because it's, "Oh, you can't insult this one. You can't do that. That's going to be insulting to somebody." You can't put a Christmas thing out on your lawn. You're not supposed to have the Ten Commandments—Maybe if more people paid attention to the Ten Commandments we wouldn't have some of the problems we have. Maybe if kids were taught respect for their elders and—and—When I was a kid growing up you would not think of insulting the flag of the United States. And everywhere you went, even the movie theaters, you know, you'd, "God bless America," you saluted the flag, you'd—every day in school. We respected this county; we respected our flag. I don't respect the people that are—that are doing all these things, it's a—"You can't do that."

TS: Well, let me ask you a question about how the role of woman has changed in the military.

JW: They're—Oh, please. They're flying airplanes.

TS: So what do you think about that?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: God bless them. I think it's wonderful.

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

JW: I don't know of anything a woman can't do except maybe pick up a guy that's twice her size, and some women I've seen can do that too. [chuckles]

TS: So, I guess in February of this year the [U.S.] Secretary of Defense [Chuck Hagel] removed a lot of the restrictions. I guess they're reviewing to see, you know, which—if there's anything women can't do.

JW: I think it's harder for the guys in the military to accept a woman in the—in the front lines. I think it's—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Than it is—

JW: Yeah.

TS: —for the woman to actually do the job? You think it's harder on the man to accept them in that role?

JW: Yes, I do, because guys are guys and they're never going to change. [both chuckle]

TS: What does—What does that mean, JoAnn? That's a pretty—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: They're never going to change.

TS: That's pretty open-ended; what does that mean?

JW: That means that I think that guys are certain—they're raised a certain way. You know, they're all supposed to be the stronger sex, they're all supposed to—I personally would not want to be the guy—I would not want to be the female on the front line. I can be—I'll be honest with you with—with that.

But women flying planes. That one in that one battle overseas that brought that A10 back that was so shot up the guys couldn't even figure out how she brought it back. I think that there are women that are perfectly capable of handling a lot of that, and you see more and more of it. And good for them, as long as they do what they expect to—The only thing I ever got bothered about was when there were women—some women joined



the guard [National Guard], and when the guard got called up they didn't think they should go. Excuse me? Why did you—Why did you sign up? Just for the money, or—I mean, what was your thinking? That's what the service does. The needs of the service always come first. So I thought, "Well, why were you there in the first place?"

TS: Well, did you—At the time that you were in, there weren't that many women in the military. I mean, there's still fifteen to—percent now—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: Well, you know, you're right.

TS: —but it was less than one percent.

JW: You're right, and at the time—It was like somebody said to me one time, he says, "Nurses, telephone operators, and women in the service; they're all loose."  
I said, "Where did you get your information?" I said—

TS: Wait, what were the ones again? [both chuckle]

JW: It was—At the time, telephone operators, nurses, and women in the service.

TS: Okay.

JW: I said, "How are you classifying them, and why?" I said, "People are people. People are going to do exactly what they want to do, or they feel like doing, or whatever." I said, "Are you saying that they're the only ones that do those things, or that you can prove that they're doing it, or what?" You know, that they—you were loose.

TS: Right.

JW: What kind of idiots are these people, and why don't they mind their own business?

TS: But your experience while you were in—

JW: Was not bad at all. No.

TS: Right. So you were treated with respect by the men that were in.

JW: Absolutely.

TS: Even though there were lots of them around you at that time?

JW: Yes, absolutely.

TS: And apparently you and your husband get along fine since—How long have you been married now?

JW: Fifty-nine years.

TS: There you go.

JW: And we fight constantly.

TS: Is that right?

JW: Oh, sure.

TS: Is that why he's in the other room? [both chuckle]

JW: Well, see, it's always fun to make up so it's okay.

TS: Oh, okay. Well, did you consider yourself, or do you—maybe not at the time, but do you consider yourself a trailblazer, at all?

