

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Portia R. McCracken

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: September 20, 2013

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is September 20, 2013. My name is Therese Strohmer and I'm at the Jackson Library in Greensboro, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina [at Greensboro]. I'm here with Portia McCracken. Portia, could you state your name the way that you would like it to read on the collection?

PM: Sure. Portia R. McCracken.

TS: Okay, excellent. Well, Portia, why don't we have you start out by telling me where and when you were born?

PM: I was born in Loudon, Tennessee, during World War II, July 31, 1943.

TS: What was Loudon, Tennessee like? Is it small—a small town?

PM: Very small. It was, I think, the county seat, but it was a very rural, not very affluent, area. I remember later visiting the grandparents there after we had moved to North Carolina—we went back to see them—and they had an outhouse. It was—It was in those times and in those places.

TS: Yeah. Now, did you have any brothers and sisters?

PM: One sister, five years younger.

TS: She's younger? Okay. And your parents, what did they do?

PM: Well, my mom never finished high school so she just kind of took whatever job she could find when she worked. My dad did have some college and I'm not sure what he did—Let's see, when they met in Tennessee he was working at Alcoa Aluminum and had befriended the husband of one of my mother's sisters. So the husband invited him home

to dinner one night and my mom was probably lured there by her sister and they met, and I re—I asked her about that one time and she said she thought he was the silliest man she'd ever seen but he was so handsome. [both laugh]

TS: She thought he was real silly?

PM: Yeah. She thought he was—I—He was real—sort of a jokester, and so he, apparently, was always like that.

TS: Always like—That's neat.

PM: Yeah.

TS: That's neat. So it—The kind of place that you lived in what—were you in a city, in a little town, or—

PM: This was—This was rural. I don't even remember a town, to be honest with you. Now, I was only there until I was two.

TS: Okay.

PM: So while I lived there, I don't have any memories. My memories come from when we would go back to visit—

TS: I see.

PM: —family later on, so—but it was a very small—even late—in later years there was—I don't remember much of a town at all. It was just—It was rural south, kind of small town, not dirt roads necessarily but not much more than dirt roads.

TS: Right.

PM: You know, really, really old time.

TS: Well, where did you move to?

PM: We moved here to Greensboro—

TS: Oh, you did?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: —while my dad was in the service. His family was here, or in this area. I think at the time his mother maybe lived here, and so my mom moved up here with me when I was two.

TS: Your father was in the service at the time?

PM: Yes.

TS: What service was he in?

PM: He was in the army. He had been—I don't remember. I don't remember if he was drafted or if he volunteered, but he was in the army.

TS: In the army. Was he overseas?

PM: He was in Germany, yes.

TS: He was?

PM: Yes, yes.

TS: Do you know what he did?

PM: I don't. I could never get him to talk about it. He never would talk about his service.

TS: Interesting.

PM: He talked about being in Germany and I guess, maybe, after the fighting was over he spent a little—enough time to get a feeling for the countryside and the people, and he loved it. He thought the people were wonderful. He thought the countryside was beautiful. He said it was the cleanest place he'd ever been, because during the war everything was used and reused. Even twigs were used, and so the forest, the streets, everything, was spotless because everything was being consumed by the Germans; they were so poor at that point. And he always wanted to go back to Germany but he never got a chance.

TS: Oh, that's too bad.

PM: Yeah.

TS: That's too bad. Well, that's neat. So he—So you—You're moving in with his parents—your parents, but you're—

PM: I think so. I think we moved in with—with his mother.

TS: Okay.

PM: I believe.

TS: Now, did you then spend your growing up years in Greensboro?

PM: I did, yes; all the way through high school and—Let's see. I guess—I don't think I went out of Greensboro. I—There was a time between high school—Yes, I did. I did go out of Greensboro. Time—Right after high school I went to Charlotte and worked there at Federal Reserve Bank, and just a—a check operator in the basement kind of thing.

TS: Like data entry, sort of?

PM: Yeah. Yeah. And then I came back to Greensboro. One day, I remember—just spotty memories but one of these memories stood out to me. We were on a break. Do you want me to—

TS: Go ahead.

PM: —diverge like this?

TS: That's fine.

PM: We were on a break. Here we were all just—just low level administrative types, and all girls had a man, of course, as our supervisor. We were on break—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: What year would this be?

PM: This would be—Let me think. I graduated in 1961, and so this would be early to mid-sixties—

TS: Okay.

PM: —probably, and—yeah, early sixties I would guess; two, maybe three; '63, '64; something like that. We were talking, just chatting, and somebody said, "Did you see the—the ring around the moon last night?"

And one of the others said—she was one of these types who always had the most authoritative answer for everything and she said, "Yes, those rings are caused by the atmosphere around the moon; the reflection in the atmosphere around the moon."

And I said to myself, "I have got to get out of this place. I will die here if I don't." So I started thinking about going back to college—or going to college for the first time.

TS: [chuckles]

PM: And ended up going to night school and working and—and came back in—I think I went to—I may have gone to UNCG briefly, to night school, and worked at Wachovia Bank at—at—No, wait. Maybe it wasn't night school. It was regular school but I worked at night, I think, because it was—Yeah, I was in the basement again doing data processing at night for Wachovia, because during the day all the checks were coming in, and so it was at night when we all processed them.

TS: Processed them.

PM: Yes, so—and then they went to the Federal Reserve Bank from there. And started out—I think I was an English major when I started out.

TS: Well, let me back up a little before you get into that.

PM: Okay, okay, alright.

TS: I want to know a little bit about Greensboro—

PM: Okay.

TS: —when you were growing up. So that was in the fifties?

PM: Yes.

TS: What was—What part of Greensboro did you live in and—

PM: We lived in Guilford College, just about half a mile from the college itself on College Road, so it was very rural out where I lived.

TS: So, yeah, I was going to say, how was that different to—from today?

PM: Today? Well, it's sad today when I look at College Road, and even Friendly [Road] out at Guilford [Road]. It's so commercial. Oh, it's just so sad. When I was there it was—it was quiet, it was tree-line—not tree-lined but very green.

TS: Yes.

PM: Old, beautiful old houses, family farms, and not a—not a rich area but beautiful; it was very beautiful. I walked to school. I lived just down the road from the school at which I spent grade one through grade twelve, and—

TS: Right. Is that right?

PM: So I could walk to school.

TS: What school was it that you went to?

PM: It was Guilford. [Public school in Guilford County, NC] Just—

TS: Okay.

PM: It was just Guilford School then.

TS: Okay.

PM: Guilford Elementary—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: And that was one through twelve?

PM: One through twelve; yes, ma'am.

TS: One—One building, or maybe a coup—

PM: I think it was all in one building.

TS: Interesting, okay.

PM: Yeah. We had a gymnasium, I think, which was separate by the time I got to high school, but I think we went to school in one building.

TS: Were you segregated?

PM: Early on, yes. I remember vaguely. I don't have any really good vivid memories when we desegregated. I remember there was a—there was turmoil, and this would have been—I don't know how old I was; pretty young[?].

TS: Well, if you graduated from high school in '61, right around that time it was probably heating up a little bit.

PM: Yes.

TS: Because the—the sit-ins were in '60.

PM: Okay. Okay. I was thinking I was younger than that but maybe not. There was a lot of turmoil, a lot of—a lot of, just, anger, I guess, or—

TS: Some tension?

PM: Tension over the idea that black children were going to be coming to a white school. But I don't think I was there. You must be right. It must have been those—that last year or so because I don't recall going to school with any black children, and I was just kind of—I felt like an onlooker. I didn't—I didn't feel involved in the tension.

TS: I see.

PM: And I was curious about it but I was, sort of, sitting back from it. I didn't get in any marches or do anything like that.

TS: Well, what kind of stuff did you do for fun as a kid in—in Greensboro at that time?

PM: Oh, I was sort of a solitary child. My sister was five years younger than I, so when we were growing up we were too far apart to be friends.

TS: Right.

PM: And really, we were more enemies.

TS: [chuckles]

PM: I—She would have loved to have been a friend of me—of mine, but I loathed—and she was a creature that I just—So I had a circle of girlfriends, and most of us either had an older sister or a younger sister. And so, we were either treated like the—the nasty, little, younger sister, or we had another younger sister that we could treat—and so younger sisters were just not part of—

TS: Right.

PM —the circle of—of interest. And I did a lot of writing at—1957—Was it?—when UNC went all the way to the national—UNC basketball team went all the way to the national championships; a girlfriend and I were absolutely enchanted. Neither one of us played basketball; had ever even been to a basketball game outside of school; the—the little school. But we were enchanted by that team for some reason; knew everything there was to know about every single member.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Was it men's basketball?

PM: Men's basketball, yes.

TS: Okay.

PM: This was—This was huge. I mean, it was—it was national news. They won—They—I guess they won every game that year. They went all the way and won the national championship. Dean Smith was the coach. We knew—We felt like we knew every team member intimately. We'd never met a single one of them, but we had story—we concocted stories and scenarios and wrote little books about them and just had a ball.

TS: What'd you do with all of them?

PM: I have no idea where it is now.

TS: Really?

PM: I have no idea.

TS: Oh, that's neat.

PM: I'm just a terrible—I—I hang on to things that have no—no good, real use, but I lose all the neat stuff; the important stuff. I'd love to have some of those old stories back.

TS: Yeah, they'd be fun, but you have the memories of them so that's really neat.

PM: I have the memories, yes.

TS: So you—So you loved following the basketball that year.

PM: Yes.

TS: And you wrote. You said you were, kind of, more of a solitary—

PM: I was a solitary child, yes, because my sister was so much older—younger than I, and my parents were not people who engaged in what their children were doing so I didn't really have a lot of stimulation at home, and so I had to sort of make my own. I—I read constantly from a very early age, and—let's see. I was born in '43 so I would have been thirteen, fourteen in '57, so probably started writing, about, when I was twelve or thirteen and did that sporadically, off and on. But reading, I read just voraciously and—

TS: Were you aware of the—the political tension with the Cold War, and did you do, like, duck and cover or any of those things?

PM: We must have, and I—I remember—I don't remember doing that but I remember a terrible nightmare that was recurrent during that period of—of a nuclear holocaust of some sort, and it was—it was weird because the nightmare—in my child's mind I didn't know what nuclear war meant. I maybe had seen one of those terrible videos that they show you that has the—the—

TS: Mushroom cloud?

PM: The cloud and then the—the force field, or whatever the—

TS: Oh, the waves.

PM: The blast wave coming, and it—it—so—it looked so tangible. And so, in my dream it was as if it was a huge foaming wave of water that was just washing over everything, and I dreamt that for years—

TS: Oh my gosh.

PM: —during that period, with very little variation. So yes, I was affected by it but—

TS: Yes.

PM: —not day to day. I didn't live in fear but obviously it affected me deeply.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: It's internalized, somehow.

PM: Yes.

TS: Very interesting that you had that. So you—What did you do? Like, sock hops and the, kind of, fifties things that we read about?

PM: Oh, yes. There was a—It was a local television, and I can't think of the name of it, but it was, like, a Saturday morning show of kids dancing, and it was sort of like the old Dick—What's his name?

TS: Clark?

PM: Dick Clark, yes. It was patterned off of that but it was local, and I had a good friend—this is high school—and I had a good friend who loved to dance. He was the best dancer, and he and I practiced, and we actually got on that show—

TS: Wow; great.

PM: —and had a great time, and the typical poodle skirt and bobby socks and—What do you call them?

TS: [unclear]?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: Oxford—No, Oxfords—

TS: [unclear] shoes?

PM: Brown and white Oxfords and frizzy hair and little—little col—Oh, it was—it was just awful, but—

TS: It was perfect, actually, probably—

PM: Yeah.

TS: —for the time.

PM: For the time; perfect for the time. But in retrospect it's really funny to look at it. I don't have any—I don't think I have any pictures of that but in my mind I can see—

TS: Yeah, you—I can see what's going on.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: —I can see that; yeah.

TS: That's neat. Well, that's neat. So did you—Were you a studious student; did you enjoy school?

PM: I did not that much. I loved English, I loved languages, but I was not good in math. Although I had a teacher who's—later became a professor at Guilford College—a math professor—who for some reason—I don't know if he took pity on me or what, or just maybe saw a grain of potential, but he—he really encouraged me and helped me a lot. I never got good at math but it—he encouraged me and I—I—we teased one another and just had a great time. And the assistant principal at the time was also—I think he may have been a science teacher at the school. Everybody had dual jobs in those days. The

assistant principal was a—I believe, a science teacher; I’m sure of it. And he and I got to be really good buddies, as far as teasing and—and just—I don’t know. None of my other friends did that, but I—I had a fun time teasing some of my teachers, because I was always teased.

I had no real interest in science at the time. I was really interested in English and literature. I didn’t get a science interest till I got to college years, years later.

TS: But he planted a seed in you somehow.

PM: I guess he did, yeah; he must have.

TS: Do you remember his name? It’s okay if you don’t.

PM: He just died not long ago. I can find if you—if you want to have it. I don’t—Just off the top of my head I don’t remember it.

TS: That’s okay. That’s alright.

PM: But I did have, also, a wonderful teacher. The best teacher I ever had in—in high school was [Dr.] Herb Appenzeller who was, at the time, the—I think he was the athletic director at Guilford College and the—maybe the football coach. He taught Latin, and I don’t know why I took it except that I enjoyed languages, and I had—he—he was so good. You’d think a coach, an athletic director, what would he know about Latin and teaching and getting kids enthused about Latin; a dead—a so-called dead language. But we had the best classes. He did Latin mythology, and if you had to miss a day—a class because you were sick, or any reason, he made you study that class syllabus really, really hard and tested you on it and—so later, the thing she[?] remembered the best were the ones you missed because you spent extra time on it.

TS: [chuckles]

PM: It was [a] strange technique, but it—it—

TS: Yeah.

PM: —sticks in my mind.

TS: He wanted to make sure you were keeping up and everything.

PM: Yeah. He was a wonderful teacher, and it—I can still see him. He was kind of a small man. He’s still around, by the way; very elderly of course, but he’s still around. And he was—he was kind of bulky, like you’d think a football—ex football player, probably, and—and football coach would be. And he would act out those myths. He would—He would take the parts and play them and he would prance around the room, and he was just so entertaining; it was wonderful. It was just—

TS: So it was like a drama class with Latin.

PM: Yes, with him doing all the parts. We didn't get up and act them out ourselves, he did them all for us, and it was just—we were all absolutely enraptured with this wonderful man.

TS: You're excited to go to his class?

PM: Yes; oh, yes. Even friends of mine who were not studious, who were not language students in general, and who didn't make particularly good grades in other classes, because the—the buzz, the word of mouth, was so enthusiastic about that, they enrolled and did well in his classes. He was that good a teacher.

TS: Excellent.

PM: Yeah.

TS: Well, that—you don't hear that about Latin teachers all that—

PM: No.

TS: I don't. I don't; not that I've heard a lot.

PM: I was so fortunate. That really—

TS: Interesting.

PM: With my science teacher befriending me and—and letting me tease and play games and so forth with him, and then my Latin teacher being so inspirational, that really set me up for my—what started out as a casual encounter with Biology in college but turned into a real lifelong love.

TS: Really neat. Well—So as you're—Actually, I'm going to pause for just a second.

PM: You sure?

TS: Yep. Yep.

[Extraneous Comments Redacted]

TS: So I—In your—As you're growing up and you're in school and you're a young girl in the fifties, what—did you have any sense of what your future was going to be like? What—

PM: Absolutely none.

TS: No?

PM: No. Didn't—My friends must not have talked about it either, although the ones who had older sisters, there was a lot of chatter about college and—and where they wanted to go and what they wanted to do, but we didn't think about it ourselves. And when I got—got to be in junior—well, a junior in high school, I guess, when it was time to start thinking about college, I discovered—I made the very, very unhappy discovery that my parents had made absolutely no plans to send me to college. We never talked about it in my family. As I said, they were not very engaged with their children, or at least not with me, which always made me think, like, I must have been a foundling or something. Maybe I just showed up on their doorstep, because we were so different and so separate. My sister was much closer to them.

TS: Well, they had practice after you.

PM: I guess, yeah. Remind me to talk about first born—

TS: Okay.

PM: —later on. Where—

TS: So you didn't have a sense that—You didn't have a lot of direction from your parents?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: No, I had no sense. I really had—had no direction from my parents. I eventually thought, “Well, everybody goes to college so I guess I'll go,” but I found out there was no—there were no plans, there was no money for it, so I would have to go to work right out of high school, and some way—if I—I could either work my way through college or go to work and save and go to college later if I planned on doing that. So—

TS: That's how you ended up in Charlotte in the banking—

PM: Yes.

TS: —after you graduated.

PM: Yeah, yeah, after I graduated; yeah, right.

TS: You said you graduated in '61.

PM: Yes.

TS: And then—So you—you got that job, and you told me a little bit about that, and then you went and worked—you went away from that and then you went back into Wachovia.

