

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Mary Anson Hennessy

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: December 12, 2014

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is December 13, 2014. My name is Therese Strohmer. I'm at the home of Mary Hennessy in Raleigh, North Carolina to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. Mary, could you state your name the way you would like it read on your collection?

MH: Yes, it's Mary Anson Hennessy.

TS: Okay. [feedback noise] We'll go the other way. Sorry about that Mary. Okay. So why don't you start out by telling me a little bit about when you were born and where you were born?

MH: Okay. I was born in—at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to my—my dad was in the army at the time so we were stationed—he was stationed there. And—

TS: Were you born on an army post then?

MH: Yes.

TS: Actually in the army hospital?

MH: In the army hospital, yes.

TS: Oh, neat. And so, that was in 1943?

MH: Yes, 1943. Yeah.

TS: Now, you told me earlier, the oldest of how many chil—how many kids?

MH: Seven.

TS: Seven.

MH: Seven children. And my mom used to say that she and my dad prayed for me, the rest of them came soon enough. [both chuckle]

TS: So they were just hoping for that first one—

MH: Yes.

TS: —and then the rest of them kept tumbling along.

MH: Right, right.

TS: Very nice.

MH: Yeah.

TS: So in Fort Leavenworth, your dad was in the army. How much longer was he in the army while you were a child?

MH: He—My dad got—was retired from the army when I was a—before I started my junior year of high school.

TS: Okay.

MH: So we grew up basically in army bases and I always felt sorry for civilians. [chuckles]

TS: Why?

MH: I mean, I—Because we'd go home and I'd see my cousins and—we had—it seemed like we had everything. We had skating rinks and libraries everywhere. I mean, it just seemed like the world was made for us. I don't know that it's the same nowadays, but when we were young it was the swimming pools. It just seemed like it was made for kids; the army bases that we lived. It was—

TS: Like a city within itself—

MH: Yes.

TS: —with all the little amenities and—

MH: And we had—I loved the "Taps"; they would play those in the morning and evening. I—It was hard for me to—when Daddy first got out because it was so much a part of who I—that rhythm. That rhythm of the military life that was—and it was such an expansive way to grow up. We lived in Japan right after the war; we were in Japan twice. And so, I

never—Because of the army, I think, I never made the mistake of thinking I was the center of the universe. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, you were born during the war, then, weren't you?

MH: Yes, yes.

TS: Yeah. Okay.

MH: And we were there—I'm trying to think what year we were—we were in Grant Heights [Dependent Housing Area], Japan, stationed just outside Tokyo. I know—I remember we had a Jeep because of the difficulty getting to our—the quarters. It was [unclear].

TS: The roads weren't that navigable, perhaps.

MH: Yes.

TS: So you remember that?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MH: It was a wonderful experience. Oh.

TS: How old were you then?

MH: I was only about five, I think. But I either have some powerful memories of it, or I've been told the story so often that—

TS: Yeah. Or maybe a combination.

MH: A combination, yeah. I don't know. The woman that—The government gave two Japanese maids to service people. This seems so strange to me to say now. But—And my mom said that was just the silliest thing she ever heard, but you had to take one, and ours, her name was Mishigo[?]. I mean, we just love her. We loved her. I just—I mean, I heard from Mishigo up till the time my daughter got married. I'm sure she's not— No one would have known to notify us when she died.

TS: Oh, right.

MH: But up until—oh, it's about fifteen years ago—we corresponded. She was just—And when my dad was being transferred out of Tokyo, she had some pills that she thought we should all take; better that we take these pills than be separated.

TS: Oh. [chuckles]

MH: My mom didn't leave us alone with Mishigo. [chuckles]

TS: After.

MH: She was just wonderful. I mean, she loved us and we loved her and—

TS: About how old do you think she was at that time?

MH: Oh, I would guess she was just a child.

TS: Oh, okay.

MH: I mean, I would guess maybe early twenties at the oldest.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: At that time.

MH: But her mom, when Tokyo was—when that area was strafed [to attack repeatedly with bombs from low-flying aircraft], her mom gave—and I have it out in the kitchen—gave it to my mom; it's a platter—this blue and white platter—and it's the only thing that survived her home from the American bombing, and she gave it to my mother.

TS: Wow.

MH: So you don't—Those lessons were just invaluable to me as a child.

TS: Yeah.

MH: So grateful. I'm so grateful to be—been raised like that, with that kind of diversity, and the wealth of it was wonderful.

TS: That's very interesting. Well, do you remember anything else as a child, like what it—what it was like there? Do you remember the bombed out part at all or anything?

MH: I—The only thing—I recently wrote a poem about Hiroshima and it was in thinking about the fact that my parents took us all over Japan, and I—I mean, I really loved that country, but I—never took us to Hiroshima or Nagasaki.

[The United States dropped nuclear bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, killing approximately 129,000 people. This led to the unconditional surrender of Japan ending WWII.]

TS: Yes.

MH: And that—It kind dawned on me very late and I was thinking about that. But we went back over there when I was about five and then we were there when I was in the seventh and eighth grade.

TS: Oh, okay. So you had two different experiences there.

MH: Yeah.

TS: Both in Tokyo?

MH: Yeah, both at Grant Heights.

TS: Yeah.

MH: It was just—I mean, I think it really imprinted me in so many ways.

TS: Yeah. Well, you talked about how, in a self-contained kind of environment for—like a city, you had probably a movie theatre, and of course shopping, and things like that.

MH: Baseball diamond. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah, I was going to ask, what kind activities did you do then? Did you—

MH: We skated; we ice skated. And they would have—They would have amenities, to us—I mean, they seemed like luxuries to us, but they would have fires in the barrels, and the Special Services would bring out hot cocoa [chuckles], and I would see my cousins—my civilian cou—my cousins—they didn't have anything like that.

TS: No. So did they—most of your cousins back in—what—

MH: Kansas City.

TS: In Kansas?

MH: Yes.

TS: Oh, okay. Kansas City, Kansas.

MH: Kansas City, yeah.

TS: So did they—So this is after—You were born after the [Great] Depression but during the war.

MH: Yes.

TS: And so, there was a lot of hardship still—

MH: Oh, yes.

TS: —from that period.

MH: Yes.

TS: Is that—Did—Were they, like, working class, just—

MH: Oh definitely, definitely.

TS: Yeah. Like hard scrabble, kind of, making sure you saved all you recyclables and—

MH: Oh definitely. [chuckles] We didn't know it. I marvel at the fact that—and I wasn't raised like this—but I think I always felt a little superior, or maybe it wasn't superior, maybe it just lucky. I had no idea we were in the bottom. [chuckles] You know what I mean, as far as economically? Because I always felt like—I always thought my family was so—it was so neat. At Christmas we got all this—I guess—well, we got socks and underwear, things like that.