JW: Well, I never considered myself that because it was something I wanted to do. But in retrospect, yeah, maybe, because I—there was—I think I was the only one in my class that did that. Now there's so many, you know?

TS: Right.

JW: But—

TS: You weren't the first but you're one of few that were doing it at that time.

JW: Yeah, and—but nobody ever gave me any grief about it. My mother. [chuckles]

TS: Except your mother.

JW: Except my mother. But then she was proud of me afterwards.

TS: Yeah. Did she finally come around to that?

JW: Yeah, she came around and—

TS: Would you recommend the service to women today?

JW: Yes. I really—I really would.

TS: Now, we hadn't talked—Your one daughter went into the air force, right?

JW: Yes, she did, and that's where she met her husband.

TS: And say what she did in the service.

JW: [chuckles] I crack up every time I say it; she was a mechanic on a B-52 bomber.

TS: Why do you crack up? Why is that funny?

JW: Because she's such a feminine female, that's why. And then she was in a funeral detail. They only let her do that once because she cried harder than the widow did. Then they put her to work in the office. But she's a good kid.[?]

TS: Yeah. How long did she serve?

JW: She served, I think, her full term.

TS: Was that four years?

JW: Yes.

TS: Four years.

JW: And her husband who—they weren't married at the time but they both got out about the same time and she went south and worked in Birmingham, and George went back to—Just that fast I forgot the name of the school, but they play LSU in football, so it's always interesting when they play together—and got his degree and went in and became a fight—fighter pilot; A10 fighter pilot. He retired a full bird colonel.

TS: That's terrific. That's really great.

JW: Great guy; great guy.

TS: Now, did—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JW: Flies for Southwest Airlines now; he's a—he's a captain. He's a great guy, he really is. I couldn't have asked for a better son-in-law.

TS: Did any of your sons—your two sons consider—

JW: No. Well yeah, Bruce went in, and when he was in basic he got an ear infection and they didn't treat it and his eardrum went bad, so they discharged him. Which was too bad; it would have been good for him.

TS: Do you think your life has been any different because of your time in the military?

JW: Probably.

TS: What way?

JW: Just that I have more respect for the military and I—I'm very proud of the fact that I was in. I am. I take pride in the fact that I served my country. So I can bitch all I want to.

TS: [chuckles] There you go.

JW: Absolutely. I mean, you know, it's like voting. If you don't vote, don't open your mouth. [chuckles]

TS: One thing I forgot to ask you about earlier when we were talking about some of the cultural things is, what do you think about the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" rule.

JW: It's none of my business. That's exactly how I feel about it. What goes on in somebody's bedroom is their business, not mine. And it's not for me to decide.

TS: Some people have said that it's a unit cohesion problem; same as they say about some of the—you know, women in certain fields.

JW: They—Actually, we had two women that were discharged because of it when I was in.

TS: Do you think they should have been?

JW: No.

TS: No?

JW: Didn't bother me. I mean, they—they didn't—Let me put it this way. I know a few people that happen to be gay; of that persuasion. Most of them that I know are really good people, and they do their job and they're talented and everything else. They nev—Now, if they were out parading in the—I ran into in Boston one time—I object to it then because you're in my way. But—

TS: What happened in Boston?

JW: Oh my God, there was a gay parade in Boston while I was trying to deliver a wedding cake to—you know where Cheers is?

TS: Yes, I do, actually.

JW: Okay, well, that—I was—we were around the corner, the car was right here, here's Cheers, and this is where I had to deliver this wedding cake this big, and I couldn't—they wouldn't let us through because there was a gay parade. [both chuckle] That's the only time I got mad about it.

TS: So that's more a logistical problem.

JW: Yeah, that's a logistical problem. But for the most part, you know, it's not my business. I don't think it's anybody's business, as long as they don't try to push it down your throat. You know, I don't want anybody pushing anything down my throat. If—And like I said, I know a lot of people that are, and they're—they're good, decent people. And I don't care what the church says or anybody else says about it; it's just not their business. Unless there's, you know, problems with it. And just because somebody's gay doesn't mean that they're—they—

TS: Yes. Well, you could have—you could have behavior issues with people who are heterosexual.