PM: Yes, I went away—Well, I came back to Greensboro to go to school, and then Wachovia was the job I had when I was first in school.

TS: Was that at Guilford?

PM: That was at Guilford. Well, I think—As I say, I think I started out in some kind of part time status at Greensboro College or UNCG. I honestly don't remember.

TS: Okay.

PM: I could look at my transcript—my old transcript—

TS: Okay.

PM: —and see if I have credits.

TS: So you, like—you were trying to get credits for—

PM: Yeah, I was just—just doing—

TS: Classes.

PM: I had no direction so I didn't know what I was doing.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

PM: And I didn't have good enough grades in high school to attract any colleges, so I was just, kind of, hunting and pecking—

TS: Taking classes?

PM: Yeah, as best I could. And then eventually—What happened? I think maybe I was—I did meet my first husband. We were both in—English majors and loved language and we ended up getting married, and then he had to go to Vietnam.

TS: About what year was that; early sixties?

PM: Yeah, I think so. I've kind of blocked most of that—

TS: [chuckles]

PM: —out because it was just a very strange interlude. But I—I was—He—He enabled me to go back to school full time.

TS: I see.

PM: I—I was able to live back with my family—my parents—and with his financial help I was able to go to Guilford full time, and eventually I got a scholarship; I got a [Charles A.] Dana Scholarship, so I was able to finish all four years at Guilford. And then—

TS: That's when you got your Biology degree?

PM: Yeah, that's when I got my undergraduate degree in Biology, and it was just a freshman Biology class. I think it was required of all students at the time. And I was an English major, had no use for biology, but you had to take it. So I got in there and was absolutely enchanted again with something; had no idea this was what biology was about—science in general; botany and biology—and was just blown away by the whole thing. So I changed—changed my whole idea of what I was going to do; decided, I think, I wanted to be, at that point, an anthropologist.

TS: Okay.

PM: In my childhood years, I forgot to mention, I had always been intrigued with dinosaurs. I wanted to be a paleontologist for years and years and years until I realized that any kind of degree in paleontology you had to have a lot of science and a lot of math and a lot—a lot of technical stuff that I probably would never be able to do. So I—I knew I wouldn't probably do that, but then as I got into science in college I was just so intrigued with it that—I still didn't know what I was going to do with it but I thought, "I'll just go to graduate school and put—put off the decision what to do with it and just go to graduate school." So after college I did go to the University of Tennessee, got a teaching assistantship there in the zoology department, and spent a year and a half in that—Loved it; just had a great time. But—Did I skip too much?

TS: No, no.

PM: Okay.

TS: You're fine.

PM: The reason I ended up going to the military recruiters while I was in graduate school was because one of our teaching assistant pals—there was a little cadre of us and we were all poor as church mice, and there was this one guy who had been an officer in the navy. He had been in the navy for four years, he—and he had—he had—Let me think. We had tuition and fees paid by the university, for which we taught, and then we had to buy our

books, and there—the stipend was two thousand dollars a year and we were living off of that. And I had a car, which was paid for apparently, and it was in that interim that I got divorced from my first husband and I got the car; that was the only thing I got out of the marriage. But I had a car and I had this tiny little apartment.

But anyway, my—my friend, the—the veteran, had so much money. I mean, he was rolling in it compared to the rest of us, because he had benefits from the military as well as having the school pay for tuition. And I thought, “There’s something to be learned here.”

TS: Okay.

PM: “There’s something about this that I need to find out more about.”

TS: Was this your first time that you really started thinking about—

PM: Yes.

TS: —the services at all?

PM: Yes; yes. I knew no one except my father—

TS: Right.

PM: —and my uncle, his brother, who had any—Well, my husband—my first husband, who went to Vietnam. Those were my only experiences with military.

TS: But they’re all men.

PM: But they’re all men and they were all combat, and this was peace—Well, it wasn’t totally peace time yet, but—yeah, this was the seven—

TS: Early seventies?

PM: Seventies, yeah. I was in a master’s program and I was—it—the economy then was very much like it was a few years ago; it was really bad; really bad. I guess [James Earl] Jimmy Carter [Jr.] was—had either just become president or was about to become president, because he was president when I was in some aspect of my military training.

TS: Well, when you first got in it would have been [Richard Milhous] Nixon.

PM: Okay.

TS: Yes.

PM: Okay.

TS: Because '72, '73.

PM: He came—He came later. I know the—the—

TS: Carter was elected in '76.

PM: Carter—When? When?

TS: Seventy-six.

PM: Well, before that the economy was terrible, because I had friends—I knew people who had master's degrees who were driving cabs.

TS: We had really high inflation.

PM: Okay.

TS: And we had some of the—the tension in the Middle East, we had at the time, with the [1973?] Oil Embargo and crisis.

PM: Okay, okay.

TS: And remember we had to, like, line up on—on even days—

PM: Yeah, yeah.

TS: —for the gasoline and things like—

PM: Right.

TS: That kind of stuff was going on.

PM: You just made me think of something too. I don't remember where I was. What was the date? Do you remember what the date of the Cuban Missile Crisis [was]?

TS: That would have been in the—

PM: Sixties.

TS: Sixties, yes. Sixty-one—

PM: I remember that. I remember that.

TS: —sixty-two.

[The Cuban Missile Crisis occurred in October 1962, between the Soviet Union and Cuba on one side and the United States on the other.]

PM: Yeah, [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy was president, and I remember that, kind of, vividly[?].

TS: That would have been right around the time you graduated.

PM: Yeah, just after. Yeah, anyway—

TS: What were your thoughts on that?

PM: Well, I just—it was very scary. It was a very scary time. We didn't know what was going to happen. I had no ties to anyone who knew anything; I was just getting my news from TV and radio. And I was in a car—I remember being in a car one night listening to some news story and wondering if we're all going to be killed, because it just was such a scary, very uncertain period of time. And then, of course, Kennedy was assassinated, and I remember that. That was a really scary thing.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: What are your memories of that?

PM: Well, it was a very, very sad time for me personally. I was very intrigued with the family. I was—The Camelot.

TS: Were you a fan?

PM: I think I must have been, yeah. I followed them. I was not political at all but I was very interested in—in them as celebrities, probably more than anything. And I was working—I think it was in Winston-Salem. So I must have gone from Charlotte to Winston-Salem before I came to Greensboro, because I was at a bank again in—in Winston-Salem. And I remember that because I would walk to work; it was close enough to walk; I had a room at a rooming house. And you could smell the tobacco, and it was a—it was a sweet smell; it was tobacco being processed. So it was a tobacco leaf smell which is a very sweet smell, but you could—it was everywhere in the city.

But I came to work on a Saturday. I guess he'd—I don't know what day—It must have been Friday when he was assassinated, and I went to work on Saturday and I was just, kind of, moping around and just not—not really there and people were asking, "What's wrong with you?" And I was astonished that they didn't know what had happened. They—

TS: Did they—

PM: They weren't affected by it.

TS: Or they weren't upset by it.

PM: Yeah, they weren't upset and I—I was very upset by it, but that was just more reason to go back to school and get around some people who had some brains. Just all these people working—and they were fine people but they just didn't think beyond their noses, you know?

TS: Well, they had a different world view, maybe, than—

PM: Yes, obviously.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —from all your reading and the things that you were interested in, right?

PM: So anyway, where were we? Graduate school.

TS: You went to Tennessee; graduate school.

PM: Yes, went to Tennessee.

TS: And now you're starting to look at, "Hmm, what's this military stuff all about?"

PM: Yes, military stuff. Yes, what—what—and I would talk to him and he would tell me some of the things that he did, and it sounded very interesting. And because he had a college degree he went in as an officer, and I had a college degree so maybe I could go in as an officer. And coincidentally, my apartment—I had—To get from my apartment to the college campus I had to drive past the recruiters' offices; just happened to be that way. Air force, army, and navy were side by side.

TS: Okay.

PM: One day, my car almost unconsciously just turned in there, sort of, and parked and I got out. I was always intrigued by the possib—or had started being intrigued by the possibility of working as a marine biologist maybe, and so I thought, "Well, the navy, I could work with marine mammals. They have all sorts of research going on there so I'll try the navy." Well, I was too old for the navy. It's the first time in my life I was told I was too old for anything.

TS: How old were you at the time?

PM: I was twenty-nine, I guess.

TS: Okay.

PM: And their cutoff was something like twenty-seven or twenty-eight.

TS: Okay.

PM: So that broke my heart. First time—I don't know if you remember the first time you were ever told you were too old for something. Maybe you never got told that, but that really made me stop and look around and think, "What is happening? I'm getting older. I'm going to be an old woman one day."

TS: [chuckles]

PM: "I better get busy."

So I then checked the army and the army was just slobbering all over me. They wanted to get ahold of me with—with my training and—and I guess—I don't know. This was probably before any tests had been taken, but anyway, they really wanted me. They were all meeting quotas, of course, and the quota for women was very small but they did have a quota, and they really tried hard to convince me to join the army but they couldn't guarantee me I could get a commission going in. They said, "Oh, don't worry about it. Just come on in enlisted and we guarantee—" air quotes, "'guarantee' you'll get a commission before any time; just before you know it." But they wouldn't put it on paper.

So I said, "I don't think so, guys."

So I went over to the air force; knew nothing about the air force; never knew anybody who'd been in the air force. The recruiter was a man; they were all men that I talked to. I was very slender and not bad looking in those days. And so, that fellow—I think the quota they were—they were looking at picking two women for—and this was for officers. They would—They would consider—They would give me a commission if I passed all the—whatever.

So we were talking about two women from the southeastern United States. I forget how many slots there were. There were quite a few slots—I mean, quite a few women were competing for these two slots.

TS: I see.

PM: And I think my work in graduate school is what got me one of the two, because I suspect most of the women were just college graduates and I had some graduate school.

TS: Right.

PM: And—At least that's just what I'm thinking. But in those days, now, if you were a woman you had to submit to a full body—I mean, you were clothed, but a full body photo that was then sent and approved or disapproved before you could join. You had to be physically attractive enough for them to want you, besides any talents or qualifications you had otherwise. This was not strange to me in those days.

TS: Was it not? That's what I was going to ask you about.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: No. No. In retrospect—

TS: It's like, "Sure, take my picture"?

PM: Well, sure, what do I know? I'd never been in a mili—Well, I'd been in those other two but I didn't know anything about military recruiting. I assumed this was natural. And they were the first ones to actually want me—want to give me a commission so I had stayed with the air force longer than I'd stayed with the navy or the army, and so we'd gotten further in the process and I just assumed everybody—and they probably did all do this at the time; it wasn't just the air force, I'm sure.

But I wanted to talk to a woman, if I could, to see what being a woman in the air force would be like, and the only woman they could find anywhere, who could maybe get to see me, was another recruiter who was a nurse. And medical officers—You probably know, medical officers—medical personnel have a totally different life from the regular officers and ordinary people who run the air force, who do the day to day jobs. They live in a different world. They have a different promotion system. They don't do anything like—like the rest of us did.

I didn't know that but I thought, "If I'm going to talk to a nurse I know that's not going to give me anything that I need because I'm not going into the medical field, so forget it." So I just went in and—

TS: You went in without talking to anybody?

PM: Without talking to any—I don't know if I told them I wasn't interested in talking to her, or she just never could get there or what—

TS: Okay.

PM: —but I never got to talk to a woman. And so, they gave me my orders and my tickets and I got on the—a plane, I guess, that I was getting from the airport to the—the base—to Lackland Air Force Base to start my training. And—Go ahead.

TS: What did your family think—and friends think about this decision?

PM: Well, I was in graduate school so my circle of friends were the other teaching assistants, and they were all kind of envious of my nerve I think, because we all knew this one fellow and we all kind of envied his comfortable position, because we were all—literally, I mean, we had to scrape up together pennies to—to have a party and maybe buy a bottle of wine and some cheese. It was just—We had absolutely nothing. And so, they thought, “Great. Go do it and let us know how it goes,” but nobody else was interested.

TS: How did you feel about not finishing your graduate studies at that time?

PM: I—It didn’t affect me very much. I knew—as I was saying earlier—I had friends who were driving cabs with master’s degrees. I was in a master’s program—it was a three year program—and I could see if I were going to get a decent job I’d have to get a PhD, so that’s another—I’m teaching along so it’s just—the time you’re in school is stretched out, so it’s another six years—another three years. So I’m already in my late twenties. This—This picture is not looking any brighter as I go, so here was the possibility of going into a career, possi—I didn’t go in with career thoughts, but something really different from anything I’d ever done before, or anything anybody I’d ever knew had done before, except this one guy who was in the navy.

And a—a good salary, that—that—and I could save—I could save money, I could get the GI Bill when I come out; all sorts of benefits would accrue from a four year stint in the military. So—

TS: When people say, “What made you decide to go in?” there’s, like, multiple reasons.

PM: Yes, and it was mostly pragmatic. I didn’t have any huge sense of patriotism. I didn’t want to follow in someone’s footsteps. It was purely pragmatic. I saw it as my best option at that point.

TS: And [The] Vietnam [War] was still going on. Did you have any thoughts about what was happening with the protests and the counter-culture and all that kind of stuff?

PM: In college I had been in the protests.

TS: Had you?

PM: Yes, at Guilford.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You were a protester?

PM: I was a protester. I don't think I got involved at the university, although at the university—No, this was not—The second time I went to the university there were Iranian students there. I'll tell you that later. There—I don't remember a lot of protests at the university when I was there as a graduate student.

TS: Well, what about in Guilford?

PM: Well, in Guilford, yeah, there were protests and I was a protester. I was a rabble-rouser when I was in college.

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

PM: I—Oh, I was absolutely against it. My—

TS: Why? Why were you against it at the time?

PM: My husband at the time was there.

TS: Right.

PM: He was a medic and he was Special Forces, and so he was doing all kinds of secret stuff; I didn't know a lot of what he was doing. But I was very much against it. I—I just saw no benefit to our being there. I don't remember my rationale at the time. All my friends were against it. We were just smart aleck college kids I guess. It seemed the thing to do, to be anti-war.

TS: Were you—There is a perception that the protesters were against the soldiers personally. Did you—Did you feel that way at that time?

PM: No. No, I was married to one, of course.

TS: Right.

PM: And—And I knew some of his friends and they were nice guys. So I didn't feel any animosity to the soldiers, but I was—mine was more just a anti-war thing.

TS: Okay.

PM: Because it just—There was just—On nightly news there was all this awful stuff that was always shown and it just never got any better. They were these stupid forecasts of seeing the light at the end of the tunnel and these—these casualty reports and—and they—they would always couch those reports and, "This is much better than it was last month and it's—it's just getting much better. We're just really getting—making progress," and no progress was ever made and it was just clear to anybody who was paying attention.

TS: Now, had you signed up before or after Kent State, because it was right around that time?

PM: What date was Kent State?

[The Kent State shootings occurred May 4, 1970, and involved the shooting of unarmed college students by the Ohio National Guard. Four students were killed and nine others wounded.]

TS: I—

PM: I don't remember.

TS: That was on my paper I was looking for but I—

PM: I don't—I remember being very aware—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: It's seventy-one or '72.

PM: —of Kent State.

TS: It's okay. We don't need to look it up. That's fine.

PM: Okay. I don't remember for sure.

TS: But you remember—

PM: I remember Kent State being horrified by it, yeah.

TS: Yes. So now you're joining the military; you're going to be a sol—a airman.

PM: Right, for—for my training period you—you are in fact, unless you're, like, a staff sergeant level, I think; enlisted.

TS: And so, how did—Did you—How did you close that gap between being an anti-war protester and then a few years later joining the military?

PM: As I said, it was purely pragmatic.

TS: Yeah?

PM: It was absolutely, “This is the best option I have at this time. I’m older than my peers. I’ve got years be—ahead of me if I stay in the career path I’m on now,” and I still didn’t know what I’d do with my degree. I figured if I got a PhD I’d be a researcher or something. Friends who were getting jobs were going to work for—for cigarette companies and pesticide com—companies to do lab work, and I didn’t want to do that. That just—That did not seem like something I should do.

TS: So it seemed like you had different opportunities available to you, po—this—when you went into the air force. Now, they guaranteed you a commission. What did they say about the type of work that you would be going into?

PM: You don’t talk about that first—at first.

TS: No?

PM: Or I don’t recall talking about it. No, you just—you—your accepted as—as a trainee for commissioned officer.

TS: Okay.

PM: You—I mean, you’re guaranteed a slot in training. You’re not guaranteed a commission but you’re guaranteed a slot in training. You have to prove yourself. You have to pass everything and do well before you get the commission. So you have to earn it. And training was a real trip, as we used to say.

TS: Why?

PM: Opened my eyes to a different kind of world. I—I remember—I was going to say earlier—from the—between the air—getting from the airport to the—to the air force base—

TS: Oh, right.