TS: Yeah.

MH: But to me it just seemed like such a—

TS: You got to open presents.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MH: —such an abundance—

TS: Yeah.

MH: —that I—I actually felt a little bit embarrassed about having so much. And so, it's interesting.

TS: Yeah, it is, because it's all relative, right—

MH: Yeah.

TS: —to what—to the world that you're in.

MH: Yeah.

TS: But you got exposed to this world view at such a young age.

MH: Oh, yeah.

TS: And you think that that had a big impact on you through your life?

MH: Oh my goodness, yeah. And when I was in the seventh and eighth grade, I was selected from my school to go to this camp; it was a Red Cross camp, it was called Gifu, Camp Gifu, and there was a—So my roommates at this camp, there was one Japanese girl, and one Korean girl, and we stayed together for—I think we were there for—just for one week at this camp. It was near the base of [Mount] Fuji. And if my memory serves—because I was also was at a Girl Scout camp so I also may be conflating—but we couldn't speak to each other. But the Korean girl knew I loved sweet rolls, and so when I'd get in bed at night, her sweet roll from breakfast would be under my pillow.

TS: Very sweet.

MH: So I had—it was just—it was that—Yeah, it was a really—it was—it did shape my world view in a very profound way. I couldn't have learned that in Kansas, even though I was in a—kind of a diverse area, I think.

TS: What kind of things do you think you learned that you wouldn't have learned in Kansas?

MH: Oh, that—Oh that—There's just a whole a different way of being in the world. In Japan, they would—they would just love you for some reason. I mean, here we were Americans. You know what I mean? It was—They were so kind, they were so good to us, and as a child, I would have older[?] kids take me places, take me to museums, take me—Just when I think about it, now it just boggles my mind. The generosity.

TS: Yeah.

MH: And I think they're very reverent, very reverent culture, very generous. There's no anti-intellectualism in Japan. [chuckles] It's not cool to be—It's a very—And it's an old culture. Much older than ours. I couldn't have—I couldn't have paid for that kind of experience.

TS: Right, sure, it's very rich and—

MH: Yeah.

TS: Very interesting. So as you're growing up, and you're the oldest and you're getting more of your siblings coming along, but you're going to school.

MH: Yes.

TS: What did you think of about school? How did you—

MH: Oh, I loved school.

TS: Did you?

MH: I just love school, yeah.

TS: Was there a favorite teacher or subject or anything like that?

MH: I loved to read.

TS: I can see that. [both chuckling] Mary has—we are surrounded by beautiful bookshelves and books in this lovely home.

MH: It is—I just—I just love to read. And my mom won't mind me telling this story. When I was in high school I was such—I was a crazed student and I don't even know—I think I just enjoyed it. That's the only thing.

TS: You were a crazed student?

MH: Student, yeah.

TS: Like, you mean you were very devoted to your studies.

MH: Yeah, I mean just couldn't stop. And one morning my mom got up and I was still sitting at the dining room table with my books and she said, "Why in the hell don't you go out and get yourself a beer?" [both chuckle]

TS: How old were you?

MH: Maybe—Maybe—I might have been seventeen at the time.

TS: Yeah.

MH: Probably not legal, that's my guess—my best guess. But she was so—She was so frustrated with me. I guess she—And wisely so. I needed to sleep and everything and I

wasn't, I didn't have good judgment as far as that. But I loved school. And I—Still, that's what I love to do.

TS: Yeah. Do you like to study and learn about new things, and cultures, and places, and things like that?

MH: Yeah.

TS: Well, so—Was there—What was there about learning that you liked, since you are actually—some people say, for example, they got to go in their mind and read about places that they never visited. Now you, you were able to visit places too.

MH: Yes, yes.

TS: What kind of benefit did it give you to be studious and study?

MH: It's like the world. That's the benefit, is the world. I still, in the morning now when I—when we read our newspaper together in the office, he's on one side and I'm on the other side—

TS: You and your husband?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MH: Yeah. I used to say my prayers first and then I would read some poetry for a while. I mean, I had this kind of ritual I would go through. But now it's gotten kind of all mixed up. [both chuckle] So I'm not sure whether I'm praying or studying or what. But it is a—I think it's such an amazing gift, and it's free, it's free.

TS: If you have access to the books.

MH: If you have—I mean, for—in this country; in this—amazing—yeah.

TS: Yes.

MH: Yeah, no, I—It breaks my heart to think that it's not—We watched a documentary last night, it was called *Rising Girl* [correction: *Girl Rising*], and these girls were saying they want an education. And the point of the documentary was if the girls were educated, what that would do to the economic and—Why we don't do it, it's just estúpido [Spanish, meaning stupid]. I mean, I don't understand it. But I've been lucky and I'm very grateful for it; grateful.

[*Girl Rising* is a 2013 documentary that tells the stories of nine girls from nine countries, and reflects their struggles to overcome societal and cultural barriers]

TS: Well, it sounds like your parents really supported you in your studies.

MH: [laughing]

TS: Except for telling you to have a beer; that was interesting.

MH: My mom was wonderful, just absolute best.

TS: Now, did you do other activities at school? Like, join any organizations—

MH: I'm trying to think.

TS: —or did you do anything through the church?

MH: I'm trying to think. When I was in the first two years of school, we were in Massachusetts—of high school, we were in Massachusetts, and I was a cheerleader. I was on—I made the basketball team and then I got really—a really bad black eye. And anyway, then I was on the cheerleading squad for the rest of that semester after, after the black eye. But I'm trying to think. I can't—It's so different than what my grandchildren—the kind of social—

TS: Activities.

MH: The kind of social activities that they are involved in. That's the only thing I can think of, was school. I mean, we went to games and things like that. We were talking the other day, our big social treat was there was a place—and this is Ayer, Massachusetts—on the main street called Tony's, and for fifteen cents you could get a Coke and a chips. And you had to buy the chips, because the man would have starved if we just went in there and sat for an hour, without the—so that was the big activity.

TS: Soda and some chips. Yeah.

MH: [chuckles] From my first two years of high school, and occasional football.

TS: But you're also socializing with the people that are in there, chatting.

[Speaking Simultaneously].

MH: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Yeah.

TS: That hasn't—That hasn't changed a whole lot, I don't think.

MH: No, that—

TS: Although maybe they're more on their cell phones and smart phones and stuff.

MH: Yeah.