JW: Oh, no kidding! [both laugh] You think?

TS: Just saying that that's a possibility.

JW: Yeah.

TS: Is there anything in particular that you would want a civilian to know or understand about what it's like to serve in the military that they may not necessarily understand or appreciate?

JW: I wouldn't—I would say that my experience was good. My experience was good. I don't think I would have made it as a marine, at least not now. I mean—

TS: I'm not so sure about that, JoAnn. [both chuckle] Because of the physical part of it?

JW: Yeah, and it's—And like I say, I really was disappointed at not getting that first job.

TS: Right.

JW: That was—

TS: The flight attendant—

JW: That was hard. That was really hard to take because I just could see myself flying all over the world.

TS: But once you got into your job and met the people—

JW: Yeah.

TS: —you kind of—

JW: That was—Well, you know what it is? You say, "Okay, I didn't get what I want, but I'm here, let's make the most—the most of it."

TS: Yeah.

JW: You have to.

TS: Did you find that by meeting people from all over the country, that that maybe changed your world view at all about—

JW: Absolutely. Just like this gal with—from Arkansas.

TS: Right.

JW: You know, it brought—because I had never encountered it before; because I was naïve. I really was; I was very naïve.

TS: Did you—Did you—This is another issue, actually, I guess I jumped by, but you were in a time when segregation was going on. Did you have any of those experiences? Were there any African-American women that you served with?

JW: Yeah, everywhere I went.

TS: Yeah?

JW: Yeah. In high school there were a few of the—God, what do you call them now? I mean, African-American is so stupid. I'm African-American—I mean, I'm American-American, you know?

TS: Okay. Blacks.

JW: Yeah. I never had problems. I never, ever did. I will say that when I lived—When we lived in Louisiana, we happened to be in New Orleans at a—Jack's relative had invited us to go to this party in—in New Orleans.

TS: This is when you were out of the service?

JW: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

JW: This is after we were out of the service, and at the time was when the desegregation started. There were some lawyers there, and they were all sitting there, and of course it was a subject that everybody was talking about, and I'll never forget this—this one man said, "You know the problem is this." He says, "Two problems. First of all, you can't legislate morality. You cannot legislate morality, only a dictator can do that." Okay? The second is the difference between the north and south—"I've got to tell you, the—the—the blacks from the south never got along with the ones from the north. Secondly, he said, "The people in the north hate—love the group—idea of the group."

TS: I'm not sure I understand what that means.

JW: Well, the people in the south—the southerners—dislike the race as a group, but they love the individuals. It's just the opposite up north. When Jack and I first went south, and went to visit his grandfather in St. Martinsville [Louisiana], you know the first person he hugged and kissed? The lady that used to work for his grandfather. Now, his grandfather was the biggest bigot I ever met in my life, vocally. But yet, when somebody came to his back door, and said, "Mr. Webb, I need help," he was the first one that gave them help. They disrespect the group as a whole, but respect the individual.

When we lived in Rochester, New York—I only moved thirty-something times.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

JW: I worked at McCurdy's [department store] in downtown, and when I got out of work at three o'clock the schools were out, and I have to tell you that downtown Rochester, New York had a large black population. I would get the bus to go back home because I didn't live that far away. I wouldn't drive down there; I took the—I would be uncomfortable because I was outnumbered about a hundred to one.

TS: Did anything ever happen?

JW: No. No.

TS: Just a feeling of un—

JW: Just a feeling of being overwhelmed.

TS: So you're, like, the one who's the minority in the group.

JW: Exactly. Of course, they were young. They were school kids; they were—and taking up the whole sidewalk and things like that.

TS: Right.