PM: —I was on a bus drive going through San Antonio, Texas, to get to Lackland Air Force Base, and there was a movie theater marquee and it was advertising *The Other—The—The Other*, I think was the name of the movie; it was a horror movie. And it was a movie I had wanted to see and I hadn’t gotten around to seeing it, and I thought, “Oh, I’ll come this weekend and see it.” Ha ha ha. You didn’t get weekend passes off of military bases when you’re in training unless you had done—you’ve done very well for a period of time and proved that you could be trusted. You were treated like—like a child in many regards, and like—not like a slave but like—you were just—you were under orders for everything; you didn’t do anything on your own. So this is a lifestyle that I’d never—

TS: How are you reacting to that?

PM: I was—I was mortifi—I mean, I was horrified. It just—It was so bizarre. I couldn't—I couldn't relate to it at all, and I got about halfway through—and a couple of my peers—my cohort—were, after a few weeks—this was like six weeks I guess; six or twelve; I can't remember; I'd have to look it up—but some of my peers were dropping out. It was just too hard on them. They could—They either couldn't handle it academically or they couldn't handle the physical nature of it or just the psychological stresses that they intentionally put you under to see what you can handle, they couldn't handle some of it and so they were dropping out.

And so, about halfway through I was at a point where I just thought, "I cannot take this crap anymore. I've got to get out of here." And then for some reason, I don't know why, I stopped myself but I—I decided I would just wait and see how much of it I could take before I—I really had to get out.

TS: So you weren't really at your breaking point?

PM: Wasn't at my breaking point.

TS: Okay.

PM: I was at—I was disgusted with all of it and I thought, "I don't—I do not have to take this. I'm out of here."

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Maybe frustrated with—

PM: Yes, frustrated; terribly frustrated. And—And you could leave any time; you didn't have to stay; you could walk out. Just sign the paper and walk away. And so, I thought, "Well, I could do it whenever I want to so let's just see how much I can take." So I kept at it a kept—and I don't know if that, kind of, turned me around or what but I got through it, and it was not that big a deal.

TS: So the—the—what you were pushing up against was really the culture—

PM: Yes, definitely.

TS: —of—and—and not so much what you were actually having to do?

PM: Some of it was [what I was] having to do, because we had to—

TS: What was it that was hard?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: We had to march everywhere in little groups, in step. I got shin splints so badly I had—I had permission slips not to march because I just kept shin splints. I'm not an athletic type; I've never been.

TS: What did you have to wear for shoes?

PM: Oh, these terrible brogades that—bro—brogans that laced up; old grandma shoes; black, ugly things; flat-soled. I mean, not—And they didn't have very much support. They weren't like the guys wore. Let's see.

TS: You didn't have boots or anything like that?

PM: No. No, women didn't wear fatigues then. Our fatigues looked like—they were blue. They were, like, a little skirt—a little wrap-around skirt and a little col—a little collar shirt without the—the tab tie that you have to wear when you're in your dress uniform. We didn't have—We were not first class citizens in the military in those days; we were just incidental. And the guys had comfortable shoes that had support and—and I think maybe during this time we were all in those fatigues—and so the guys had real fatigues and boots with support and their ankles were supported, and we were just prancing around in these idiotic little—I think we may have had slacks but I don't think we used—we wore them in training; they were allowed later after you got on active duty.

But we had to wear these silly skirts and you marched everywhere. You had to learn how to call a march, which was, for me, the hardest thing. I don't know why but it was absolutely excruciating for me. You had to master all the commands and then you had your little squadron lined up and you start them out, and you had to give them directions to—to stop, to turn, to do all—a hundred-eighty degree turn and go backwards. I had them marching in every directions possible. It was so mortifying. I don't know how I ever passed that part of the training because I never mastered that. I never—I always dreaded any part of that because I just—it was one of those things I could not seem to get the hang of.

TS: Did you have to march troops later in your career?

PM: No, I never did.

TS: No? [chuckles]

PM: Just part of the harassment training they'd make you go through.

TS: Okay.

PM: If I had been—I don't know. If I had been assigned to a school somewhere and we had parades then you would have marched.

TS: But you didn't ever have to?

PM: No.

TS: So it was just in this—

PM: It was just in the training.

TS: So you got through—Did you do any weapons training or—

PM: No, no, no. No, women were not allowed to carry weapons and so there was no point in training. Women were not even allowed to run in—in the athletics—the—the physical training part of—of the training.

TS: Like the obstacle course?

PM: Yeah, women were not allowed to run. They thought something terrible would happen to us physically, like our uteruses would fall out or something. I mean, this is true. This is how backward, how dark ages, it was. We did gym. We did XBX [Ten Basic Exercises], I think it was called. It was like exercises. That's the only—I mean, that's—We were—

TS: See, now is when I need a videotape, Portia— [chuckles]

PM: Sorry.

TS: —so I can see the hand—

PM: Sorry.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: No, no, no, it's good.

PM: Yeah, wouldn't that be great?

TS: Yeah.

PM: Yeah, nope, sorry.

TS: That's good.

PM: You could probably—You could probably get some historical records somewhere.

TS: Oh, sure, sure, but—

PM: Yeah.

TS: —it's having you do it, personally, it's much more fun.

PM: Oh, no, no. No, sorry.

TS: So—So you made it through your training?

PM: Yes.

TS: And you're—What are you thinking about yourself at this point?

PM: Okay. Well, I'm—I'm pleased that I'm making it, that I'm—I've gotten to the end of it, and it's—it's an achievement that I've never—never really worked that hard to get.

College was fun; it—it was fun, I did lots of extracurricular stuff. I helped found a Biology club that—I guess it had been around years and years before but had gone defunct and we re—resurrected it. The Biophile[?] Club was great fun. We went camping and trekking in the woods, and very plant and animal tree-hugger type stuff. We—That—That went right along with our anti-war feelings. We were kind of hippies in those days I guess. And—But it was all easy for me, relatively speaking.

I did have to take—What was it called?—Physics for Dummies, I think they called it. To be a science major you had to take certain science courses and physics was one of them, and that was another one of my weaknesses. And so, they had—bless them—they had us segregated out—this is at Guilford College—into the regular track of science students who could take real physics, and they had Physics for Dummies for people who had to have physics to graduate but were never going to use it, obviously, because they couldn't handle it.

TS: I see.

PM: So I took Physics for Dummies and passed it with a C, I think, so—really, really bad. But other than s—little obstacles like that I coasted right through college, and graduate school was not proving to be difficult to me. So I'd never really been challenged—seriously challenged by anything, and this was my first real challenge and I met it, and that was kind of gratifying. [unclear], "Well, gosh, I did this after all. I didn't—didn't have to drop out." I didn't—wasn't forced to drop out.

TS: Right.

PM: So the last few days of training when you talked about what you were going to do, where you—where were you going to go—

TS: Right.

PM: —what you're going to do, I remember going to a classroom and some people from military personnel headquarters came to talk to us, and we filled out a bunch of paperwork about what we wanted to do and where we wanted to go and so forth, and I—and they said, "Just put down your heart's desire about everything and maybe you'll get it; maybe you'll get it. We'll do our best to get it for you."

Well, I put down East Coast or West Coast because I'd grown up on the East Coast. I loved the Outer Banks and the coast on the west would be fun, too, because I would be close to the ocean, and they put me—my first assignment was Oklahoma.

TS: Right in the middle of the country.

PM: Right in the middle; they split the difference. [both chuckle]

TS: They were trying to compromise.

PM: I suppose, in their wisdom.

TS: Well, how did they decide on what career you were going to—

PM: Well, in my case—

TS: —look at?

PM: —I think I mentioned my degree was in Biology, and the air force had—had no idea what to do with somebody who was not me—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: I think we talked about this off tape.

PM: Yes, that's right, who was not medically trained in—in the sciences and they had no non-medical science jobs, and the closest thing anybody could come to—some—some paper-pusher down in headquarters decided that disaster preparedness dealt with chemicals and atoms and nuclear war, that sort of thing, and a science, biology person probably would understand that so let's put her in that. I didn't know what it was and so I accepted it of course, and my first assignment at Enid, Oklahoma. What was the name of the base?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oklahoma?

PM: Vance; Vance Air Force Base. Here I am, nearly thirty.

TS: Right.

PM: Oh, and by the way, I missed the air force cutoff for age by something like less than six months.

TS: So they got a waiver for you?

PM: No, I missed by—I mean, if I had been six months older—

TS: Oh, I see.

PM: —I would not have been able to go in the air force.

TS: Oh.

PM: So I barely snuck in. I was twenty-nine when I went in so I was pushing thirty when I go into my first assignment. And my first assignment, of all things, is an undergraduate pilot training base. This means all these bright whiz kids, right out of college guys—all of them guys—twenty-one, twenty-two years old, on top of the world, thought they were the king of the world, were all over; the base was crawling with these kids. And I'm supposed to teach them about—here—Oklahoma; they don't build basements in Oklahoma. At least our military base had no basements. Tornado alley, possible [*sic*] still planning for the—what to do if there were a nuclear war. You've got to have fallout shelters, you've got to have protection underground; there was nothing underground. But I was teaching classes to all these kids. They had to come to my class as I had to teach them about all these ridiculous terms and protective measures they had—would have to take. They could care less. I was embarrassed by how irrelevant the whole thing was. It was a very strange first assignment, I'll tell you. It's a wonder I didn't try to leave the air force, but I was committed for four years so I couldn't leave very easily at that point, but I—I wondered, "What on earth have I gotten myself into? This is really strange."

TS: Did you challenge anybody on what you were—

PM: Oh, yes.

TS: Did you?

PM: Yeah, yeah. You mean the students?

TS: Well, no, I mean, like—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: Oh, on the assignment.

TS: —did you challenge the curriculum that you're teaching or anything like that?

PM: Oh, no.

TS: You just, kind of, were like—

PM: No, I didn't have any background in any of the stuff I was teaching. I had gone to school for it—military school for it before I got the assignment.

TS: Right.

PM: But that was my only training in that, and so I really—and I'd never taught before except teaching assistant which is not really a formal teaching job, it's kind of like a lab assistant and you teach a few classes and—and it's not a real structured teaching job. So I'd never been a teacher before in a formal sense, and so I didn't know about syllabus and how—how to adjust or even challenge curriculum. I just took it and did the best I could with it, thinking, "I'm going to get out of this as soon as I can."

And by the way, when I arrived on Vance Air Force Base the base newspaper came out and interviewed me because I was only—it was the first time in the history of the base that two uniformed military women had been assigned there at the same time. There was another woman, a sergeant or an airman or something, on the base, assigned there. I was the second woman to be assigned there and the two of us were there at the same time. It was—It was history being made.

TS: So this was in the seven—'73? Seventy—

PM: Yeah, this would have been '73. Yeah, probably June-ish—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So you had—

PM: June, July, August; sometime around there.

TS: So there wasn't—You didn't, like, have a cadre of women to hang out with or anything like that?

PM: No, no, no, no.

TS: I see, '73, '74.

PM: You know what? Come to think of it, I did spend some time after training—I was—Yeah, I should have backed up; this is important stuff I should have told you. A few of us were handpicked—and I don't know why I got picked; I never understood this; maybe because I was older. A few of us were handpicked to stay at the school and be the, sort of, big sisters to a new—a group of girls who were going to come in—young women I should say—because, I think, they were starting to integrate the—the dormitories; men and women. And they wanted us to help these new women make it under those extreme conditions. It would be—I think that was what it was. What were the—

TS: Well—Because the period that you're in, you are—there's a transition; the end of the draft is happening, right—

PM: Yes.

TS: —pretty much that summer. That—You're going to your first assignment, too.

PM: Yes. I can't remember exactly.

TS: So they could be—have gender integrated training or gender integrating—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: Something was going on with the women coming in that next class. It was going to be a very large class and—

TS: They wanted you to be a mentor?

PM: They wanted us to mentor those—those new women.

TS: How was that? How did that—

PM: That was interesting. It didn't amount to much. They—I was there about—about just a few months—I'd have to look to see exactly how long—before I went to my assignment, and I had to get a waiver because I was supposed to have gone right out of school and I had to be—get a waiver to stay there from the commander of the base I was going to.

But it turns out that one of my cohort classmates—one of the women—was the first woman to train in aircraft and to be—to fly an aircraft. She was obviously not a fighter pilot. She was going to be a transport pilot because that's where they put them at first. But she was one of the first women to fly aircraft, so it was that early in—

TS: Right.

PM: —in today's military, just when women were starting to break—break in.

TS: Right, because this is a time when they're opening up new career fields for women in all the services.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: First time, yeah.

TS: Yeah. Well, you—So we have a whole twenty year career.

PM: Yeah.

TS: And to—to kind of give us an idea of what it was like there's—you have—you've kind of laid out a couple tiers here; like, you had different training that you did that we can talk about, and maybe we'll talk about that first and say—

PM: Okay.

TS: —what kind of training that you had. But I want to ask you when—how— just in general, how were you received at these—at your—at the bases that you went to by the personnel that were there, as a woman?

PM: Okay.

TS: As an officer?

PM: I had—I didn't have any problems as an officer. My—I was [in] a two person office with a staff sergeant who worked for me; he was a career staff sergeant; had already been in twenty-some years.

TS: Yes.

PM: Had only made staff sergeant, which told you that something was wrong with this fellow that he hadn't advanced any further than that. Turns out he was a—a dyed in the wool alcoholic, and when he was not drinking he was a great guy; just work his little butt off

and do anything for me. He just, sort of, took me under his wing. He never seemed to resent working for a—a stupid officer; an officer who knew nothing about the military and he'd been a career man for so long; never seemed to resent that.

But when the time came I—I'd learned that he was an alcoholic, and once in a while I—I thought he had been drinking because he was, sort of—slurred speech and something was going on. But I had to finally one day bail him out because he'd been picked up, and it just was strange. I've never been in that kind of parental role where I had—and in the air force and military, that's—that's how officers must be with their troops. You have to be. No matter how old you are or how inexperienced you are, you're the parent; you're the adult. And they—While you expect them to be able to think for themselves, you still are responsible for them in a very real way. And so, I was—For the first time in my life I was a parent, kind of, to this guy who was older than I—Well—Yeah, older than I was by some, and—but far more experienced I was but I was the parent. [chuckles] So it was—it was an interesting thing. And I—I just kind of gritted my teeth and got through that assignment.

As soon as I could I volunteered to go overseas, and it was the same work I was going to do but it was in Thailand and it was going to be a different—different situation entirely. So I just spent two years, sort of, gritting my teeth till I could get out there; till I could volunteer for another assignment.

TS: But what—What was it about this assignment that was so—that you wanted to get out of? The [unclear]—The training—

PM: Just it was—it was such a thankless job.

TS: Okay.

PM: The commander didn't care about it. I mean, he—he did—he went through the motions of supporting me, but it was clear nobody on that base thought I was doing anything worthwhile, and I didn't think I was doing anything worthwhile. I couldn't understand why the air force made me do it. It was just so—It was so biz—so pointless. We weren't going to do any of the things that we were being taught to do because we didn't have the equipment, we didn't have the shelters, we didn't—we didn't have any of the stuff that you would have to have to be able to behave the way I was trying to teach people they were going to have to behave. And so, it was just—

TS: So it's like you had this pointless checklist—

PM: Exactly.

TS: —of training—

PM: Exactly.

TS: —that—

PM: And so, that—that made—Well, I was a lot older—or several years older than most of the—the other young second lieutenants, and so I didn't fraternize with them very much. They just—They were kids right out of college and I just didn't have a lot in common with them. And after you hear this a hundred times it—it gets old: "What's your name?"

"Portia."

"Oh, your mom named you after a sports car. How cool."

You hear that too many times and it just turns the whole world dark for you. So just for the record, the name is from Shakespeare and not—not—the German sports—

TS: Did you correct them and explain that?

PM: I did but after a while I just quit. I said, "You should meet my sister; she's named Mercedes," just—

TS: Yeah, play along with the joke.

PM: Play along with it, yeah.

But I lived on base in bachelor's quarters. I ate at the officer's club. I kept, kind of, a solitary existence there too. Didn't have many friends because there was no one—In the military you—you are sort of in a cohort as you go along and—and you stay within your rank—age and rank, and in—except in unusual circumstances. For instance in Thailand, you don't have friends unless you're married. You don't have friends that are spread out over the ranks.

And so, there were no—there were no—not many other officers, who were not pilot trainees, who were in my rank, and so I didn't have a lot of friends, and that was another reason I wanted to get out of there, because it was really, kind of, a lone—lonely existence, and it was in the middle of—of Oklahoma, which is not my idea of paradise. The skies at night were gorgeous because they went all the way down to the horizon. I'd never seen skies like that. When there was a storm it was—it was operatic, but that's not enough to keep you in a place. [unclear]

TS: [chuckles] Well, how'd you end up in Thailand then?

PM: Well, I volunteered to be—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Specifically for Thailand?