TS: But yeah. So did you do any—So the fifties. We had sock hops and dances, did you do anything like that?

MH: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It was wonderful. And that's something, too, I really want for my grandchildren. We always danced, always danced, and we even sang, publicly. [both chuckle]

TS: Yeah, that's right.

MH: When I was in nurses' training, there was a place called The Levy and we could only go out from 8:00 [p.m.] to 10:00. We had quiet time from 6:00 to 8:00, we could go out from 8:00 to 10:00, and we had to be back in the dorm by 10:00.

TS: So you had a curfew.

MH: Yes. But we would go to The Levy and we'd sing "The Bells of Saint Mary's" [1917 popular song] while drinking beer.

TS: That sounds pretty fun.

MH: [chuckles] And thought about Sister Mary Angeline [probably referring to Sister Mary Benedict, played by Ingrid Bergman, in the 1945 American drama *The Bells of St. Mary's*], she was so—she's very—

TS: Strict?

MH: Yes. Very, very somber, sober; all those things. [both chuckle]

TS: That's pretty neat.

TS: So you—Did—You enjoyed your childhood years?

MH: Oh, yeah, yeah.

TS: Yeah.

MH: I was very lucky, very fortunate, yes.

TS: Now, how about movie stars or anything like that? Did you have anybody that you had a big crush on?

MH: I can remember telling my granddaughter, who wants to talk about this stuff all the time, that the kind of erotic dreams we had as youngsters, were—there always some man wearing a tux [tuxedo]. [both laugh]

TS: Not with his shirt off, right?

MH: No, shirt off. No, no shirt off. And ballroom dancing. That was the kind of—that was the kind of—

TS: Those were you fantasies, going out with Cary Grant [American film actor] or something in a tux, huh?

MH: [chuckles] It was—I mean, that was, kind of—But I don't remember. I remember movies being a very big deal. My God, I remember it being an event.

TS: Well, you had all the classic movie stars at that one time.

MH: Oh, my God, being absolutely an event. My mom was much more—she was [unclear]; you would have loved her. Geez. But she had—they had those movie magazines in the old days and she had fifty pictures of Gary Cooper [American film actor], fifty, at some—She put some energy into that.

TS: Yes.

MH: And her brother took one of them down, and she had kind of a bad temper—I don't think I ever saw, but she said she did when she was little—and so she took them all down. But she had fifty pictures of him in her room.

TS: In her room, like—

MH: So she was really more movie star than I was. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah, real struck by it. So was that when she was a young girl?

MH: Yeah.

TS: Oh, how neat.

MH: Yeah.

TS: How neat was that?

MH: She was wonderful.

TS: I wonder where those pictures ended up? [both chuckle]

MH: Yeah. Well, movie magazines were really, kind of—I don't know. I can remember, I think I was thirteen years old, the first time I saw cleavage. [both chuckle]

TS: Oh, yeah.

MH: And I thought, "Oh my God, what is this?" And it was a movie magazine.

TS: Sure.

MH: My cousin had one.

TS: Sure.

MH: So it was a great time to be young; it was.

TS: Yeah, very neat. Now, so you're—You said around—I forget what grade—middle schoolish—is when your dad got out of the—retired.

MH: He—I just finished my sophomore year.

TS: Okay. Oh, sophomore year of high school?

MH: Right.

TS: Okay. Now, what was it that he did in the service?

MH: He was a—Well, his title was a food supervisor, but he ran mess hall. He was a wonderful cook.

TS: Was he an enlisted or officer?

MH: He was E8 [Sergeant or Master Sergeant?].

TS: He was an E8. Oh, good for him.

MH: Yeah.

TS: Wonderful cook. So did he cook at home, too, or did your mom?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MH: Wonderful cook, quiet. No my dad did.

TS: Your dad did?

MH: Yeah.

TS: Wow.

MH: Yeah.

TS: You don't hear that often.

MH: No, he was just all—yeah.

TS: Okay, tell me what he made that you really liked.

MH: Oh my God. Gravy. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah, the best gravy. I bet he was good at that.

MH: Gravy, yeah. Every Sunday we would have a roast and gravy. Sometimes we'd have chicken. And he was a kind of—I mean, I don't know that they still have men like this nowadays, but they must. But we were convinced that Daddy really liked the neck.

TS: [chuckles] He would probably take that instead of—and let you kids have the rest.

MH: Yes.

TS: Yeah. Very generous.

MH: I was much older before I realized nobody likes it. [chuckles]

TS: No, not much meat there. [chuckles] No.

MH: No, but he—And soups, he made wonderful soups, gravy. I mean, anything he cooked was won—halibut, he'd made us halibut sometimes, halibut steaks, and—Oh my goodness, that was a—

TS: That was good.

MH: One time we went camping in Colorado and he had brought cans of chili, but he would do some magic with it and put it back in the can, and then we would—we ate it out of the can, and oh, it was the best. [chuckling]

TS: So he, like, made it and then put it—like that's your serving container. Pretty neat.

MH: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. What was your mom doing while dad was cooking?

MH: Laughing.

TS: Looking at it—Trying to find more Gary Cooper magazines, maybe. No.

MH: [chuckles] She—She laughed all the time and—and people really came from everywhere to see her, so she was always visiting.

TS: Very popular. Very charismatic, she sounds like. Yeah.

MH: [chuckles] Yes, and my dad did not like to visit.

TS: No? He was more, like—maybe introverted with some.

MH: [unclear].

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So they were a good pair, then, right?

MH: Oh, they were perfect [chuckles] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

TS: Yeah. Well, that's neat. Well, as you're growing up in this great environment, did you have a thought about what you were going to do in your future? Did you think you were going to college or anything like that? Was that encouraged?

MH: I made really good grades in school and because of our experience, I think—and this something I think a lot about—I was—I was in the top of my class. And I—No one ever asked me—I mean college wasn't even—

TS: On the radar?

MH: Was—No, no it wasn't. I— No, I knew no one that had gone to college.

TS: Okay.

MH: And so, when I first graduated, the first year, I went to—there was an ad in our Catholic paper about Bishop [Vincent] Waters [third bishop of the Raleigh Diocese] in North Carolina was having—he was starting a group of lay missionaries. You signed up for a year, if they took you, and there would be no drinking, smoking, or dating for that year. You lived—You lived here and the nuns lived right next to you. They were partying then, so we didn't know that—I didn't know that when I came down.

TS: They were what then?

MH: Partying. P-A-R-T-Y. [chuckles]

TS: Oh. Who was partying, the nuns?

MH: The nuns.

TS: Oh, they were?

MH: Oh, my goodness, yeah.