JW: But we have friends that are black in South Carolina. Used to spend every New Year's with them, you, know, and went out to dinner with them, and things like that, so it was—I don't have that—As long as somebody is nice to me I'm going to be nice to them.

TS: It's an issue of respect.

JW: Exactly. I mean, it's just like going in and out of the post office. If somebody's coming in I usually say, "Good Morning". In fact, I have to tell you. We had a high school reunion here, in Springfield. Because we used to do it three—for three and four days; we would have these all over the country.

And one of the fellows said to me, he said, "This is the darndest town I've ever been in." He said, "You walk down the street and people smile and say 'hello' to you." He said, "You'd get shot where I live."

I said, "Well, stay where you are and don't come down here" [both chuckle]

But you know, he said, "Everybody down here is so friendly."

I said, "Well, what have they got to be unfriendly about?"

There are people that are bigoted, there are people that are always going to be bigoted. I don't know what their problem is; I really don't care. I can't—I'll never be able to straighten them out, so I try to do the best I can with what I've got.

TS: Let me ask you what you—what patriotism means to you?

JW: Patriotism means, to me, that you honor what the founding fathers did, including our charter. I firmly believe in what they did, the way they did it, and somehow we've lost it; is how I feel right now. The constitution of the United States was probably the greatest thing ever written, and the people that did it were incredible. They all were tortured, killed and everything else after that. It was outrageous what happened to them. We've lost it somehow.

TS: What do you think's been lost?

JW: I think—I think that people that have—I'll give you a for instance.

TS: Okay.

JW: There was a senator that resigned. He was in Washington, I think, six to nine months; I think that's the length he was in there. He resigned, and his reason for resigning was the fact that he promised the people that voted in his district that he was going to accomplish some things that they felt needed to be corrected, or done. He said, "I can't do it." He said, "There is such a group that run things, and you have to finagle the bagel, you have



to—if you want a bill passed then you have to vote for somebody else's bill, even though you don't even know what it's about, or you know what it's about and you don't think that you should do it." He said, "I cannot do the job I was sent here to do, so therefore, I'm resigning." He said, "I can't fight them."

TS: When was—When was his resignation?

JW: This was—I would say—Lord, when did that happen?

TS: I mean, recent years?

JW: I would say it was probably ten, twelve years ago.

TS: Okay.

JW: And I think it's gotten worse since. I don't think anybody should be president of the United States unless they've been on the battlefield facing the enemy. That's for starters. I don't think Congress is entitled to a health care prob—I mean, if this thing is so great, why aren't they—any of—they have to be on it? Why isn't the president on it? See, these are the things that bother me. I think that we owe it to our ancestors; the ones that came here through Ellis Island legally; the ones that—the middle class that built this country. See, I remember how everybody was in World War II. Everybody did everything they could. Everybody pulled together. We don't pull together anymore. This country doesn't pull together anymore.

We've got too damn many lawyers that are making so damn many rules and regulations you don't know what's up and what's down. Why can't we abide by the Ten Commandments? If everybody abided by the Ten Commandments we'd be fine.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

JW: I just—I don't—I don't believe in the government anymore. I have no faith in them—let me put it that way—that they're doing what's best for this country. They're—My feeling is they're doing best to get re-elected.

TS: Is that all of the government, or just the federal level, or what levels of government?

JW: I—Listen, as far as I'm concerned, all of Washington. I think that when they get inside the [Interstate] 495 tri—bypass they leave their brain behind. I just don't—I cannot believe some of the things that go on. I just can't—Where did they come from, how did they get there, and why are we tolerating it?

I am br—I pray every day for this country because I wanted my kids and my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren, which I have, to have the same feeling of safety that I had growing up. That people are respectful of each other. So if you go to one church and I go to another one, what difference does that make? Do I care? I don't. I care about what I do. What I feel. Of course, I sound awful all the time, and Jack says, "For

crying out loud, JoAnn, if anybody knew what a softie you were, they would walk all over you."