PM: Yeah, the opportunity—I don't know—I don't know how I found out about it. I think I was just doing some research, getting with the people in headquarters saying, "Get me out of here. Get me out of here," and Thailand came up as a possibility, and I'd never

been to Thailand so—and it was in the same career field but I—I knew it had to be different so I took it. By then I was a first lieutenant. I'd been two years in so there's an automatic promotion to first lieutenant. You probably know all this.

TS: But the people that—

PM: Okay.

TS: —are listening may not.

PM: Okay. So I was a first lieutenant when I got there, I think—or shortly after I got there, and as the disaster preparedness officer I was the only junior officer on base who had a vehicle. I had a jeep.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: How did that happen?

PM: Because we responded to emergencies.

TS: Oh, okay.

PM: You had to be able to respond to emergency; you had to have a vehicle. I had a jeep with—which had a—a radio and all kinds of fancy equipment, and I could zip around the base. And I had to have the jeep with me at all times because you never knew—

TS: Never knew when something was going to happen.

PM: —when something was—when an airplane might crash. I mean, that was our major response—responsibility, if an airplane crashed, and that was when Cambodia was still hot, Laos was still hot. It was so soon after Vietnam that there was still a lot of turmoil and—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Seventy-four, '75?

PM: Yeah, in that—Yes, in that—it was '75—in that—I think. Yeah, '74, '75—

TS: Okay.

PM: —in that part of the world. Thailand was quiet but around us there was quite a bit going on, and there were—there were guns that were shooting over the border, from Laos or Cambodia, at the bases that were close to the border. We were not one of those, fortunately, so we didn't have to put up with that, but our guys were flying all the time so there was always the possibility of—of some kind of encounter. And in fact, the USS *Mayaguez* [SS *Mayaguez*] incident happened when I was in Thailand.

TS: What was that?

PM: That was a merchant marine ship—and I didn't do my homework before I came—

TS: That's okay.

PM: —so I don't remember many details, but it was a merchant marine vessel that was taken hostage—it was captured by the—Phnom Penh—is that Cambodia or Laos? I can't remember.

TS: I'm not sure.

PM: Okay, well, I'll have—

TS: That's okay, that's something we can—

PM: I'll have to look it up. By Cambodia or Laos, it was taken by those—

TS: Troops?

PM: —troops; those—the navy from one of those two countries. And—And these are neighbors of—in Thailand—neighbors of Thailand. And so, our fighter aircraft, which were primarily F4s at the time, were mobilized to be part of the force that would go in and—we weren't trying to rescue, I don't think. I don't think—see how we could rescue a ship, but we were going in and harassing and flying over and keeping an eye on the ship and the people to be sure—hopefully to be sure that nothing happened to them. And one—we did recover one aircraft that had battle damage. That was the high point of my two—my year in Thailand; we recovered one aircraft that had battle damage. And so, my job as disaster preparedness officer was sort of authenticated. I did finally get to do something that the job—the job description called for. It was very gratifying.

TS: Did you enjoy the time in Thailand?

PM: I did. It was funny—again, it was early, early days. I was one of very few women, most of them civilian. They were, like, UF—not UFO—U—USO [United Service Organizations] women who were there, and sec—civilian secretaries, and so there were very few military women there. We all—military and civilian—all lived in one big, sort of a dormitory, whereas the guys had, what they called, hooches, which were, like,

duplexes and they'd have two off—two men to a side. So there were four men in—in a hooch and the women all stayed [in] a dormitory. And they called all the Western women—the guys called all the—the few Western women who were on the base "round eyes," to—obviously to distinguish us from the locals who were all Asian.

And we were—Because there were so few of us, in terms of women, we were in a really strange—I—I—it was like almost another world environment. The men were very solicitous to a fault. I would take a book with me and bury my head in a book when I had dinner at the club just to keep guys from si—just sitting down at the table and starting to talk to me. I'd—

TS: Kind of close your space?

PM: Yeah, close my space, because you couldn't get away from them. They wanted—They missed being home, they missed women, and they wanted to be with the "round eyes" as much as they could. I mean, they had girlfriends and—and whatever who were all locals—mostly locals—but they wanted to be around "round eyes" so they could remember what it was like to be home. And so, we were constantly in—and in a very nice way but in a very stressful way, we were constantly needed; they needed us so badly that you had to—to find a place to get away from the guys and—the nice guy—nice guys. That sounds really cold but at—at a certain time though—a certain point you—you just can't take much more it; it's just too demanding; they just want too much of you. And we had virtually naked go-go dancers that would come in to entertain at night at the club, and we would—the women would just look the other way if we were there. It was part of the—part of the place; part of the—

TS: Culture?

PM: Culture, yeah. And my friends—As I said, in—in that kind of a environment I had friends of all ranks and one of my friends, the—Well, as—as the effort—as all the military effort in that southeast Asian theater was waning and bases were closing, Thailand—the bases in Thailand were closing and—and there's an element of local whatever around every military base; locals trying to get money one way or another from the GIs.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: GIs?

PM: Prostitution, criminals, you name it. And as the bases closed those elements were more and more concentrated at the bases that remained. And so, by the time—this would have been maybe the last month, maybe the last two months of my time there, we were, I think, next to the last base to close so we didn't go off base. Most of us didn't go off base. We had been, before that, free to go off base to whatever we wanted to do. We had to be

careful. There were bandits and strange things going on, but we were relatively safe in the countryside. By this time we weren't so we didn't go off base.

TS: Because they were preying on the GIs?

PM: Yeah. Well, you just—Yeah, people were—no longer had their steady income; these people who had preyed on all the bases. And so they were out in the countryside, and if you found yourself out there you didn't know what might happen. You could be—You could be a hostage for ransom, you could be robbed and killed, you—who knows what, so we didn't go off base and—the women anyway. The men may have but the women didn't, and if we did we had a—a cadre of men around us to—really to protect us if anything happened.

And a good friend of mine who was a lieutenant colonel—I was a first lieutenant—he was a lieutenant colonel—I think he was a pilot by training but he was not in a pilot's job; he wasn't flying there. He was one of the controllers or something, doing some kind of support work for pilots, but great guy, super good-looking, black, former pro—or he had played pro tennis but he was an air force career officer, and he gave lessons on the base, and maybe off base, and a lot of colonels' wives and general's wife—well, there weren't many generals—but colonel's wives loved to take lessons from him; he was good-looking guy; a real player, I'm sure. I forget his last name, his first name was Walt; good guy. He was murdered in his hooch, on the base, and it—the ultimate blame was placed on a Thai air force sergeant who apparently was—Walt had had a contract taken out on him by one of the Thai officers whose wife apparently had gotten involved with Walt. That was the story anyway. So he took a contract out with this ser—staff sergeant, and he murdered him. That was a somewhat free for the—the Thai military—it was a—Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base was the formal name, and so we were like—we were—What do you call it?

TS: Like an open base where they came and went?

PM: Well, it wasn't open but we were like renters on the base.

TS: I see.

PM: It wasn't the U.S.—It wasn't the U.S. military base; it wasn't our property. We were—

TS: It was a Thai base?

PM: Yes, it was a Thai air force base. Thai Royal—Roy—Royal Thai Air Force Base, and we were just—I forget. There was a term and I can't think of the term right now, but we—we rented space, we leased space, and we—everything was ours that we brought with us but the space was theirs, and they, kind of, had free—freedom to come and go, with some restrictions. But this guy got on the base with no problem at all and got into the housing area and killed Walt, and it was—it was just horrifying. It was the last—I think it was the last month or so, and—

TS: That you were there; the last month?

PM: Yeah, the last month we were there—

TS: Okay.

PM: —before I went home; the last month I was there. And I was—We were all going home about the same time. There wasn't a lot of time after I left before the base actually closed.

TS: I see.

PM: So it was a—a real bitter ending to what had been a pretty reasonably enjoyable time. There was a military—or there was a Thai jeweler on the base who—it was like a vendor. He was allowed with—He had a license to sell jewelry and design jewelry. We had all kinds of jewelry because we had money that—There was no place to spend it so we had tons of money. There was a—an Indian tailor who had a—a vendor shop on the base, and we had all of our uniforms tailor-made and—Oh, we were living a great lifestyle in this little microcosm of strangeness.

One of the strangest stories I love to tell is—if we have time, if I can tell it—is as the base is—the base was getting close to closing the—the tailor wanted to thank his favorite customers, and so he invited us to dinner at his shop, and his sister flew in from somewhere in-country. She—They were both Indians but they were both in Thailand for some reason, and she flew in especially to cook the dinner. And so, we were very honored by this. This is something that doesn't happen very often, or it had never happened, as far as I know, to any of us anyway.

And so, we showed up in our finery at his tailor shop and we're standing around amongst the bulks of cloth, and in Thailand you—if you're not in a military—like, in the dining room at the—the military dining room, you don't drink the water and you don't have ice from the local water. So the only thing he had to offer us to drink was whiskey, and we couldn't even have ice because of the dangers of it, so—and I'm not a whiskey drinker but that was what we were drinking.

And then his sister brought out these steaming trays of beautiful—some sort of chicken curry with rice and we all heaped our plates up and it just looked delicious, and we started eating it and it was so hot smoke was practically coming out of our ears; it was so spicy hot. This was a—These people were from a part of India that really ate *[sic]* hot spices and it was painfully hot, but you don't not eat it; you have—in that culture you have to eat what you take. And so, we had—we were trying to wash this fiery hot Indian curry down with whiskey, standing, again, amongst these bulks of cloth; we weren't sitting down, we were holding everything in our hands. It was the most excruciating dinner I have ever attended. I don't even remember what it tasted like because there was no taste. There—The first bite you knew you were in trouble, and you just had—and we'd heaped our plates. I mean, it looked so good. We'd all been very generous with our helpings, and we had to tell her how good it was with tears streaming down our faces, and it was the strangest, most bizarre dinner I've ever been at.

TS: Yes.

PM: Yeah. Sweet people but—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: That's—That's—

PM: —ruined me for Indian food, really, for a long, long time.

TS: Did it?

PM: Yeah.

TS: I can relate to that story. [chuckles]

PM: Yeah, okay.

TS: That's interesting. So you—Around this time, then, you've been in for a few years now; it's a different experience than Vance [Air Force Base]. And you had signed up for—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: Yeah, it's about four years.

TS: Yeah, so you'd signed up for about four, so what are thinking about—

PM: Well, I—I was doing okay, I was making my promotions, and it wasn't a difficult life. Training had been—The officer training had been much more physically and emotionally demanding than anything I'd had to do so far, and so I was comfortable. I didn't think I needed to leave yet; I was going to stay around and see what happened.

TS: Did you feel like you were fitting into that culture of the military?

PM: Enough that I was reasonably comfortable.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Enough?

PM: Yeah.

TS: Even though you're isolated, kind of, as a women in certain places?

PM: Right. I didn't—

TS: How were you dealing with that?

PM: Well, in graduate school there weren't many women, at that time, and in the sciences and zoology there weren't many of us, so it wasn't like I was coming from a milieu that had just all women all the time, lots and lots of friends of women, into something that was completely alien. So I was—And I had kind of grown up as a solitary child so I wasn't—I didn't feel that strange about not having a lot of women friends. I sought them out when I could, and in fact, I think I was—Was I there yet? No, I don't think I was. I tried—I think I was at—at Vance when I started trying to get together with other women, as they started coming in; there were so few of us you could count them on one hand. As I said, when I got there I was only the second. So when they would come in, and they were almost always enlisted, I would try to touch base with them and—and try to have an informal network—support network for—for ourselves, and I—I did that wherever I went until it became more common to have plenty of women, and we even stopped being called WAF [Women in the Air Force]; we were—we were just women then.

TS: Right.

PM: No longer that W-A-F acronym. And—But—But it didn't—That didn't affect me that much. I never—I enjoyed women, I like women; personally I really like women; I'd never felt threatened by women; but I didn't feel that I was being denied anything really important to me by not having a lot of women to—I was never that big at telling all my secrets to my best friend, and all that. I guess I was always sort of a stand-offish type of person, and so it didn't seem that strange to me.

TS: Well, it sounds like you were making friends with your colleagues—

PM: Right.

TS: —at work as well, that were male.

PM: Right. Sure, and most of them were male. You had to make friends with them or you didn't have any friends at all, you know? So yeah—yeah, I had friends—I had acquaintances and friends, but—so I wasn't lonesome in that respect. I just—And I didn't—I didn't really miss anything else. I don't know. I don't know why.

TS: How were your relationships through your career? We probably can't go through every single place you were at, but how were your relations throughout your career with your superiors?

PM: Relatively good. The—Let's see. I think I came back from Thailand to Florida in the Biology—the Field Biology; the Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard Team—the BASH Team, it was called—and that's where I met my husband to be and we got married there. And then from there I went—And I'm trying to—Maybe it was there; I can't remember. There was some—There was a colonel who was the deputy commander—

TS: Okay.

PM: —at—at one of these early bases, who hated having women in his command. He just—

TS: How did he react?

PM: He was very rude, but he didn't—he did—he—he would go right up to the edge of what was allowed in terms of nastiness, and make our lives as miserable as possible, but he—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Can you give me, like, an example of something he might do?

PM: Well—

TS: Not an exact thing he did but something like—

PM: The only thing I remember was after I had sort of won him over, I was—I remember standing—I was in my little—We wore these short-sleeve, bl—light blue shirts with a tab tie and it—it had—it was the Jackie Kennedy-style uniform still and it—it was an overblouse with a relatively short tail—it wasn't long tunic type—and these sort of semi A-line skirts, and pumps—low pumps, and that's what I wore to work all the time at this point. And I was in Public Relations—Public Affairs at this time so it must have been either Florida or beyond.

But anyway, this guy, I was standing beside his desk—he was sitting at his desk and I was standing beside it, talking to him about something that—that I had brought for him to see, and he looked up and he said something like, "Suck it in, McCracken. Suck that stomach in."

And I said something like, "You had—Sir, if you had the plumbing that women have, you—you would understand that you can't have a washboard flat stomach. This is not a big stomach, this is a good stomach."

We were at the point—While we didn't like one another very much, we could—

TS: Banter back and forth?

PM: Banter. Yes, that's a good word; banter. So—And I don't know how he treated the other women in the command but we had sort of reached an armed standoff sort of—

TS: [chuckles]

PM: We didn't let the other one get away with very much. And he tolerated it. I didn't get insubordinate—I was very careful never to be insubordinate—but he tolerated the teasing and seemed to enjoy it.

TS: So maybe because you didn't simply just back—

PM: Well, and I was older than most of the women too—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: That's true.

PM: —so I had a different—I had a different—

TS: Style?

PM: —outlook and style; yeah, a different air, I'm sure. I wasn't green as grass about everything. Even as a captain you're still a very junior officer, and when you're in your thirties, even if you're a junior officer, you've been around the block a few times. And so, I—I don't know if they sensed it or I just didn't put up with the kind of stuff that more junior or younger officers would, but for whatever reason, I was able to—to tolerate it and they tolerated me, with relative ease.

TS: Did you ever have any examples of—Did you ever have any, like, sexual harassment or anything like that?

PM: One serious time. The only really serious time was when I was in Florida when I had just come back from Viet—from Thailand—

TS: From Thailand?

PM: —and it was my first public affairs job. Public affairs in the air force, as you may know, is a very civilian kind of job. You're dealing with the community, with the press—the off-base press—a lot of celebrities, and just people who are not military. There's a lot of military—You have an on-base newspaper and a lot of military things that you do as well, but you—you were off base a lot and so you're wearing civilian clothes a lot to attend these affairs.

I don't know how explicit I can get on tape, but I was the first woman officer in the job that I came into, which I guess was, like, deputy director, maybe, and the director was a civilian who'd been in the job forever, and he knew everybody. He had fingers in every pie, he knew everybody's secrets, so he—he could bring—he could get everything—anything you wanted done, he could get it done because he knew everybody and knew everything. So he was an old hat and he—There was a huge—Florida was—This was the panhandle and it's—it was a very redneck time and place, and the good ol'—good ol' boy network was just—that's all there was; women were just peripheral.

And so, as the woman officer I was just peripheral to him and—and there was a term that he called his second in commands to the civilians, which he called me publicly one night when I had to get up and address these people. And—

TS: Do you not want to say the word or—

PM: I will say it if it's—I don't know—

TS: You might as well.

PM: Well, he called—he called me his PCO, which stood for Pussy Control Officer, and I had to get up and stand up and address these people after he said that; after he introduced me as that. And you can tell what his previous officers had been doing for those people and for him, I gue—He was married, too, but who knows who all they were helping procure whatever for, and I didn't do any of that. I don't know if he didn't have the nerve to ask me to as a woman or if it just never came up—I don't remember, but I didn't—I didn't do it—but that's what he called me to these, all—almost—it must have been all men.

TS: You want to explain, just for the people who don't quite understand what you're alluding to, that the people before you were doing? What were they doing—

PM: I don't know for a fact what they were doing, but if they had the—the title, Pussy Control Officer—

TS: Right.