TS: What year was this?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MH: We were—This was—Let's see—I got out—I graduated from high school in '60, so it would be—No, I graduated in '61 and Tom graduated in '60.

TS: Sixty-one.

MH: Sixty-one.

TS: Okay.

MH: And so, that was the year we came down to North Carolina, and the nuns were the mission helpers of the Sacred Heart [Cathedral], and they were just—oh my—It really is two [unclear]. We would say our prayers at night, they had us say prime [6am] and compline [bedtime] from the [Roman] Breviary. And we would say our compline and [unclear], and they would be in their rec room playing music, and one of the nuns played the cello and she'd spin it around, and laughing and carrying on. So we'd say we can't say our prayers. [both chuckling]

TS: Under these conditions, right?

MH: With all this.

TS: There's too much raucous going on.

MH: But they were—they were very wonderful.

TS: So you did do that for a year, then?

MH: I did it for a year, and then I wanted to—I wanted to go into the convent after that and they said—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, really. Okay.

MH: They said, "Go home."

TS: The nuns said?

MH: Yeah. "Go home and pray about it." I was so attached to them.

TS: Sure.

TS: I mean, I loved them, every one of them. And if they'd kept me I think I would have been happy.

TS: Yeah. Sure. You wouldn't have known any different, right?

MH: Yeah, exactly. But they were wise and said, "Go home and—" So then I worked in a pathology lab for a year.

TS: Where was this at?

MH: In Kansas City, Missouri.

TS: Okay.

MH: And then—And I went to school. I could only take—eight hours, I think, was the most I could take at night school at Donnelly's [Donnelly College]. So I took eight hours at Donnelly at night school and five hours at—I took a biology course at Kansas City Junior College. I was carrying almost a full load at night and doing that—working at the pathology lab. And so, I started thinking about school, and so then I—and in those days, a

woman could be a teacher, a secretary, or a nurse, those were our choices, so I told Mom—I said, "I think I want to be a nurse." And that was—

TS: Did your mom support you with that?

MH: You don't realize till after the fact that the money just wasn't there. And my dad, very quietly—his sister was a nurse—very tenderly tried to dissuade me. He did say they work so hard, which was true.

TS: Oh, because—So he knew the experience of his sister.

MH: Exactly.

TS: I see.

MH: But my mom said, "Okay," she took me up to the Rutherford[?] Bank on Minnesota Avenue, and I know the man's name was Cliff Cuden, he was the vice president of the bank, and he had—This is so vivid to me, because he had a bottle of some kind of bourbon in his drawer—he was an alcoholic—and he showed it to me and said, "I keep it there to—" because he had been sober for many, many years, but—because I didn't understand any of this, but it was all pretty vivid. And he lent my mother enough money for me to take the first semester at nurses' training and I got scholarships after that.

TS: Oh, where did you go?

MH: To Saint Mary's School of Nursing in Kansas City, Missouri.

TS: So you didn't go far from home.

MH: No. Well, they—And when I applied, Therese, they told me my grades were good enough that—these nuns were also at Saint Louis University, that I should go there. Well, again, we had no concept of it

TS: Right

MH: It just—

TS: Why leave home?

MH: Yeah, I mean, I didn't under—you can't—I really appreciate when I see some of these kids struggling with school and I know—I know—I have a sen—I don't know everything about it but I have a sense of they have no experience of it.

TS: Everything is new.

MH: Yes, yes.

TS: The environment, the living away from home.

MH: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Much more intense, kind of, studies than high school.

MH: Oh yeah..

TS: Things like that.

MH: Yeah.

TS: Yeah, neat. So, okay, did you stay at home, then, or did you live at—

MH: Well, the first—No, I moved into the dorm—

TS: Okay.

MH: —right from the beginning and it was just a really wonderful experience. We were in—Like, when we were in OB [Obstetrics]—we had a rotation in OB and Psych [psychiatry] and Pediatrics. So to live in the dorms was almost necessary.

TS: Right, because of the hours you were keeping you had to be close.

MH: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. Now, why did you pick nursing over the other two; the secretary or teaching?

MH: I don't know, because I think now teaching is something I really enjoy doing now in different ways. I think I just—The idea of taking care of people was very—

TS: Comforting?

MH: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: And you're the oldest, too, so you're probably very nurturing just because of that, I would think.

MH: I don't know but it—

TS: From what you've told me about your father's personality and your mother's personality, where do you fit in that spectrum?

MH: I think I'm more like my dad.

TS: Yeah? A little quieter.

MH: Yea. I think—But I laugh all time too. My granddaughter from Poland, she was imitating all the family members when she was home and her imitation of me was just this lunatic laughter. I mean, she would hold her little hands up like this—[both chuckle]

TS: Now, you said she's from Poland?

MH: Yeah, yeah.

TS: How—What's that connection?

MH: My youngest son Patrick.

TS: Okay, Patrick.

MH: My Patrick and your mom's Patrick.

TS: That's right.

MH: Went to Poland after he graduated from State.

TS: Okay, N.C. [North Carolina] State [University]?

MH: Yes, and he met—after—he was there for a few years, but he met and taught English; the kind of girl that every mother prays her son will meet. [chuckles]

TS: Will meet?

MH: Yes.

TS: Okay. The girl you can take home to Mom, right? She was just from Poland?

MH: I mean, she was just a peach and so now he has two daughters.

TS: Do they still live over there?

MH: Yeah.

TS: Oh, they do! Where in Poland do they live?

MH: Krakow.

TS: How about that? That's really neat. Really neat.

MH: Yeah, it is neat.

TS: Yeah.

MH: And the kids are just—I mean, just stunning. [chuckles]

TS: Very sweet. Well, so now you're—you're going to school at Saint Mary's and you're studying to be a nurse. Now, when you said you did the rotations, like the OB, the—

MH: Right.

TS: What kind of—

MH: It was OB, Pediatrics, and Psych, those were the three.

TS: And Psych. Which one of those did you gravitate to liking more than the others?

MH: Really—I don't think—Psych was very difficult for me.

TS: Was it?

MH: Very diffi—Because those were the—those were the—we did not give people anesthetic for electro shock, and I had the same problem with—I had this one patient who would throw a—she had some kind of a white blanket that she would throw on a piano bench and she'd played the piano. She had flaming red hair and she would play the piano, and I just fell in love with her. I just thought she was the most interesting—she was just wonderful. And she was pretty dirty, but she would soak as long as I would read to her from the *Rubáiyát [of Omar Khayyám]*. Well, I thought this was just the greatest thing that I ever—it was just wonderful. So Sister said that I failed to keep a therapeutic stance.