TS: [chuckles]

JW: Well, gee. But it's true. I just—I see how animals are treated now; people leaving their dog by the roadside to sit there; people that beat up on them. Just like the pitbulls. This dog here is a pit—part pitbull. Does he look ferocious to you?

TS: What's his name again?

JW: Romeo. [both chuckle]

TS: That's right.

JW: He's a lover. He's aptly named, he really is. He was found walking down a road in Hilton Head [South Carolina] and they picked him and took him to the thing. He was about, I think, three or four months old when my son adopted him.

TS: Well, I think unless you have anything else that you would like to add that we can end with Romeo because he's—

JW: He's a peach, isn't he? He's a peach. You know—

TS: Is there anything that you'd like to say about your service?

JW: Well, I—I'm going to say this. We've had the Wounded Warrior [Project] flights.

TS: Right.

JW: I mean, the—the—the World War II flights, we have Wounded Warrior programs that we all, you know, try to help with. My thing is, I hear—I see these guys that come back from this god-awful war, and when I hear about the money that's spent in Washington on vacations, aren't they entitled to that money? Aren't they entitled to better treatment in the hospitals, and more hospitals, and better care taken of them? There's something wrong here. There's really—I really feel deep in my heart that there's—everything seems to be—people in power. And I'm a firm believer that absolute power corrupts absolutely. I firmly believe it.

I think there's so much waste going on here. I think the man upstairs is trying to tell us all something with the things that are going on in the whole world today, and nobody's paying attention. I don't know what else I can do other than pray, for my children, for this country, for the whole world for that matter. Why can't we live and let live? What did I ever do to somebody in Saudi Arabia? I mean, what—what did any of us do to them?

TS: What did—Oh, you mean—

JW: In Afghanistan, or any of these places. What did we do except give these people money, and they hate you for it. Nobody likes—Everybody wants to take the money but nobody likes the guy that gives it to you, because they're jealous of him, and why has he got it and I don't? And he's lording it over us because he's given us that—the money. My own opinion, let's pull all the troops back, put them around the country and guard the borders, and let's take care of our own, like the people that have been so devastated by floods and fire and everything else that has gone on; let's take care of them. That's what our government is supposed to do; not take care of the rest of the world because we're never going to take care of the rest of the world. They're never going to let us. These people have been fighting since they got—were put on planet Earth. Let's take care of our own.

TS: What do you think the difference was between the current situations we're having in Afghanistan and what ended in Iraq, and World War II; that era?

JW: We were attacked. They brought the fight to us; we didn't take it to them. They started it—I'm talking about the Japanese started the war, and the Nazis.

TS: Right. Some say that's what happened on 9/11.

JW: I knew.

TS: But that's—

JW: Listen, it wasn't just 9/11, it was everything else that went on beforehand; the Marine barracks, the—you know. And I sitting here saying, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Why are we putting up with this?" But it's a whole different—it's a whole different enemy now. It's not a country that's declaring war. And how many of them have we supplied with the bullets and the guns and the equipment? Let's—Let's take care of us here, in this country. Let's make us better. Let's help the people that need help in this country, before we try to settle everybody else's problem, and sending them billions of dollars every year. Don't tell me that we're in financial crisis when you're giving billions of dollars away, and spending it foolishly.

TS: Would you like to end on that note?

JW: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

JW: And of course, everybody—you know, everybody says, "My God, they know everything you say now."

I said, "I don't care." I'm eighty years old, and I am entitled to my own—The Constitution of the United States says that I can have an opinion of my own

without—unless I’m threatening to kill you. That’s what our constitution says, and I’m a firm believer in the constitution.

TS: Well, I appreciate you letting me come here and talk to you today, JoAnn.

JW: I’m so glad you came.

TS: It’s been really nice to meet.

JW: It’s been fun; I’ve enjoyed it

TS: Okay.

JW: Even if I do get on my soap box.

TS: That’s quite all right.

[End of Interview]