PM: —I assume that meant they provided escorts, either on base when civilians—civilian city leaders, community leaders, came on the base, but I suspect more so when we would take the same community leaders off base to other military bases around the country, sometimes around the world. They were community leaders, we let them know all that we could about our base, and then we'd take them to other bases and show them other missions and explain them, and then we'd get all kinds of briefings and tours and so forth, and you're out of town. And as it—in the junior position to this civilian director, you had to keep track of everything. You were the administrative assistant, basically, on all these trips. And I—I suspect that women were a part of that administrative job, that—

TS: One of the privileges of—of being on this—a civilian—

PM: Right.

TS: —getting services, was to have a woman [unclear].

PM: I suspect. I never knew for sure. Nobody ever said it but—but with that kind of name—title—

TS: So how did you handle it when he said that?

PM: Oh, I was very embarrassed but I just ignored it.

TS: Yeah?

PM: I just—just said, "Hello. I'm really—" and this is right after I got there; my first opportunity to talk to any of these people. I just pretended he hadn't said it—or pretend I didn't know what he meant and just—

TS: Did you ever say anything to him later?

PM: I'm sure I did, yeah. We had several discussions and I got him to the point where he stopped doing a lot of things. But it turns out after I had left there—gone to, I guess, my next assignment—I was contacted by somebody from that base because a young airman had—had submitted a sexual harassment charge against him—against this civilian. And so, his previous officers—or the women who had previously worked for him, who were anywhere around, were being interviewed to see what they had gone through, and I told them about that—that incident.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Incident?

PM: And he—This guy was constantly putting his arms around you, trying to put his hands on you; just exploring boundaries all the time. And I would—I fended him off nicely all the time; laughed it off; joked about it; pretended I didn't understand; whatever was needed to stay away from him. I—As an older person, I could—I knew what to do, I knew how to handle it under those crazy societal—

TS: Yes.

PM: —norms, but the young girls coming in didn't, and—and it eventually got to the point—and I don't know what may have happened to any of those younger girls before I

got there, but then subsequently women were starting to assert themselves enough so that this girl said, "You know, I'm not taking this crap anymore," and she went to the legal office and charged the guy with—or went to the commander—whatever channel she went through—she charged him with sexual harassment.

TS: Do you know whatever happened?

PM: No, I—I didn't get any follow-up. What—What had happened—Apparently the event—the incident had to do with her going with him on a boat trip with city fathers[?] and—and something that they expected her to do that she did not do.

TS: Well, it sounds like you're explaining, really, like, a classic example of a man testing the boundaries in the workplace of how far he can push that sexual harassment.

PM: Yes.

TS: And that as a woman, you're the one that has to really put the rebar [reinforcing bar] in for—

PM: Right.

TS: —keeping—keeping the boundaries really strong.

PM: Yes. Yes.

TS: And depending on how well or how poorly you do that, falls on the woman, right, not the man.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: Exactly, absolutely. And he had the commander's ears so I would never consider—I don't know what he would have had to do before I would have been willing to go to the commander. It just—I just wouldn't have—It would have been "he said, she said," kind of thing.

TS: Right, and sexual—the term "sexual harassment" was really relative—maybe not even talked about at that point, because it didn't—I mean—

PM: I don't think it was. It was something that you—you expect—you expected, kind of; it—it happened wherever you went; every man. When I was—Even when I was away from there, I was in California at my next assignment—No, no, I was in—I was still in Florida; this was before I moved into Public Affairs. I was in the Field Biology job, in the BASH team, and we were somewhere out in the boonies, at someplace, doing a—a

survey of some sort, and one of the other officers and I—we were peers—and we met another military officer wherever we were, and those two guys started talking about me as if I weren't there, giving me a grade—a number grade.

TS: Based on what?

PM: My appearance. Was I a six or nine or—The guy that I was with, both of us despised one another so he thought I was about a six, the other guy thought I was about an eight or a nine, maybe, and the first guy didn't understand that; he's, "Really? You really think that? She's that good?"

TS: So in front of you?

PM: Yeah.

TS: And so, is this another thing you just ignore?

PM: Just ignore. You just—It just wouldn't have paid to make a scene. You—You wouldn't get anything accomplished, you wouldn't fix the problem, you wouldn't be able to work—carry out the mission that you were there to do. It just—It just didn't—

TS: So, like, at this point in—in the military, in your career, you're really having to accommodate to the particular environment that you're put in.

PM: Yes.

TS: And even though you may—you're pressing for—well, pushing—pushing away incidents but not really challenging them, where you would go and report something like that.

PM: I never reported anything. I don't recall ever reporting. I never came under that much pressure. It was always that—that overt, kind of—just testing; just being—being a horse's ass. They were just—That's what they were doing.

TS: Seeing if they could get your goat, and all that?

PM: Yeah, exactly, and—and you know that and—

TS: Rile you up and—

PM: —there's no—Yeah, don't give them the satisfaction of—of letting them know it gets to you.

TS: I see.

PM: Yeah, so—No, I didn't —Certain circumstances I would throw something back at them; "If you think—What? Do you think you're a ten?" or something like that.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: But it was somebody you might have known and how to deal with—

PM: Yeah, I would—I could deal with it.

TS: —the temperament of that person.

PM: Right, right, depending on the situation and what we were there to do, what—was I in the office or the officers club or in uniform or not in uniform, or whatever, it just all—

TS: You kind of had to take the temperature of what was going—

PM: Yeah, it was all situational.

TS: Interesting.

PM: Yeah. And it was young—this guy was probably younger than I was, and so it was not older guys. The guy I worked for in Florida was quite a bit older than I, but it was not just dirty old men who did this, it was everybody.

TS: Young and old.

PM: Young and old.

TS: [unclear] rank?

PM: And enlisted and officer, oh yes. In fact, the kid that worked for me in Thailand pushed really hard to date me. I mean, he'd—it was—It was very uncomfortable to have your subordinate getting overtly—

TS: Kind of fresh?

PM: Yes, very, and I had to gently—because I had to work with this guy for the next year, you can't—you can't soil your—your—your bed clothes or whatever, your—your nest, and—and then still try to work there, so I had to gently teach him what was appropriate and what wasn't, in un—uncertain enough—or in certain enough terms that he wouldn't misunderstand it, and think, "Well, she doesn't really mean that." It was very uncomfortable for a while, and then we got to be good friends after we got past that. The

first few weeks—maybe the first month or two—he kept putting the make on me, I guess you could say, but we got over it; we got past it.

TS: You got past it?

PM: It was interesting.

TS: Well, did you—How'd you feel throughout your career—your—how—you—like, your evaluations, officer—

PM: I got good evaluations; I always did. There were only—There were only two officers that I worked for and they were my last assignment, at the one in Alaska, that I did not get along with; two commanders, both of them generals, that I didn't get along with. I was—I was very easy to get along with on the job. I was competent enough. I was—I could solve problems well enough that I never had any serious issues, other than this colonel who—and I wasn't in his command—his—he was not in my chain of command—that—and he would harass me, but—

TS: This was in Alaska, or a different—

PM: This last assignment, yes.

TS: I see.

PM: The two gen—The two commanders that I just could not please. I couldn't get along with them, I could not please them, I had no respect for them because of the way they behaved, and that—that was really my first time having that kind of problem. They weren't sexually harassing me—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: And that's—No.

PM: —but they just—they—they didn't like me, they didn't want me to succeed, they tried to make sure I didn't succeed. It was very, very—

TS: Was it gender related or—

PM: I don't know.

TS: It was hard to say?

PM: I honestly don't know, because—No, it couldn't have been gender related because the—one of the—one of the women in the office, when I first got there, when the first general was there—and it's strange, I've seen him on TV as one of the experts—military experts that—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: On TV?

PM: —that news people—

TS: Yeah.

PM: —MSNBC [Microsoft/National Broadcasting Company], NBC, CBS, CNN—they bring in to talk about certain situ—I've seen him on TV since then.

TS: You just close your eyes?

PM: I just close my eyes and grit my teeth. But anyway, this one young woman, she was a—an enlisted woman, and she got along great with this guy. She would—She could get away with anything. We would—We would have her do anything that was uncomfortable for any of us because she could do it. He would let her do anything, and—and it was almost—it wasn't inappropriate but it bordered on inappropriate, how close they were. Nothing was ever insinuated that there was anything improper about it, but they were just—they were so close it was like they were family members; they knew each other so well. They—They could sense moods with one another and she knew exactly when to hit him for something that we needed; when he would be vulnerable and we could get it. She was great to have around. And she—that was a woman, so he didn't have gender issues with her. She was not an officer, I was, and by then I was a lieutenant colonel. I made that rank at my base in Utah; the best job I had backed up by the worst job I had in Alaska; it was real—back to back; really, really strange.

TS: Well, it's interesting you went through the twenty years without—

PM: Yeah.

TS: —having an issue, and then the last place you're at—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: Yeah, without really having a serious issue. I mean, I was unhappy certain places, and there were people I didn't like, but I never ran up against that kind of wall that I did in Alaska.

TS: Well, why don't you talk a little bit about your favorite place? Tell me about that. Why was it your favorite, and when were you there?

PM: Well, Utah was one of my very favorites, as far as assignments were concerned.

TS: Okay. This was in—'88 to '91?

PM: Right.

TS: Okay.

PM: It was going to be a really good job—It was—I had gone from a headquarters job, which is a miserable place to be. Headquarters jobs you're just one of a crowd, no matter what your rank is, unless you're the commander.

TS: That was at Scott Air Force Base [Illinois]?

PM: Scott Air Force Base, and I was just one of the staff officers; one of hundreds. And I was a major but—I think I made major while I was at Scott—and major is the first rank in the air force, at least, and probably in the rest of the military. That's the first non-automatic rank. You have to earn the rank of major or you get out. It's up or out in the military, and if you don't make major you have to go out; you have to leave. You don't get to retire, you don't get to stay in beyond—And by the time I'd gotten to the ten year point, I was married by then, and my ex—my—my husband was a—an officer a well, and I was—I was having a reasonably good time. I was comfortable. We were making tons of money between us. We didn't have any kids to—to raise. The jobs were good enough. We were going all kinds of places. I thought, "Well, hell, I'll just stay. I don't need to leave." It was kind of like that over and over. I got to that point where I—

TS: Reassessed and—

PM: Yeah, reassess and, "Now would be a good time to jump. Do I want to jump? Well, no, I'm really having a good time," or, "I'm making too much money to go," or whatever. "I've got a good assignment coming up," or whatever. So there was always a reason, most of it having to do with being pragmatic again, I was enjoying myself or I was comfortable or—

TS: Good economic security.

PM: Yeah, exactly.

TS: Benefits, all that.

PM: And when I was a captain, I had a—a wonderful mentor who was a colonel—full colonel. She was one of the very few full colonels who worked at the Pentagon. I don't know how we got together, how we ever hit it off, but she told me at that time—and she—she would come around and lecture women—

TS: Where were you in your career at this time?

PM: I was at—Let's see. I was a captain so I would have been at, maybe, George Air Force Base [California].

TS: Oh, it's okay. You were a captain—

PM: Yeah.

TS: —so you're—

PM: Yeah, I was a cap—I was a—a—I was—

TS: For around eight years?

PM: Yeah, between four and ten years.

TS: Okay.

PM: Somewhere in there; about eight probably; good enough. And she told me, as a captain in the military I was in the—I forget what—upper ungodly-percentage of women earners. I'd only been in the air force for a few years and I was already, because the military—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Compared to—

PM: Compared to the—to the—

TS: —demographics of—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: —civilian world. Yes, exactly.

TS: —women in the United States?

PM: Of women workers in the United States.

TS: Interesting. So—

PM: I was in—

TS: —you were up at the top?

PM: Way up at the top, yeah, just—just as a captain.

TS: Wow.

PM: So that—

TS: This would have been maybe in George—George Air—

PM: George sounds right; California.

TS: So the early eighties, actually? Sometime in the early eighties, then, that probably was?
I'm just trying to get the timeframe—

PM: Yeah.

TS: —for when she was saying that. So okay, she said you were in the top tier of the women earners, just in the United—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: Yeah.

TS: —American work—American female workers?

PM: Right.

TS: How did that—What'd you think about that?

PM: Made me really think, yeah. I mean, I felt very proud that I was be—that I was able to do that. I was very gratified that—Well, I'm not sure.

I was very proud of it, really. I didn't—I hadn't thought about the money I made as being unusual. I didn't have a lot to base it on; I hadn't done a lot of research. I knew I

was lucky to be where I was and doing what I was and making the money I was making, but I didn't—hadn't really researched it, and she really opened my eyes to it. She, sort of, made—Her career was, kind of, a woman's liaison officer for the air force, and she would go around to bases and bring all the women together and—and talk to us about women in the military, and what we could expect, and the things we had to deal with, and so forth and so on. She was really good and she—we hit it off. I think maybe I invited her home to dinner or something when I first met her and—and we got to know one another, and—and followed—we followed one another in our careers for quite some time before we lost track. I guess she probably retired and we lost track. But she was—she was really nice to have. I was really grateful to have her.

TS: Did you have any other mentors?

PM: Not really. My—My husband helped me a lot. He was a—He was one—Well, when we met I was a captain and he was a major., and then when he retired, he retired at the Pentagon as a lieutenant colonel, and then I retired some years later as a lieutenant colonel. So we retired at the same rank but when we met we were one rank apart. And he had been in for quite a—quite a number of years longer than I had and was a support officer—he wasn't a—a pilot—and I was a support officer so he was very helpful to me from that point on to deal with the bureaucracy in—not as a woman but just as an officer in—in the military. He was a good mentor for many years.

TS: You had said that when—when it was—you guys were figuring out—when you were first married—that you needed to kind of change career fields too. We said that off tape, though. You want to talk about that a little bit?

PM: Oh yeah, okay. Yeah. When I went to Florida I had made—finally made the jump—finally managed to get myself out of that disaster preparedness career field and into something related to what I was trained in, in biology. I became, what was called, an Environmental Planner Biologist at the Air Force, at the time, Civil Engineering Center [now called Air Force Civil Engineer Support Agency] at Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida. And we were on, what—a brand new concept. The air force had put together a team of pilots and scientists—biologists—to build what they dubbed the Bird[/Wildlife] Aircraft Strike Hazard Team, and the acronym was BASH. We were the BASH Team. We got to be world famous, and I became known as the cr—The Flash from—for Bash, at one point—but anyway.

TS: How did you get to be The Flash?

PM: I can't remember. It was just some—some silly—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: That sounds, like, too interesting to pass up. [chuckling]

PM: I don't even remember how it came up. It was prob—I wasn't the only wom—I was the only military woman on the team, I wasn't—there was one other woman on the team.

TS: Yeah?

PM: But it was just—We all got along except that one man that I told you about. We all got along pretty well, and we teased and played tricks on one another. It was probably just some silly nickname.

TS: Okay.

PM: Although in Thailand, when I had the jeep and I would respond to emergencies, the com—the base commander, who was the on-scene commander for any emergency—not the overall wing commander, it was the base commander who was the on-scene commander—and he and I got along real well, and he—he dubbed me the Cr—the—he dubbed me Crash McCracken, because I had this jeep and I would come barreling up and—

TS: [chuckling]

PM: —screeching to a halt, and he just got a big kick out of that, so I had that nickname for a long time.

TS: That's cute.

PM: Anyway, the—

TS: The BASH Team.

PM: The BASH Team. I had—Let's see. Wait a minute; hold on a second. That's where I met my husband. Yes, I made the jump, out of disaster preparedness into biology and got to go all over the world for a couple of years doing field biology research, which sounds wonderful and it was wonderful for the first six months to a year, and then it got to be—we were doing the same thing over and over and over again. It was so rote, it was so sad. It seemed so wonderful that I could do it, but I could do it in my sleep after a while because we never did—we went to a different place but the problems were always the same. The aircraft at that base were having too many bird strikes, while they were in the air. You kill people that way. You—You crash airplanes that way. One airplane costs a huge amount of money. So, “We've got to do something,” the air force said, “to fix this,” or, “The military base has all these airplanes in the hangars and the pigeons are pooping all over the airplanes, which is corrosive as all get out, and so we've got to repaint all these airplanes. That costs tons of money, so we need somebody to tell us what to do; fix this problem.” So we were the experts; the—the Pros from Dover, sort of.

TS: What'd you do with the pigeons?

PM: We just made sure that—that it was an inhospitable environment for them; inhospitable environment. We put—There was—There was some kind of a pa—spray that you could put of that was kind of off-putting for them. There were also—I forget what they were called but at the time you could—you could get these little prickly wires that you could wrap around rafters to make it uncomfortable for them to roost.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: For them to land and roost; okay.

PM: Yeah. So we just—we just moved them. We didn't kill them; we never killed them. We just made it uncomfortable or inhospitable for them to be—for the birds on [unclear] bases when—on certain days when it's overcast. Tons of—Hundreds of thousands of seagulls, if you're anywhere near the coast, or in Utah; there were tons of gulls in Utah, believe it or not. Gulls would land and just sit on that flat expanse of runway, and that really—you can't take off through a flock of birds. You'll—You'll suck them in the engines. If you're higher than that they'll crash through your window. You got all kinds of problems.