TS: [chuckles]

MH: Which that was always a problem for me. Human beings—So anyway.

TS: So you didn't keep a distance.

MH: I didn't—Yeah. And we wore the—we wore keys around our waist. And it was—it didn't seem like a very therapeutic environment, to be real honest with you. I would say—In OB, we had a Sister Michael Marie who was just a terror. So seeing the babies born was very, very special. She, kind of, was so frightening. [chuckles] I really wasn't drawn to any of those. I said [unclear].

TS: Yeah, that's interesting. That is interesting. So what did think you of—If that's what you were thinking, were you a little worried about your choice?

MH: I—But I liked—I loved taking care of patients, and I think I loved the patients on Psych. I loved the OB patients. It was this—To me it seemed so false. This—This—I don't even know a good word for it. Maybe it's that therapeutic distance [chuckles], that I found it—like I was supposed to pretend something different—

TS: So you had to have, sort of, like, a façade—

MH: Yes.

TS: —of almost like this barrier between you.

MH: Yeah.

TS: And it interesting you say that, because I have a sister who is in the medical field but she can be very—like when something traumatic happens, she's fantastic, but she has—she becomes very clinical about her—the way she's talking about it, instead of emotional. And maybe that's that kind of thing that they try to get you to, it was just tough.

MH: I think, and I see—I can see the value in it.

TS: Yeah.

MH: But I've found it really hard to do.

TS: To do? You couldn't turn it on and off in that way?

MH: Well, it seemed—I think honesty was always the primary value for us.

TS: Yes

MH: Even more so than love, because how can you love somebody if you're not honest?

TS: Right. Interesting.

MH: So it was really—it was a problem for me, and I'm sure for Sister too. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, it sounds like you made it through.

MH: Oh yeah I—I was the outstanding graduate of my class. But there were only like twenty, [chuckles] it was a tiny class.

TS: That's fine, it still makes a difference, I think, doesn't it? So you—Now, at one point while you're there, you—this when you got involved with the army, right? Army Nurse Corps?

MH: Yes, yes.

TS: Tell me how that happened.

MH: I'll tell you the truth, I don't remember. I know one of the girls that I ran around with, Janet Kelly, Annie Spears—I'm trying to think of who else—I guess started—we started talking about it and it seemed unbelievably—I mean, it seemed like a wonderful—because I had always thought that would be something I'd want to do because of my dad.

TS: To go in the army?

MH: Yes.

TS: Okay.

MH: Separate from the school issue at all—

TS: Okay.

MH: I always thought that would be a—that idea of service was very attractive to me. And my dad was so attractive to me that I—

TS: How long had you had those kind of thoughts about doing something in service?

MH: I think—I guess while I was in nurses' training when I started—you think you have some skills that you can use and where would be the best place to use them.

MH Husband: Hey. Hey.

TS: We're going to pause for a second here.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Okay, we just had a little—short little greeting there from your husband coming in. So you're—you—when you're in the sch—in the nurses' training, and you're—somehow—maybe somebody came around and said there's this possibility for this extra stipend or—

MH: I don't—I think it must have been one of my friends that told me about it. But I don't really remember, Therese, to be real honest with you.

TS: That's okay

MH: But when they were telling us about, we could not—it just seemed too good to be true.

TS: Oh, did it?

MH: Oh yeah, because we—especially for somebody who was thinking about it anyway. Yeah, it just seemed like it—

TS: What did it offer?

MH: I don't remember what it was but it seemed like—to me, like zillions of dollars. [both chuckle]

TS: I bet it wasn't that, but yeah.

MH: But that's what it seemed like.

TS: More money than you thought possible that you could get.

MH: Yeah, yeah, for that year and—

TS: So they pay you, like, a stipend—

MH: Yes.

TS: —to just continuing what you're doing, right?

MH: And so then, because we were—most us worked in the hospital, so then that wasn't necessary. And we really—we put in long hours for—as far as clinic and studying and singing. [chuckles]

TS: Right, that's right, on the—with beer. So you went—So in '65, I think you said, is when you actually—Was that you're [a] senior?

MH: Yes.

TS: Senior year.

MH: It would be my senior year.

TS: When you started to do that. Now, you didn't have to do any drill or anything special?

MH: No, nothing.

TS: Did you have a uniform?

MH: Nothing. We went downtown and we were sworn in and that was it.

TS: Okay. And this is Kansas City.

MH: Yes.

TS: Okay. Now, did you have to, then, have an obligation of two years?

MH: Two years.

TS: Okay.

MH: I know one of the girls that was sworn in when we were sworn in was married and had a baby—and became pregnant so that was—

TS: So you couldn't stay in the program.

MH: You couldn't stay in the program then with that, but.

TS: Well, the [Army] Nursing Corps, too, for a while, they—even just getting—the baby, certainly, was not allowed, but even getting married sometimes was not allowed in the Nursing Corps, right?

MH: When I was in you could be married.

TS: Yeah.

MH: But—Tom and I were at Fort Leonard Wood [Missouri] when we were getting out—when I was very close to getting out. He came and lived with me, after he graduated from college, in the bachelor's officers quarters, and I was called before my chief nurse and said, "What's this about you living with somebody in the bachelor—" I said, "Well, it's my husband."

TS: Yeah, it was a no, no [both chuckle] That's interesting that you did that. Wow, that's funny.

MH: And didn't even think about it.

TS: No?

MH: We had like—We were married August the 3rd and I think I got out on my birthday, the 22nd.

TS: So it was just, like, for about a month?

MH: Yeah. Really less than a month.

TS: Yeah.

MH: No, it never dawned on me that it would be—

TS: That it would be verboten [German, meaning forbidden]? [chuckles]

MH: Because my brother would come sometimes and stay with me and I never had any permission or anything. It just never—

TS: Well, that's one of those things where it's better to ask forgiveness than permission. [chuckles]

MH: That's the way we were brought up, [both chuckling] about things in general.

TS: Oh, okay. Well, let me ask you a little bit about the context of the times, then. So you're—In '65 when you joined, probably one of the reasons they were recruiting was because of the Vietnam War.

MH: Yes.

TS: It had been going a little bit, but it was starting to heat up in '65.

MH: Yes.

TS: Now, did you have any—We talked about, earlier, how you had this world view. Did you have any political view of the world?

MH: I think it's always surprising how naïve—when you look back on yourself, but I think I've always been, kind of, a wannabe pacifist; not really getting there but always wanting to—wanting that. And I can remember when I got down to Fort Sam [Houston, Texas] and they issued me a gun, and we had to learn how to clean it and—I thought, "There's been some mistake here."