So what we would do then is—we had this dead gull fabricated, and we had recorded calls of distress—gulls in distress. We had a little—little vehicle. We couldn't have taken that with us; I don't—We must have had some sort of recording device that any vehicle could—could use. But we would—we would drive out to the area where the birds were, throw the dead gull out the window, and start squawking, turn the recorder on and have all these distress calls, and the gulls would—would hightail it out of there, until they got acclimated; eventually they get acclimated. Crows were hard to get rid of because they're so smart.

But for—for air strikes we would—the pilot on the team would—he was the team leader, of course, being the air force—he would analyze the flight routes and where—where they were going—where the cr—the near misses or the actual—

TS: Hits?

PM: —bird—bird strikes were happening and f—and real—decide what kind of—we'd go out and pace it off or drive it off or fly it off or whatever ourselves. And sometimes there would be cliffs in the area. They were getting too close to the cliffs where the birds were getting an updraft or something, so we—he would give them alternate routes that they could get their training done. These were all training missions they were on. They could get their training—the same training done in a different area so they didn't expose themselves to these problems, because you're not going to get rid of the birds. You [sic] got to change your habits; the birds are not going to change theirs, unless you kill them,

and we're not in the business of killing birds. Most of them are protected anyway, you couldn't kill them, so—and we did this all over the world. Spain and Turkey were two really fun overseas jobs we had.

But there was just a set of problems, and after you'd been doing that long enough you got through the set, you started repeating yourself. The reports were all the same. They got to be, almost, a fill in the blank kind of thing; if this, then this. And I got bored. I loved it at first, I just adored it, and the tra—the traveling. We were—We were gone for two or three weeks, back home for two or three weeks, gone for two or three weeks, back home, and when you're gone nobody does your work, so when you get back you've got a pile of work on your desk that you've got to plow through, and turn in all your vouchers and all that. By the time you get through that it's time to go off again. So that got old. And so, that was the only assignment I—I did—I had doing actual biological work.

From there, that's—that's when I—we got married and I made the switch into public relations; public affairs.

TS: Public relations. Did you enjoy the public relations work?

PM: I did. I enjoyed it a lot. I loved the work. I loved the diversity of it, because you didn't have to do the same thing. I had a newspaper I could write or edit for, I had a magazine I could produce. Some places I had a TV—or radio show that I could do; the speeches to write for the commander to give. I could go do all kinds of things with community leaders; meet the—do news releases for the press, have press tours on the base; just a ton of stuff you could do.

And Andrews Air Force Base, when I was—this was—I went from Florida to California to Maryland, to Andrews. Andrews was the—

TS: Eighty-two to '85?

PM: Right, the presidential air fleet is there, and any time the president or members of Congress go anywhere on an airplane, they go out of Andrews Air Force Base. So it's, sort of, ground central for the presidential press corps [White House Press Corps]. Some go with the president and some stay on the ground and cover the departure and the arrival, and I was in charge of those people that stayed on the ground, and—and making sure that the ones who were going with him were properly taken care of before they boarded the aircraft.

And [Ronald Wilson] Reagan was president at the time, I think the entire time I was there, and he was such a—I didn't—I don't like his politics, but he was the most charismatic, almost magical, man I have ever seen. I never got to meet him, but I swear to you, it felt like—and probably everybody in that crowd felt this way, but it felt like after a while—when I would go out I would be on this—in this press pen, we called it. We actually made a little corral for the press; they were not allowed out of it while the president was in the vicinity.

When he would get out of the helicopter—or Marine One [call sign of any United States Marine Corps aircraft carrying the President of the United States], the helicopter, and he'd wave and he'd walk over and he'd talk to the commander, and he'd get up on

the—on Air Force One and wave again, it would be like he was looking right at me and waving at me. I swear it was that feeling. He couldn't have been that way, but it felt that way every time he went anywhere; every time I was out there. It was like he would look for me and he would find me and he would—he would react with me. It was the weirdest thing. The man was magic; he really was. I could see why he would be so successful as a politician. He just mesmerized people. He made them think things were happening that couldn't have been happening. It was amazing.

And one time, one photographer that I—I got to know pretty well, and he was a really good, award winning photographer, took pictures of—What was it? He was taking pictures of—of the plane—I guess Air Force One—when it was taking off, and the president, and so forth and so on. They were all black and white. And as the plane was taking off, he switched quickly—he switched cameras, or reloaded his camera with color film, and I said, “Why—” later on I said, “Why'd you do that.”

And he said, “In case—I want to catch the fireball in color.”

I thought, “Wow, that—” I guess if you're in the game that long you learn you got to be prepared for anything, and if that plane crashed on departure, by God, he was going to have the color photo of it.

TS: Oh my gosh.

PM: Isn't that—It gives me goose bumps just thinking about it. So anyway. There was a lot of terrorism scares when I was at Andrews, and so I had to think about that; what I would do if something happened while I was on the—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Well, your disaster preparedness helped you—

PM: No, then I was—Well, yeah, but we didn't talk about terrorists—terrorism when I was in disaster preparedness, funny—

TS: Okay.

PM: —oddly enough. That was not the Homeland Security part that we ever had to deal with, because there wasn't anything. There was no worry about terrorism, it was all the enemy; the—the Russ—the Soviets.

TS: The big enemy.

PM: The big enemy, the big enemy, yes, or airplane crashes, or tornadoes; natural disasters; chemical, nuclear warfare, or airplane crashes.

TS: Okay.

PM: So terrorism was—was—

TS: Was on the radar?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: —just starting, and—or the worry was just starting, and I had to think about what I would do if something were to happen while the president or one of the congressmen or some—or somebody was in close quarters with us addressing the press, or sometimes the president would come over and say something to the—the reporters and answer a few questions, and I had to think, “What’s around me, who’s around me, how close am I, what—how would I protect the president if I had to?” And of course, he had Secret Service all around him, too, but you really have to think about weird things like that.

TS: Well, of course, he—he had been shot, just after get—getting elected in early Mar—Was it March of ’82; something like that?

PM: Yeah, okay.

TS: I don’t remember what month it was.

PM: I’m not sure what the sequence is either.

TS: It was early.

PM: But it—But yeah, it was—

TS: Early after—

PM: It was—There was that, and we would have actual terror alerts on the base, and when those would happen the traf—we didn’t stop the president from going anywhere. He would come and go as—as he needed to, but the base would go, kind of, on lockdown. And then’s when you would start—your radar would go up and you’d start thinking, “Well, what if somebody got on the base?” and what would happen and what would you do, and all those sort of things, so you sort of had to be on edge and thinking about everything, and not just—just keeping house; just—just keeping the—the reporters in their pen.

TS: Right.

PM: You had to think about other things when you’re on the flight line. I did that for several years and it was a good assignment.

TS: Well, tell me some more what you liked about—because we really haven't gotten into Utah. What was it you liked about that?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: Yeah, Utah. Oh, that's—that's a funny story. Before we—When we—we had got that assignment, my—my husband was already retired so he was able to come with me as a contractor, and worked as a civilian contractor, I think, on the military base. And so, before we went we did some research on Utah and we knew it was a Mormon state; it's, like, ninety percent Mormon; the—the entire population; at that time anyway. And the Mormons are very different from anybody else; any—They're as different from the Judo-Chris—Judo—Judeo-Christian followers that you normally meet in the United States. The Mormons are as different from that as the Muslims are.

And so, we decided that we would treat going to Utah as if we were going to a foreign country, because the culture was going to be so different. And if you go to a foreign country you don't—you're smart enough, usually, not to let yourself get upset when things don't go the way you expect them to, or the way you're comfortable with. You just, kind of, roll with the punches and—and you accept the differences and you enjoy—you try to enjoy the differences.

And so, if we had gone to Utah not in that mindset, it would have driven us crazy. But as it was, we were—we were able to enjoy the difference in the culture. And it turns out one of the wonderful things about the Mormons is that they have a terrific work—work ethic. I had a—the biggest office I'd ever had, and I had a terrific job. I mean, the job, I had so much good stuff that I could do. The community was very pro-military so I was always welcomed in the community. I won some award there—Woman of the Year, something or other—as the base Public Affairs Officer with the community, and got along great with my commanders, and my people were so good at what they did. I came in—The guy ahead of—that had been there ahead of me had not really done a very good job and things were kind of ragged.

And so, I came in and was able to—to clean everything up that was—was ragged around the edges, and started—we started winning prizes and just—and the majority of my people were civilians, which was new to me. I'd been around civilians, of course, my whole career but I hadn't had that many working for me so that was kind of new. It's a different environment if you have civilians working for you than if you have military working for you.

TS: How's it different?

PM: Well, they just—they have a whole different set of rules that they are supposed to follow, and as the bo—you're not the parent anymore, you're the boss, and a boss has certain restrictions. There are many things you cannot do with or to a civilian subordinate that you can do without question to a military—or with a military—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Disciplinary type—

PM: Disciplinary things—expectations—

TS: Ordering—okay.

PM: You can order a civ—a military kid to come in at midnight and do whatever needs to be done. You don't do that to a civilian unless their job description calls for that kind of extra work. You—You don't—You just have to learn a whole new set of language and restrictions and rules and it's a different culture, basically, than it is with the military. And so, my main—my people were mostly civilians but they were—had been brought up as Mormons and they loved to work; they were—they loved to excel. And so, we had the best time. It was a great assignment.

I traveled around Utah and got to see some beautiful country. It was a—a strange place, a very primitive countryside. It's very—sort of, almost prehistoric in places, with the rocks and the petroglyphs and beautiful countryside; neat people.

TS: What is it—When you say that—how Mormons are so different.

PM: Yes.

TS: What—How—Can you explain what you mean by that?

PM: Well, they're very cloistered. The church—

TS: Okay.

PM: The church is the center of their universe—the LSD [Latter-day Saints] Church—and the church really tells them how to conduct their lives in every aspect, and if you're not a Mormon you're an outsider. And, for instance, I was in Utah for—I forget—four years, three years, and I never once was invited inside the home of a—There are—There are devout Mormons and there are, what is called, Jack Mormons; they were raised Mormons but they left the church. They still kind of call themselves Mormons but they don't—they don't practice so—and they're much more open. They don't mind having non-Mormons in their house. Mormons do not invite non-Mormons into their homes. The Mormons are ver—a very closed society, and even though I dealt all the time with these community leaders who were all Mormon and they were very welcoming and very wonderful people to be around, there was—there was a wall between us.

TS: It was like a business relationship?

PM: Yes, absolutely.

TS: Not a personal relationship.

PM: Absolutely, yeah. If they were Mormons there was no personal relationship at all. And it was just a very—very different kind of thing. I've never run across it anywhere except in a foreign country where you are the outsider. You don't share. But even then, most people in other countries welcome you into their homes. They—They're—They're happy to share with you. Mormons are not like that. They—They're nice people, they're some of the nicest people you'd ever want to meet, but they are closed as a society almost 100 percent to anybody who's not a Mormon. And—And so, that—I'm so glad we went in knowing that and expecting it and not being put off by it, because it could have been—in the office around—office environment it could have been kind—tension building, because usually you have all—you have cocktail parties or dinner parties and you invite your office, and your office has them and they invite you, and it's a very cordial, social environment off—off duty, but not in Utah; not so much in Utah.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: But that didn't happen? But you said this was your favorite tour?

PM: Because the job was so good. I had a—I had a real job, I was good at it, the commander let me do my job. I saw some big problems that came up, got promoted to lieutenant colonel because I was good at it. The people who worked for me were terrific. It just was, all in all, a terrific assignment; that's why. Not because it was a wonderful place to be and it was the most beautiful place I've ever been, but because the job was so good, and I went from there to the worst—

TS: Right, the one in Alaska?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: The contrast—

TS: Right.

PM: In retrospect—I knew it was good at the time, but in retrospect I realize how really good it was because—because of the contrast with the job in Alaska being so awful, and the timing be so bad. We were looking over our shoulders constantly because the Cold War had ended, we had won, now what on earth do we do with these millions of people we

have in the military that we don't need anymore, and cuts started right and left and people were just paranoid about their job. They were—They were much more concerned with their career than they were with doing the job; protecting their career than doing the job. And so, you—it was so hard to get anything done.

TS: People started becoming really insecure about losing that—

PM: Very insecure.

TS: —the security?

PM: The mid-grade[?] people.

TS: Okay.

PM: The people between four years, who were going to get out anyway probably, and—

TS: Like, twelve years?

PM: —ten, twelve years, yeah.

TS: And you have to—

PM: Two—You've invested an awful lot and you—by then you probably are planning to stay and make it a career, so you're thinking, "Well, I'll be able to retire. I'll get benefits," and so forth, and all of a sudden you're out on your can. Or you may be out on your can because they're looking to cut X number of people out of the force before such and such, and so you're desperate to protect yourself however you need to, and that made for some very uncomfortable situations, and that was part of the dislike. And I didn't like my commanders there.

TS: Right.

PM: I probably shouldn't say that on the record, but it was true. I just—

TS: Well, you're not mentioning any names.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: They didn't like me and I didn't like them; yeah. They've both been in the—in national news since—since then. One of them—the one that I kept seeing for a while on TV—was—was in a helpful capacity, the other guy was in a—in a scandal capacity.

But anyway, Alaska would have been a wonderful assignment if I had enjoyed myself on the job. I've always been like that. If I'm not enjoying what I'm doing I can't enjoy everything else around me, and if I love my job, then no matter where I am I enjoy it. If I don't love my job, then I can't really enjoy them. Alaska would have been a wonderful assignment if I had been happy in my work, but I couldn't wait to get out of there; I could not wait to leave.

TS: So that was kind of a catalyst for you retiring too?

PM: Exactly. I—I—If it had been a good assignment, like the Utah assignment, I would—I had always wanted to retire at twenty. I wanted to retire at twenty, and having come in late I wanted to retire by the time I was fifty, and that—that was the only goal I had. I didn't have any lofty goals of what all I wanted to, that was just two things I really wanted to be able to do. And come to find out when I was fat, dumb, and happy in Utah and something like eighteen months from the time when I could retire at twenty years, I get a call from headquarters saying, "Oh, by the way, you haven't been overseas in this many years—since Thailand; haven't had an overseas assignment; you're supposed to have one periodically in your career. So you're going to have to go overseas." And the—the problem is, once you take an assignment you can't—you have to commit to that re—that assignment, and these were all—the ones that I was offered were all—Well, I don't know if they were all, but the one I ended up with in Alaska was a four year assignment.

TS: That was considered overseas?

PM: Four year—And that was considered overseas, yes. For logistics purposes, the military considers Hawaii and Alaska, both, overseas assignments, and so you get overseas credit for it.

TS: I see.

PM: It's difficult—It's just difficult to live—And—And especially in Alaska it's very difficult to live there because of the logistics, and so they are considered overseas. And I was given the choice of Hawaii, which I didn't want because I'd—I'd been there briefly on some short business trips and I—it was beautiful but the weather, the humidity, and the bugs just—I knew if I lived there I—it would drive me crazy; just drive me crazy. So I didn't want Hawaii. My other option was Korea. I wanted nothing to do with Korea. I didn't want to go through a Korean winter; they are brutal. So I did some checking and Alaska—people who had been to Alaska liked it, they thought it was great, so—and these were mostly hunters and fisherman.

TS: Right.

PM: Paradise. So—And my husband was a hunter and a fisherman so it just seemed ideal. And so, we went and then the—the cuts started coming at my—at the two year point in

the four year commitment, so when they were looking for volunteers before they made the serious cuts I put my hand up and said, “I’ll go,” and I was able to get out of the four year assignment, and —and—because I was so miserable I was—just couldn’t wait to get out of Alaska. So we—we spent a few more months there getting prepared for the—and this was retirement; I retired from there. Then we bought an RV [recreational vehicle] and toured the country for four months looking for the ideal place to retire.

TS: Where’d you end up?

PM: Whidbey Island, Washington; paradise; loved it.

TS: That’s beautiful there.

PM: Spent fifteen years there before I moved back here. I miss it every day.

TS: I bet you do. I bet you do.

PM: So.

TS: Well, let me ask you a question—a little bit about—

PM: Okay.

TS: Did you have any—Well, tell me a little bit about how housing accommodations changed over time. I know you got married so you probably had different things with that, but you said at one point you were in, like, a dormitory type—

PM: Right. When I was in Thailand it was a dormitory. You had to live on base and you had to live in whatever they had on the base, and for women they had a dormitory arrangement, and for the men they had, what they call, the hooches, with duplex types, and they were—it seems like they were on stilts. I mean, it was very exotic looking. We were just in a old frame dormitory and—

TS: Even as an officer?

PM: Even as an officer, yeah. They—All the women were housed together.

TS: Okay.

PM: Civilian, military, officer, enlisted, because there were so few of us it just didn’t make sense to separate us. The—The—The insect—The reptile and insect life there was fascinating.