TS: [chuckles] "I'm a nurse," right?

MH: It was really—It was one of those moments when the world, kind of, shows its face and you think, "No, thank you." I was really unnerved by that.

TS: Yeah.

MH: And I thought to myself—I can remember doing, kind of, mental—I don't know—gymnastics or whatever it took, but I thought, "You're going to be in serious trouble." [both chuckle]

And I thought—And I remember talking to this one man and he said, "Well, it's just to defend your patients."

And I thought, "Well, I hope my patients have guns because I won't be able to—"

TS: Not going to be able to shoot anybody.

MH: I could be between them, but I could not—that would not be—that's not going to happen.

TS: Right.

MH: But it was a real—it was a real adult moment before I was an adult, I think in some ways.

TS: You hadn't really considered that there would be weapons in the army. [both chuckle]

MH: Genius, right?

TS: It's the Nursing Corps, it's different. I'm just teasing you. It's—

MH: No, no. I mean—But I said that to myself.

TS: Yeah. But it was different. The Nursing Corps was different than the regular army, and it had a different mission.

MH: Yeah.

TS: So yeah, I can see why you wouldn't have thought about it at all. I forgot to ask about this too. When you were in nursing school, a couple of incidents happened, I guess you could say. So the president was killed—assassinated. That would've happened when you were in nursing school?

[President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated 22 November 1963, in Dallas, Texas]

MH: Freshman—Freshman nurses[?].

TS: Do you remember what happened? Do you want to tell me about that?

MH: I remember where I was sitting, what I had on.

TS: Where were you sitting?

MH: In a class at Donnelly College; it was a small Catholic college. We got an excellent education. I mean, we took our anatomy, physiology, chemistry. What else did we take there? Anyway, we got—we really—excellent education from the nuns there. And—But I just remember vividly and—

TS: How did you find out?

MH: They announced it in class.

TS: Oh, they did?

MH: We were in class when they announced it. Yeah, I really don't—It's one of those moments that you go to and you're right in the middle of it again, and I don't understand that kind of stuff.

TS: Yeah. Just shocking.

MH: Yeah.

TS: Just shocking.

MH: Yeah.

TS: Did you watch the funeral procession on TV, like many people did?

MH: I think we watched some of it. We were so—We were pretty—We had a lot of—

TS: Exams coming up? I'm sure that time of year was at the end of the semester.

MH: Yeah, so I don't remember watching a lot of it, but all those images are there so I've got—I've seen a lot of them over the years and—

TS: Yeah.

MH: But it's just—I don't know. I don't understand shooting people. I don't understand blowing up buildings. Any of that stuff.

TS: Right. Right. Well, who does, really? Yeah. Well you—So in this time period, it maybe would have been more when you were in high school, where you were in the era when they did "duck and cover." Did you ever do any of that?

MH: I don't remember doing that.

TS: No?

MH: I don't remember doing that.

TS: Did you ever have any fear of, like, the nuclear war? It's interesting because you were in Tokyo when Hiroshima and Nagasaki—

MH: Yeah. That has more of an effect on me even than Kennedy's assassination.

TS: Does it?

MH: Isn't that interesting.

TS: It makes sense, though.

MH: I guess when you think about all the children and—But I forgot what you were asking me now.

TS: I was just wondering—So in this time period, like, the Cold War, we're worried about the Soviets and the Americans, and we had the Cuban Missile Crisis.

[The Cuban Missile Crisis occurred from 16-28 October 1962, and was a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union concerning Soviet ballistic missiles deployment in Cuba. It was the closest the Cold War came to escalating into a full-scale nuclear war]

MH: Right, right.

TS: And we had this worry about nuclear war at that time.

MH: Right, right. I remember—I remember all that—that thing—and this will sound really bizarre, and this is much earlier, I was much younger—I can remember when [Joseph] Stalin died. And I thought, "He's never going to get to heaven." And I can remember we used to say to those you can get a plenary indulgence, and I thought, "I'd better save one for him." And I thought "One is not going to do it." [both chuckle]

[In the Roman Catholic Church, in order to gain a plenary indulgence, a person must exclude all attachment to sin, must perform the work or say the prayer for which the indulgence is granted, and must fulfil the three conditions of sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion, and praying for the intentions of the Pope]

TS: But you did, for Stalin? How about that.

MH: I can remember—I can remember that was a—that had a profound—And I remember I was working in the path [pathology] lab during the Cu—during the Cuban Missile Crisis and I think I felt the same anxiety that—But Stalin had a more—a more—more immediate—

TS: Personal; like you took a personal care for his soul. [both chuckle] Very interesting. I don't think I've ever talked to anyone who's had that reaction to his death. But—that's sweet, Mary; that's very sweet.

MH: [chuckles]

TS: Okay, so let's go back, then; I didn't mean to go back ahead, I had just forgotten to ask you about those things. So your—You decide to sign up and you did your basic training and now you're out—you're out, you've graduated. What—You said your—How did your parents feel about this decision?

MH: About going in the army?

TS: Yeah.

MH: I think—I think they were fine with it because it was such a—it was such a fact of our lives. [unclear]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Yeah, and it had been a part of your mom's life, too, that's true.

MH: Yeah, I think they were fine with it. That's the thing though about Vietnam, our whole—four of my seven—four of us had orders. Three—All of us had orders at one time or another for Vietnam and when my—I didn't go because of illness. Both of my brothers went and then my sister was the last to—when she got orders for Vietnam. My mother, and she's not like this, but she called Bob Dole [American politician] and said, "Basta [Spanish, Enough], no mas, no more," that was it and he helped her and my sister didn't have to go.

TS: Oh, really? Bob Dole, the sixth [?] Senator?

MH: Yes, from Kansas, yeah.

TS: Now, what service was your sister?

MH: Army Nurse Corps.

TS: Was she? Now, what sister was this?

MH: Patsy, so she was—she was—Let's see—Bob, Patsy, I had one brother—

TS: Oh, just go through them all.

MH: Okay, okay, okay.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So start with Mary and go all the way through the line.

MH: Mary, Bob, Patsy, the one that was in the—Bob also went to Vietnam, Patsy, Bill also went to Vietnam, and then the three younger ones, Jeannie, Lenny, and Connie. Lenny was in the air force, but that was after Vietnam.

TS: After Vietnam.

MH: So she didn't—

TS: So three of your—the five sisters were in the service?

MH: They were, yes.

TS: And two of the brothers?

MH: Yes.

TS: So both brothers then?

MH: Both brothers.

TS: You just had two brothers then.

MH: Right, right.

TS: So five of the seven were in—

MH: Right.

TS: Well, that's amazing.

MH: Right.

TS: I guess you're father's experiences—

MH: Yes.

TS: —in the service were very positive, then, it seems like.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MH: And I think—Very positive, but I think, too, Therese honestly, we didn't have a lot of options like there are now. For kids who want to something besides—do something.
[chuckles]

TS: Yes.

MH: I mean—I kid about whole neighborhoods being wiped out in Vietnam, it's because that's where they were.

TS: Yeah. True. Now, your youngest sister that was in the air force.

MH: Yes.

TS: What did she do?

MH: Lenny was in—She went to Japan.

TS: Oh, okay.

MH: She went to Japan. And Lenny was—Patsy and Lenny were born in Japan when my father was in the army.

TS: Okay.

MH: And she served in Japan, and I think really—I think she really enjoyed it.

TS: Was she also a nurse?

MH: Yes.

TS: So three nurses.

MH: Yeah, well, all five of us are nurses.

TS: All five girls?

MH: Yeah.

TS: How about that? Not a teacher or secretary among you.

MH: [chuckling]

TS: Very nice. I'm definitely calling my mom after this.

MH: Have your mom call me.

TS: I think I will have to.

MH: We'll have a good time.

TS: That's right. Oh my goodness, okay. Well, that really interesting, that's very interesting. I didn't realize that connection. There's a strong connection to the service.

MH: Yeah.

TS: And—Except for the one sister in the army, right?

MH: Yes, yes.

TS: So your parents were supportive. Can you tell me about what it was like for you when you went then—you told me the experience of having to have a weapon [chuckles], but what was the rest of it like, then, when you went through your training to be an officer?

MH: Oh, it was—it was intimidating, it was thrilling, it was—and the time was—I think Vietnam really, there's no way you could communicate to someone—I don't think that—what that was like, the lottery; what number came up for these young men. It was just a—I mean, people were very—it seemed to me they were hyper alert at the time. [chuckles] More—it was very different. A very different—What do they call it?—zeitgeist would be not the right word but kind of like that. It's just a very—And I was conflicted about a lot of it.

TS: Yes.

MH: Enjoyed a lot of it. It was—The marching and saluting, we were—the nurses typically would carry—if we'd carry bags in our arms, we didn't have to salute, because we looked so ridiculous saluting, and so we really made an effort.

TS: To carry as many bags as you possibly could? Yes? [both chuckling]

MH: Yes. It was—And one time—I mean, I was so not geared for—despite being a military brat, it seems strange, it seems kind of a contradiction. But I remember one night—one time—that wasn't night, it was during the day—I was driving into the post and I was supposed to get some kind of a pass or something, I had just gotten my car and I supposed to get some kind of ID, and I didn't have it. And I thought, "I'll just hold up this;" I had a bag with a doughnut in it [chuckles], and I thought, "He'll never—They don't look at you, he'll never notice." And so, I, kind of, held this little white flat thing and he pulled me over.

TS: And then what happened?

MH: He said, "What did you—What did you show me?"
And I said, "I'm embarrassed, I'd rather not say. I was hoping—" And he let me go.

TS: Yeah?

MH: [both chuckle] But I never held up anything. Talk about putting the fear of God into you. Holy smoke.

TS: You were probably very afraid when they—when he pulled you over the side, I would imagine.

MH: Yeah. I mean it was—it was—I just didn't have the right frame of mind so—

TS: [chuckles] Well, you're just trying to get to where you're going, you're not thinking about—

MH: Exactly. And it was a square—a square cellophane—I thought, "It'll pass."

TS: Did you have to do any marching or physical—

MH: Yeah, we did marching.

TS: Did you?

MH: And I can remember when we were—we had—we had some time that we spent, like—and I'm trying to think what they called it now, it would be, like, bivouac [a temporary camp without tents or cover] or something like that.

TS: Okay, sure.

MH: So we were in our fatigues all the time, and we ate outside with our mess kits, and you could go down after—after your day's work you could go down some place where they—where they had beer. But you had to take off—I mean, you had to have your combat boots on. Well, nobody—nobody wanted to go down that badly [chuckles], because—So you could either leave you boots on and go out or stay at home and take your boots off. Well, it was an easy choice, because we're—our feet were—[chuckles]

TS: You took your boots off?

MH: We just took out boots off.

TS: So you just stayed. Interesting.

MH: But it was—yeah.

TS: Yeah, they didn't have boots that really fit women at that time.

MH: It—That's—That was my memory of it, that they were so uncomfortable.

TS: And they were for years. They didn't really—

MH: So there's a reason for that memory. [chuckles]

TS: Yes, there is; they did not—they did not fit women. They did not make them for women's feet. Well, there's a couple of different scenarios for that, but yeah. Yeah, I'm sure that's why they hurt.

MH: That's an interesting—

TS: Yeah. How did you feel about your fatigues?

MH: Oh, I was—I was fine with all of that. We had—I have kind of a big head and so my—I had to get my hats—

TS: Adjusted?

MH: They had to order them or something, so that was the only—but yeah, I didn't mind any of that. Our nurse's uniforms were really stiff.

TS: Oh really?

MH: They were like boards, yeah. Very starched and white.

TS: The white ones?

MH: Yeah. So, I don't know, that probably wasn't real practical but it—they were fine.

TS: Yeah.

MH: It was really nothing—It was more the context of the times.

TS: Right, and you had the hats, too, at that time.

MH: Yes, yes.

TS: How'd you like wearing the hat?

MH: I'll tell you, it was problematic, but I can remember feeling like this in civilian hospitals, you're always trying to either move people in bed, or turn them over, do dressings or something, you're constantly knocking that, so it was—it seemed to me more ornamental than functional. And I don't think nurses wear them any more at all. I don't know if they do in the—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Very few. Very few.

MH: Do they in the military?

TS: I don't think so. I'm not sure.

MH: Oh, that's interesting.

TS: But even—It's interesting because some of them—some people—some places they don't even give you the hat when you graduate, because that was like some sort of status, I guess, right? For a nurse to get your hat.

MH: Yeah, right.

TS: My mom, I know she got a cape.

MH: No, we didn't get capes. That would've been, kind of, super hero though. [both chuckle]

TS: That's right. But it's like that. So in the military you have this uniform, the same as, like, a nursing—

MH: Yes, yes.

TS: So that isn't much different as far as getting ready for work and things.

MH: No, no, and it was—it was just a privilege to—it was—Part of it was they were so good to each other.

TS: Who's they?

MH: The patients.

TS: Oh, yeah?

MH: There was a real—And so, some of that just rubbed off on you.