TS: I bet.

PM: Oh, we had these—We had resident geckos. You could not live anywhere without having geckos in and out, because everything—there were no—everything was screened in. It was—It was not closed up like it is in the States; no—not much glass, it was all screen—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Screens?

PM: —and shuttered, and I mean, when the storms came you had to shutter things, but then as soon as the storms left you could open everything up, and even at night everything was open, screened in, and so you could hear all the lizards and geckos making their weird cries, and the—the little guys could just come and go, but the buildings were all old so they had all kinds of holes in them and God knows what all came and went, but the geckos were just—they were friendly, they—they ate insects, so we didn't mind having them around. And the cockroaches were gigantic. We used to claim that you could harness them and ride them to town because they were so big. And they flew. They flew quite happily, and that was the worst thing about the assignment.

TS: Could you smell them?

PM: No, not those. There were other bugs. The—The locals had some strange culinary customs. They—What they called rice bugs—I don't know what they really were—they were enormous beetles of some sort, and they ate them. They loved them; they were a delicacy. They would pull off their legs and suck out their insides. And these—

TS: Raw?

PM: Raw. These were mostly peasants, or low level workers, who would come on the base and—cleaners and people who didn't have much money, didn't get much money, didn't have access to a lot of other food, and this was a local delicacy. The mangos there were absolutely out of this world. You—I've never had a better mango.

TS: Probably can't even buy one in a store now to—

PM: No.

TS: No.

PM: No, just not the same. Anyway, it was—it was never a dull moment in Thailand—

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

PM: —with the insects.

TS: And so, your other housing—Did you—

PM: Oh, the housing, yes; we were talking about housing.

TS: That's okay. Did you—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: When I—

TS: —have, like, any officer—basic—What is that?—Bachelor Officers' Quarters?

PM: Yes. When I first went to Oklahoma I lived in the Bachelor Officers' Quarters—BOC—BOQ.

TS: BOQ.

PM: BOQ. Yeah, the visiting officer were VOQ, and if you went TDY [temporary duty] someplace you—and stayed on base you stayed in the Visiting Officers' Quarters.

TS: Right.

PM: But the base officer quarters, it was like a small apartment and it was furnished; everything was furnished for you. You had to buy your food—your meals, but your uniforms—I think as officers we had to buy our uniforms but we were given a uniform allowance.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Stipend? Right.

PM: And you had to buy your meals and any extra things, but I don't think—If you lived off base you got a housing allowance; a family who lived off base got a housing allowance. And senior officers, I think, were allowed to live off base even if they weren't married with families. But those of us who were not given an allowance to live off base, we would have to pay that out of our pocket, or if we lived on base we didn't have to pay anything. And the quarters were not bad. They were basic but not bad.

Let's see. Then—That was Oklahoma. Then I went from there to Thailand, then came back to Florida. I think I—I lived off base in Florida and I was able to get—Yeah, I was only a captain but I was able to get a housing allowance. It didn't cover all my rent,

but I lived off base in an apartment. And then when we got married, we—we had—both of us had housing allowances and we bought a house, and our housing—our mortgage payment, which we thought was exorbitant, was something like six hundred dollars a month back in the seventies—late seventies.

TS: Well, the interest rates were a lot higher then.

PM: Yeah. Yeah. In fact, we had to take out—One of the houses, I think the one in California, we ended up having to take out a second mortgage because, yeah, things were tight. But anyway—

TS: So mostly you lived off base?

PM: Mostly, yeah. Once I got married we lived off base from then on.

TS: Okay.

PM: Yeah.

TS: Were there any—Was there any particular award or—that you received—decoration or award that you received that was memorable to you?

PM: Not really. I—I have a stack of the ones that you just have to be breathing and—and there and you get them. I think I got something as I got more senior and I—I won several awards and I got some kind of—on leaving I was given some kind of special—but nothing—nothing out of the—nothing extraordinary; nothing that I would be very proud to wear. My—My ex got the bronze star when he was in Vietnam, and he always wore it on his civilian coat lapel. If we went out and did anything with the civilian community, he would always wear his bronze star—his little pin that they give you, that if you're not wearing the medal on your uniform, you have a little pin that you wear that signifies it, and he always wore it but he would never talk about it. I have no idea why he was given the bronze star; something he did in Vietnam that was meritorious beyond—

TS: But you never knew what he—

PM: But I never knew what. He never told me.

TS: Interesting.

PM: He would not tell me. It must have been bad because he would not tell me. It must have been traumatic, but he never told me. But I never got anything like that, for that kind of service, so they were all just—didn't really mean—

TS: Routine?

- PM: Yeah, more or less routine. If you did above and beyond the job you got some nice medals that you could wear on your uniform, but if you weren't in uniform, so what? And now, I don't even remember what they're called.
- TS: Okay. Now, did you—We had gone over some of the—You received a lot of training. Was there any special training or education that you'd like to talk about, as—as your career progressed, that you received?
- PM: Well, the communications training that I got at the University of Oklahoma, before I went into public affairs, was fascinating. I'd never done anything like that. We learned to—We learned public speaking and journalism and writing news releases and the—the journalism code of ethics, and I—Let's see, where was I? I guess it was when I was in Alaska, I finally became a member of PRSA, which is the Public Relations Society of America, which is a—it's an international society as well. Any public relations person who is willing to go way above and beyond just the job to complete a lot of pretty high standards requirements, and you have to be in the field for a certain amount of time, and you have to have done a certain types [*sic*] of things, and you have to take a really hard test. And then if you do all that—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

- TS: It's like a professional certification?
- PM: It is, yes.
- TS: Okay.
- PM: It's—It's not—Except among public relations people, it's not considered anything particularly unusual or—or—
- TS: But within—
- PM: —wonderful, but within the—
- TS: In the field, though.
- PM: In the field it's—it's respected pretty highly, and I—I got that while I was in—in Alaska, and got to know a lot of the local PR people, and enjoyed that. That was one of the more enjoyable things about being in Alaska. It was the first time I'd really gotten into a professional grouping off base when I did that. I'm sorry, what—
- TS: Did you ever finish your graduate degree?

PM: I did, but not in zoology. I finished my—In the air force, as with most military, you are only as current as your last degree; air force more than any other. Even enlisted people in the air force are highly educated people, and officers have to have at least a master's degree if you're going to be a senior officer, and if you're—you've got to have several degrees if you're going to go beyond colonel; O-6. So to make O-5, make beyond major, O-4—O-5, lieutenant colonel—I had to have a master's degree, or I probably wouldn't—I might have made it but that was—that was just a—another feather in your cap. So when I was at Scott Air Force Base—I guess it was—when I was in headquarters there, I finished a master's program in human resources, which is personnel management, and it was just—I did the work and I got the degree and I never used it. It was just something to have on my record.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Check on your checklist.

PM: Yeah, it was a—a check off thing. So I did get a master's but I never finished my master's in zoology.

TS: How did you see how attitudes towards women changed over the course—from the early seventies through the mid, early nineties, I guess, when you got out?

PM: You mean in society at large or in the military—

TS: Within the air force. Within your field that you were working in.

PM: Okay. Except for the few people I ran into along the way who just didn't like dealing with women for one reason or another, I never really—the changes were more obvious because of my rank than they were because of my gender.

TS: Can you explain why?

PM: As a junior officer you don't get much respect from anybody. Even the enlisted people don't respect you, and you don't respect yourself very much because you know you don't know anything yet, so even though you're an officer it doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman, you don't—nobody has much respect for you. As you get higher in rank, then you get more proficient and you get more authoritative and you get more legitimate, and so you are respected more by your subordinates, by your peers, and your sup—your superiors respect you more, and more is expected of you.

So I just—I didn't have the kind of jolting, traumatic harassment or any—even worse that women are subjected to in the military nowadays overseas—in—in Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance; the kind of peer rape that—that women are going through. I never heard of that when I was—The worst I ever heard of was what—was what that

young airman had had to put up with, going out—assuming she was doing her job, being part of the—the work that evening in this civilian group, and apparently a lot more was expected of her and she refused to do it and she got in hot water with her boss because of that. That was the worst thing I ever remember coming across when I was in the military.

But we weren't in any wars until I was in Utah. That was when the Middle East heat—heated up and—

TS: [Operation] Desert Storm [or The Gulf War]?

PM: Yeah, Desert Storm, and women in a combat environment, because we're not—it may be because we're not full-fledged members, not full-fledged, still, combat comrades be—until now nothing was open to women in combat. They did it but they didn't get the—the credit for it. They didn't get the money for it; they didn't get any of the medals for it; they didn't get any of the credit for it. But that—I didn't ever come across that kind of trauma. So it just got better for me as I got senior in rank, but I don't know that that had anything to do with changes in attitudes toward women.

TS: Do you think any opportunities were opening up for women during—over that course?

PM: Well, of course my—one of my classmates at—from officer training was the first woman—one of the first women to fly a military aircraft. She was selected to fly a—a—

TS: Transport?

PM: —transport air—yeah, transport; heavies, yeah. They wouldn't trust us at first. For a long, long time they wouldn't trust us with the—the little fast guys, but that was—right off the bat, that was when I was still in training, or just coming out of training, when that happened, and as I went along there were all kinds of opportunities that opened. Women were being made general for the first time in some of the services—the first one-star general, first two-star general—and got to be, in fact—About midway through my career, I was in public relations by then, it got to be—it got to the point where we actively avoided the term “first time woman” whatever. It just—

TS: In the public relations?

PM: In public—In writing an article for publication for the news—base newspaper. For news release off base we—we tried not to say that, because it had gotten to the point where women were doing so many things now that it just kind of—brought attention to the fact that we still weren't doing everything, if we just kept saying, “The first woman to do this.” It just made us seem more like second class citizens if we kept pointing out that this was the first time we'd ever been allowed to do this.

TS: Did it have anything to do, too, with resentment from the men, where they had been doing things—some of the jobs for a really long time and—

PM: Well, there was—the fact that we stopped saying—we tried to stop saying that didn't—to my knowledge, had nothing to do with any man's opinion of what was going on. There were men that did actively resent our taking certain jobs.

When I was in Thailand, in fact, one of the senior NCOs on the base—I forget what job he was in—but he said one day—and some kind—we were preparing for something, maybe it was the—the USS [SS] *Mayaguez*, and the base was—was going into a combat mode, and I was in a meeting as the disaster preparedness officer. I was in some kind of meeting planning for that, and this one senior NCO said something to the effect that, “Well, we don't—We shouldn't even have the women here because they don't carry guns so they're no good to us. They're not—They're just going to be a—a burden.”

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Burden?

PM: “We shouldn't have them here. They should all go home,” or something like that. He obviously had a serious issue with women being in the military. But that was the worst remark I ever came across.

TS: Well, my—More what I mean is that sometimes I have read that the publicity that women got for particular jobs—

PM: Oh.

TS: —like being the first pilot or first—

PM: Those individual women came under hellish conditions from their peers, yes, and they more than anyone would wish that we would quit saying “first” because it just pointed to the men—again, it made the men more conscience of the fact that this woman was special, and she got—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: And that's something that men had been doing for a long time.

PM: Yes, and—

TS: That's more what I meant.

PM: Yes, that's true, and that was mostly, like, pilots, because most jobs—except for combat oriented jobs, most jobs when I came in—most of the support jobs were open to women. It was the flying jobs that were still not—

TS: Yes.

PM: —not all open to women, and combat was not open, but I know—I know the women—and it still happens; women astronauts. Any job when it's first opened to women, those women are just put through hell.

TS: Well, do you think there's any job that women shouldn't do? Not just in the air force but in the military, like infantry or Special Forces or anything like that?

PM: Well, it—Yes and no. I personally would not want to be in a combat job, because I know—not because I wouldn't want to be in combat, but because I know how resentful the men still are and—and the kind of stresses you'd be under because of your peers. You might be the only woman in a unit and that would be almost untenable. I cannot imagine living in a—a unit that didn't really want you there, and being a woman. I just—I don't think I would be willing to do that. Women do it, women volunteer for it, and I—I—my hat's off to them, but I wouldn't want to go through what they're going through.

TS: But—You're kind of describing the same scenario that other firsts have gone through, so if there's not a first then there can't be the second, third, fourth, and fifth.

PM: That's true. That's true.

TS: Where it becomes more—a better environment.

PM: Yes, and—and when I first came in the air force I guess I was one of those. I was the first woman at a lot of places to do some—I was the first woman officer who'd ever been at my first base, Vance Air Force Base. The second—The first time two women had ever been assigned to that base at the same time. And I was the first a lot of times, and I got grief for it. It wasn't a high—It wasn't always a high visibility first so I didn't get a lot of—

TS: Publicity?

PM: —goodies that men—the men who had done it forever were not getting.

TS: Right.

PM: But even that made me uncomfortable so I can't—I can't really—I can't speak to it since I never went through it, but I know it must be terrible. You have to have a really, really strong ego and strong sense of self and strong sense of self-worth to be able to put up with that and not—not just give up and leave, just quit, because it just get—would get so

hard. When I think about the training—the stress and so forth under—during training, and the—the stresses I was in in Thailand with just—just the attention—the kind of constant attention I was given, and—and put all that in a really negative sort of environment, I—just what I’ve been exposed to, I can’t imagine going through that.

TS: Like a pressure cooker, sort of.

PM: Yeah, and a constant press—pressure cooker, just—I—I wouldn’t—If I had it to do over I might happily jump into the middle of one of those, but looking back on it and looking at the women who are doing it now, I don’t envy them at all.

TS: Do you think that the women’s movement shaped your views at all?

PM: Oh yeah, sure.

TS: How?

PM: Well, I was a feminist early on. I was right in the thick of it when it started. Betty Friedan and all the—the—

[Betty Friedan was the author of the well-known 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*.]

TS: [unclear]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: —goddesses of feminism, I felt like they were my big sisters. So the—the woman’s movement was very instrumental in probably my having the nerve to—to go in the military. I might not have—even with this friend who had done it, I might not have thought about doing it, not seriously, if I—if the woman’s movement hadn’t been really strong during that time. And we really thought we could do anything. There was no doubt that we could do it—do things, just whether we wanted to or not, that was the only deciding factor. And it’s—it’s—You’ve heard this, I’m sure, I hear it from a lot of people, it’s sad that today’s young women don’t understand that, don’t appreciate it, because they haven’t been put through that pressure cooker. They take for granted—Just like any generation does, they take for granted the things that they have, and until you start taking those things away from them they don’t really appreciate them. And I suspect the political climate, the way it has become in the last few years, has made a—some young women start thinking about it in a different light because women—there’s really been a war on women, I think, in politics, and we don’t like it.

TS: Well, a lot of women in the military are considered more conservative and don't—even in the eras that you were in, did not want to be called feminists. I mean, you're identifying as a feminist—

PM: Yes.

TS: —but many women in the military—

PM: Yeah.

TS: —reject that particular term.

PM: It never—I don't remember it coming up with me. I mean, you didn't talk—If you sensed that something was not popular, if you—if you kind of got—overhearing a conversation, men talking about feminists in a derogatory term, then you didn't—unless you wanted harassment you didn't say, “Oh, I'm a feminist. What's wrong with that?” Unless you want to go looking for a fight you don't bring it up.

TS: Another example of situational—

PM: Right, ex—Yes.

TS: —behavior in certain groups. Okay.

PM: And—And defusing a situation; you have a choice to make. And I—And it's—I don't consider it lacking in courage, not bringing things like that up. You got the job done anyway—

TS: Yes.

PM: —and you got recognition for doing a good job and you were a woman and not many women had ever done that before, so you kind of got the—the message out there without being a pain in the butt about it.

TS: What did you think about the—the first Gulf War?

PM: The first—

TS: The first Gulf War; the Desert Storm.

PM: Oh, the first Gulf—Well, I was—I guess I was in the conservative military mode at the time and I was very supportive of the president, what he was doing. I felt like he—we really needed to be there, we really needed to do it, and I volunteered—I was in Utah—volunteered to go over but they weren't taking any women. I don't know if it was just in my career field in public relations or if they weren't taking any military women in

any field at that time. Things were just too hard on women at the time. Later they did accept women in various positions but it was still miserable; they couldn't—

TS: Was it in the [Operation] Desert Shield part—

PM: Yeah.

TS: —that you volunteered, before the actual—

PM: I guess.

TS: —hostilities broke out.

PM: I forget what—They didn't even—

TS: It was like the summer of—like, August of '90—What was it, '91, and then through the—and then the beginning of the next year is when we had the actual hostilities.

PM: It must have been early on. They weren't—At the very beginning they didn't even ask for public relations, public affairs officers to go over. They—They weren't concerned with public affairs in the beginning, in the middle—in the heat of it. Once things had kind of sorted themselves out then they decided they needed public relations, so they were getting public relations people over there, and then they decided—that's when I volunteered and they weren't taking women so I couldn't go.

TS: I see.

PM: Later on they did take women in various things and the women were really second class citizens. Military women were really second class citizens when they went to the—to an assignment in the Middle East because they—women were under such constraints that any time they dealt with locals, on base or off, they had to be so circumspect, they couldn't drive off base, they had to wear those idiotic hoods, just—it was miserable for them. So I was kind of glad, retrospectively—

TS: That you didn't have to go?

PM: —that I didn't have to go. Plus, I'm kind of prone to respiratory problems, and the dust and the chemicals—So many people came back from that so sick, I know it would have been life threatening for me, probably, if I'd gone over. I'm glad—I'm very glad now that I didn't, but I was very disappointed that I couldn't go.

TS: At the time?

PM: Yes.

TS: What are your thoughts on the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and homosexuals in the military in general?

PM: I think it’s past time. I’m very happy to see it. Yeah, I thought—I thought [President William “Bill” Jefferson] Clinton was wrong to do it in the first place and—and everybody was wrong to keep it there for so long. I was very glad when [Vice President Joseph Robinette] Joe Biden opened his big mouth and put the pressure on President [Barack Hussein] Obama to do something. Yeah, it’s past time for that.

TS: Did you work with any lesbians or gay men?

PM: I’m sure I did, and there was—they—there was no difference. You didn’t—You didn’t—You didn’t know—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: But no one—Like, the—

PM: It was not overt.

TS: Okay.

PM: No, it was not overt. If they were—I mean, some cases they were civilians who had a—had a very rich civilian life and—I don’t know—they were probably more flamboyant and did more things than the military people did. It was not allowed at the time so you—you didn’t let people know that—that you were gay, male or female, but I don’t have any doubt that I worked daily, probably, with—with gays and lesbians, and it just didn’t matter; it did—you did your job.

The military has a different mindset about work; about their job; the mission. You think of things in terms of mission, not just what I have to work at today, or what my job is. And when you—when you think like that you really don’t think about—I’m sorry, I’m getting emotional. I’m an emotional person and this was—this plagued me throughout my military career. When I had to discipline a subordinate—

TS: Oh.

PM: —I’d have to preface the situation with, “Now, I will probably start crying in the middle of this—”

TS: [chuckles]

PM: “—but do not take that for weakness because I am serious about this,” and invariably I would cry, so this is—this is a cross I have to bare. For no good reason, I—things—I cry at commercials; I’m just one of those people.

TS: Well, it took you a few hours to get there, so you’re doing good.

PM: Oh, yeah, I did, didn’t I? But anyway.

TS: Do you want to take a break or are you okay?

PM: Oh, what time is it? It is getting kind of late, isn’t it?

TS: Well, we’re almost done.

PM: Are we.

TS: Yeah.

PM: Okay. No, I don’t want to take a break.

TS: Okay.

PM: Anyway, you just think in terms of mission; you don’t think personally. Maybe kids do now more, like Bradley Manning probably—he was—poor guy had apparently a lot of issues he was dealing with, and he thought a lot in terms of himself, I think, and—and what he needed to do aside from the mission, or outside of the mission, and that’s why he stole all those documents. But for the most part, people in the military, no matter what your gender, no matter what your sexual persuasion or religious beliefs or anything, they are secondary to the mission. And so, you just don’t worry about it. You might suspect somebody is something, but if they work—if they do their job and they support the mission properly, you don’t—you don’t worry about it. At least I never had to and I don’t know anybody who did. There might be some bigots that just—just would work hard to get that person out of their office or out of their unit, but I never ran into any of that with any of the people who worked for me or—or any of the people I worked for who saw my people. I just—It was never an issue for me. But I know—Given the demographics, I know I had to have worked with gays and lesbians; no big deal.

TS: Now, this is another question we kind of had talked about but not directly. Do you consider yourself a trailblazer at all? At the time you were in did you see yourself that way?

PM: I did not.

TS: And then now looking back?

PM: Looking back, I suppose I was, given—again—the demographics. The women were so tiny and under such quotas. You couldn't—You—Well, I know I was under a quota when I was recruited. There could only be so many people—women recruited, there could probably be only so many women allowed into a training class. Those—That situation makes me feel like I might have been a bit of a trailblazer, but I never did anything overtly that made me—made me a trailblazer. I won awards and I got various things for that, but—recognition and so forth, but I never—I never set out to blaze any trails.

TS: Well, rather than quotas, they were more like caps; like limits.

PM: Yeah, I guess.

TS: Instead of, like, needing—like—like saying, “We have to get four women to fill this,” it was like, “We can only have four women.”

PM: Well, and some—it might be quotas as well because recruiters are under all kinds of stresses to get—to—to meet their quotas.

TS: Yes. But it seems like they had a lot more women—

PM: They did have a lot more women wanting the job than they had.

TS: Right.

PM: Yes.

TS: So that's why I brought up—

PM: You're right. I think probably both—some of both.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, yeah. No, I don't disagree that there weren't quotas.

PM: They had a quota but the quota was exceeded by the cap, usually; yeah, you're right.

TS: So just because you were talking about the limitations a little bit, that's why I thought—

PM: Right; yeah.

TS: Did you—Have you had any experiences with the Veterans Administration at all?

PM: Not really. I—I did—did try to—or did use the VA a couple times for medical and dental, and I was very happy I didn't have to rely on it because it was just more of a bureaucracy than the military medical system is, and so—so crowded, so undermanned, so poorly equipped, it's just—I—I really feel for the people who are forced to rely on it. It's—It's an antiquated system, as far as medical care is concerned. It's catching up slowly but that takes money and money's not coming these days.

TS: Would you recommend the military to young women today?

PM: Absolutely not.

TS: Why not?

PM: Because of what's—women are going through in today's military. Until—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: The sexual abuse?

PM: Up until and after I—way after I retired—

TS: Yes.

PM: —I was a proponent—I would tell any young woman who thought she might be interested, “Go for it. You can do great things. You can do things you would never get to do. Not just go places and see things but do things; jobs.” But I wouldn't do that anymore. Women are—Women are being treated like animals in some places in today's military, and if you go in the military you are going to end up in those places, men and women, and men have the upper hand.

TS: In what places?

PM: In the place—In combat situations.

TS: Oh, okay.

PM: You're going to end up in combat one way or another no matter who you are, and if you end up in combat in a—the stresses that are on everybody in combat, not just the women, the men are under a lot of stress, and the worst qualities come out in those cases many times, and—and you're the weakest link in the chain; you're—you're a woman.

TS: So the sex—sexual abuse is what you're referring to?

PM: Sexual abuse, yes. I would never suggest a—to a young woman that she put herself in that situation, no. And I really am sorry about that.

TS: Well, do you think your life has been different because of the time that you spent in the air force?

PM: Oh yeah, it's been much richer. The people I know that I went to school with—

TS: That you grew up with?

PM: Yeah, that I grew up with, either they didn't go to college even, or if they went to college they just stayed close to home. My sister has never wanted to do—to leave Greensboro. She's been other places but she's never done it because she wanted to. And so, I've—I've had a much richer life. I've—I'm enjoying my retirement now thanks to the military. If I—I mean, I'm divorced. A thirty year marriage blew up in my face six years ago just out of the blue. Had I—And I hadn't worked in fifteen years, since I'd retired. Had I not had my military pension to fall back on, I—I guess I would have had to go on welfare, or get a job that I was no longer qualified for. I tried—In fact, I tried to find work when I got here, but after fifteen years not working, nobody wants to hire you. No matter what you did when you were active, nobody wants to hire you. So—

TS: So that was a—That pragmatism that you were talking about—

PM: Yeah.

TS: —really overcame[?] to actually be a good safety net for you.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes, very good; the—the pension, the medical. Before I got Medicare I was on Tricare For Life, and—or Tricare, I guess. Once Medicare kicked in it became Tricare For Life, but Tricare paid for—it was minimal fees that we had to pay, military—retired military pays a fee for—just like you pay for Medicare, you pay for Tricare; a small amount. Nothing like what the civilian force—workforce pays for their insurance premiums, and there were restrictions but it was wonderful; just wonderful care.

And so, I—I'm not rolling in dough and I don't do everything I'd like to do, but I'm quite comfortable, and unless Congress does something really, really draconian to benefits, I shouldn't have it—to worry about anything when I get really old, hopefully. So yeah, I would not be who I am or where I am now if it weren't for the military. So.

TS: Do you think there's anything in particular that you would want a civilian to know or understand, what it's like to serve in the military, that they might not understand or appreciate or have a misconception about?

PM: Like what? Now, you're a civilian. What—What do you—I mean, you know too much about it probably, more than I do, but—

TS: Well, if you ever hear conversations of people talking and—about the military, do you ever think, “Hmm, that’s not quite what I remember,” or—

PM: Well, in popular culture, yeah, there are a lot—you run—you read a book and there’s something written about a military person or—or a military situation and such and such, and you know that that wouldn’t happen. You see a movie or you see a TV show or you talk—you’re talking to somebody about a situation and—and they—the only knowledge they have is what they’ve seen in books and movies and TV, and they’re completely wrong about what they think would happen, or what they think did happen.

TS: Yes.

PM: But I don’t go out of my way to correct them.

TS: Well, what—You did kind of explain something earlier when you were talking about the differences between the job and a mission.

PM: Yeah.

TS: I mean, that’s—that’s one way that you—

PM: Yeah.

TS: —you had talked about it.

PM: Yeah, but you don’t go around talking about that to—unless somebody asks you specifically, like you are asking me to tell about this. It’s not something you start up a conversation using—

TS: No, right. Well, I didn’t say—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: —or even jump in and correct somebody if they’ve said something wrong.

TS: I think I said you would want, not—

PM: [laughing]

TS: —that you have to tell.

PM: I don't know.

TS: Or even, like, a—the sense of urgency of completing a task, like when it becomes five o'clock and it's the end of the day.

PM: Well, yeah, that's—that's something, and—and I don't know today's military. I've been out for twenty years now, so when I was in it was very different, and you could look at things that military people do publically now and that was not done; politically, religious activities, just the kind of active engagement that some military people—high level military people are doing, would never have been tolerated when I was in the military. So the culture has changed—the military culture has changed, and so the civilian culture sees a different military than what I knew.

TS: That's interesting, yeah.

PM: Yeah. So I don't really know. I—If I have an opportunity where it seems appropriate I will say that I'm a veteran. Sometimes it strikes up a conversation, sometimes it doesn't, but people just say, "Oh, that's nice. You don't look like a veteran," or something; something inane. But I don't talk about it a lot, except if I tell some story that something has happened and—and it—it triggers me and I think this—these people would enjoy—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: "When I was in Thailand—"

PM: Well, these people will enjoy this story—

TS: Yes.

PM: —I will throw it in, but otherwise I don't talk about my military service at all. So I don't know. I never have thought about what I wish the civilian world knew; "If only they knew this it would be so much better." I can't think because, like I say, the military now is so different from the military then, and I don't know that the average—even the average officer, much less the average enlisted person, thinks about the mission the way I did. Many of them do, I have no doubt, but I don't know that the majority do the way we did. I just don't know. I don't know today's military, except what I see on TV.

TS: Right, what you're getting in the popular culture.

PM: Right, exactly. I do probably a little more background research than most people do. When I hear something I double, triple check it to—to be sure I’m getting the right picture.

TS: That’s when your background—

PM: And that’s probably some of my military background, yeah. Yeah, you have to be precise in the military, you have to be sure you’re right, and to do that you’ve got to do background homework research. So I still do that. Plus, part of that’s the journalism and public relations job that I did too. You have—

TS: Getting it right?

PM: Yes, you have to get it right the first time, so I’d probably do that more.

TS: Well, what does patriotism mean to you?

PM: I don’t know. I don’t think much about patriotism. I think it’s misused in today’s political climate. It’s like a badge that people use—or cudgel that people use to beat people up with, so I—I don’t have a lot of things that I would want to say about patriotism. It’s—I joined the military for a pragmatic reason. I stayed in for a pragmatic reason. I’m thrilled with my situation now. Thank God I was pragmatic and—and had my eyes open when I did and so I did it, but I never joined to be a patriot. I never—I didn’t volunteer to go to the Middle East for—during Desert Shield and Desert Storm because I felt patriotic. I wanted to go because I wanted to experience it, I wanted to—That’s part of my job that I would never be able to do anywhere else, so I wanted to see what it was like; I wanted to be able to do it. So I’m not a good one to ask about that. I’m probably not a typical veteran, in that respect. I don’t—I don’t put a flag out when it’s the holiday, I don’t wave flags at parades, I don’t wear a flag pin, I don’t—I don’t do that. It’s—

TS: What does being a veteran mean to you then?

PM: I don’t know. I don’t know. [long pause] Sorry.

TS: That’s okay.

PM: I have something I want to say but I’m having trouble getting it out right now. Let me get myself under control.
 As a veteran—As a veteran officer—I can’t speak for enlisted personnel so I don’t know how they would feel, but as an officer I feel sort of—not—I don’t want to say elite, but I feel in many ways I am better equipped than a lot of people—most of the people I know—to deal with situations that come up, because the military taught me how to do it. [emotional] I think I’m winding down. [chuckles]

TS: It’s really the last question.

PM: Really?

TS: Yes.

PM: I don't wave flags but I'm very grateful that I'm a veteran.

TS: So it's—In some sense, it's the polititizite—politicalization [*sic*] of patriotism—

PM: Yeah.

TS: —that turns you off.

PM: Yes, very much so.

TS: But the idea of—of the service that you did for the country, you have a lot of—of pride in. Would that be a good characterization of your—

PM: I think so. I have a lot of feeling about that.

TS: Yeah? Because you—I mean, just sitting here with you it's just pouring out of you—the pride—so to not call it patriotism is fine. You don't have to be patriotic to be proud of your service—Right?—and have that flag waving. I think that's a great answer, actually, to—to show the twenty years that you put in, in difficult times.

PM: It was easy times really. I—I was lucky.

TS: Yeah?

PM: I missed Vietnam and I missed the Middle East. The Middle East was just starting as I was ending my career. My last three, four years we were in the Middle East, and so I was really lucky. I came in a good time—I came in in a good time, I got out at a good time, and I'm reaping huge benefits from it, so I'm very grateful.

TS: Yeah. Would you do it again? Maybe not now but, I mean, if you—

PM: If I could go back and look at it?

TS: Yes.

PM: Sure, I had a great time. I'd hope to do some different things than I did the first time around, but yeah, that was a great—that was a great way of life, and I said I always used to recommend it to any man—young man or woman.

TS: Yes.

PM: I said, “Get your college degree so you can be an officer. You have a much better lifestyle if you’re an officer. Join the air force rather than the other services. You have a much better lifestyle in the air force than you do in the other—” The other services used to love to come to—I was told—come to an air force base because the living conditions were so much better than they had in—at their bases—

TS: Yes.

PM: —their services. So I was lucky in many ways that—that way. I joined the right service and—and I [unclear]—

TS: Didn’t get in the navy or the army.

PM: Didn’t get—No, that’s right. The navy didn’t want me and the—the army wasn’t—didn’t really have—

TS: Didn’t give you the guarantee you wanted.

PM: They didn’t offer me what I needed, and so I was kind of air force by default, but it turned out it was a great, great way to do. Yeah.

TS: Well, I don’t have any more formal questions, but is there anything that we haven’t talked about that you—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: Gosh, I can’t think of anything. Let’s see.

TS: —would like to add?

PM: I’m sure once I process all this—

TS: Right. Sure.

PM: —I’ll think of some things, and I do want to get back with you when I’ve had a chance to go through those things I found—

TS: Okay.

PM: —and see—when I can find that portrait. And there’s another photo I’d love for you to have that was one of my—when you—when you’re coming up for promotion there’s a package that goes forward that is considered, and you always have to have a recent photo

of yourself in uniform—just a head and shoulders shot—and one of my later photos was one of my best. I think I was a—I don't know if I was a major or a lieutenant colonel when I had it taken.

TS: You're going to try to find it?

PM: But I'd love to—I'd love to be able to give you that.

TS: Well, we would love to get it.

PM: Yeah, I would. It's just a black and white, just military photo—

TS: That's great.

PM: —but it's a really—it looks like me. It just—There's no glamour, no—no special lighting or anything.

TS: It's not done up.

PM: It's just pure.

TS: It's not softened for you?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

PM: And those photos are supposed to be—No, those photos are absolutely all—warts and all. They—They're made to look like that—to make you look like you really look. And so—

TS: Oh, because they go on the promotion packets, right?

PM: Right, they go on—Yeah.

TS: Okay.

PM: So you—you can't—There's—You can't go have a professional photographer take them. They maybe do it now but we couldn't. You had to have the base photographer, just the regular routine for that kind of a—

TS: Excellent.[?]

PM: I was going to leave that with you, wasn't I?

TS: Well, I'll go ahead and turn the tape recorder off—

PM: Okay.

TS: —but thank you so much, Portia.

PM: Well, you're welcome! It was really fun.

TS: It was fun.

PM: Yeah. I'm sorry I kept breaking down; I just hate that.

[End of Interview]