TS: This was at Fort Sam Houston?

MH: Yeah. Yeah. They were just really, really tight.

TS: Yeah. Did you fall kind of seamlessly into—like, after you finished your officer training, into—because you stayed at the same place, then, right?

MH: Yes.

TS: Even though you had orders somewhere else, so you got them changed?

MH: Yes.

TS: You said you went in with the buddy system, with another young woman?

MH: Yes, right, right. And we lived—We had an apartment off base. You could live—They did have quarters on base, but there were four of us that—we got a place off base, and it had a swimming pool. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, nice. Well, you were in Texas, right?

MH: Right. [chuckles]

TS: You need a swimming pool. Tell me what it was like; like, a typical day, once you got into your regular work at Fort Sam Houston.

MH: At Fort Sam we just worked regular days. At Fort Leonard Wood—By the time I was at Fort Leonard Wood we were on twelve hours; we had twelve hours on, twelve hours off. So that was a little different. They were—

TS: Right.

MH: That was different.

TS: But at first you were just—

MH: Just on a—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Like an eight hour shift?

MH: Like on a regular nursing—It was—And—When I was at Fort Sam, I was on an amputee ward—mostly on the orthopedic ward, that's where I spent most of the time. Some time on the amputee ward but they were—they were connected. And the amputee—I mean the orthopedic ward was called "The Jungle" and it looked like a jungle because it had all these—I can't think of the right name. I'll think of that before you need that transcript.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

MH: But all these orthopedic framed beds, so.

TS: Oh, like a Stryker?

MH: Yes, I think that's it; Stryker frame. It seemed like there was another name for it too.

TS: Might be.

MH: But it is a Stryker, definitely. And it was just—it seemed to me—

TS: Everybody's gotten something elevated?

MH: Yes.

TS: Okay.

MH: Yes, and it seemed like so much activity, so much—it was really a stunning time to—even if I would just witness to it, not a participant, I would have been grateful.

TS: In what way?

MH: It's really hard to put into words. If we were working nights and we knew that we'd have some patients brought in—sometimes they were evaced [evacuated by helicopter] from Vietnam to different bases before they were brought to Fort Sam. I think Philippines was one, but I won't swear to it. It's been so long, for some of this, to remember.

TS: Yeah.

MH: But—And they'd stabilized them and then they'd fly them into Brooke [Army Medical Center] and we had a helicopter pad in front of the hospital, and it was con—just constant, just constant; never ending. Or in my memory, maybe.

TS: Well, this was in '67, '68?

MH: Sixty-seven. It would've been '67.

TS: So it was a pretty intense time for the war.

MH: It just seemed like it was. And so, if we knew we were having some patients—I can remember doing this a number of times. I don't know if we did it always or what was what, but we would make, like, submarine sandwiches, so when they got there they had something to eat.

TS: Something to eat.

MH: It was celebratory.

TS: Like "Welcome home"?

MH: Yeah. Yeah. So we—we made a—So that was—that was great. We got to be there and saying, "Thank God you're here."

TS: Yeah.

MH: It was really very special in a lot of ways. And they were like—they were kids, absolutely kids. I had this one guy, his name was Everett Hilts[?]
—Everett Hilts—and I think—I probably shouldn't say this, because he was not really—he had some developmental issues, and—but he would just smile all the time. I mean, that was [unclear]. You know what I mean? And his bed was right outside the nurses' station, about four or five down, and he'd sit in those blue convalescent pajamas, that nappy hair and a big grin on his face and—I mean, it was just a privilege.

TS: Yeah. Which ward was he in?

MH: Orthopedic.

TS: Orthopedic. The Jungle?

MH: The Jungle, yes, exactly.

TS: Well, what was it like in the other ward with the amputees? That had to have been very difficult.

MH: We had—It was just—What they would say would be that they would do fine as long as they were in the hospital, but when they went home, that was the hard part.

TS: Once they left?

MH: Because when they were in the hospital they were having a good time. They would do what guys do when they get together: make a lot of racket, race around in wheel chairs, that kind of thing.

TS: Chase competitions, sort of thing?

MH: Yeah, just—Yeah.

TS: They're still around their buddies?

MH: Kid, being funny, teasing. I mean, it was just a very alive place, but when they'd go home, that would be heartache.

TS: Yeah. Do you—I wonder about—With the current wars that we've had and all the people coming home with PTSD [Post-traumatic Stress Disorder] and broken bodies and things like that, do you—does that affect you still from—

MH: Oh, sure. I can't believe it.

TS: Yeah.

MH: I can't believe we're still doing it. It just—It doesn't seem possible. When my husband retired I wanted to go to Mexico, and within a day after he retired, we got on a bus—a bus, he wanted to fly. But I thought, "I want to see it, I want to fly over it, I want to look at it," and that was a mistake, except for the fact that I saw all these—I had never seen anybody from Iraq. This was in—See, he's been retired for over ten years now.

TS: So 2003, 2004?

MH: Yeah. And this boy got on the bus and he—his arms were burned, comic books in them. There was a clear plastic bag that said "Patient's belongings" or something like that and it had comic books badly burned. And I thought—

TS: He was on the bus?

MH: On the bus—On the bus, yeah. Well, he was probably, I'm guessing, maybe, maybe eight to twelve weeks after injury.

TS: Yeah.

MH: So he had been in treatment.

TS: Where you headed?

MH: Mexico. Mexico. But he was probably Texas, I'm guessing.

TS: I see.

MH: Because we went through everything.

TS: So you had to drop off somewhere. Interesting that he was on the bus.

MH: Well, he got on the bus. He got on the bus. I'm not even sure where we were, but I thought I hadn't seen anybody from Iraq or Afghanistan.

TS: Until then.

MH: Yeah. Yeah. It—That really—There's a wonderful quotation that—I'm trying think of who said it, I'll know that, too, when—but it's: "Hope is a smaller thing on a bus."

TS: Interesting.

MH: Yeah. I sure thought of that when I saw that kid.

TS: Yeah.

MH: But I just can't believe it; I can't believe it. It doesn't seem possible that we're still doing it. Now we have business with Vietnam, which—all the time—I mean, I wouldn't want to—anything else. But how about these guys that are—One of my brother's that died[?], he never was right after Vietnam. Not—He was never who he was before went.

TS: Right.

MH: I'll say that.

TS: What did he—What was his job? Was he drafted?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MH: He was in ar—He was in artillery. Yeah, both of them were.

TS: Both of them were drafted?

MH: Both of them got—Both of them got, kind of, bad numbers it seemed like.

[During the Vietnam War, the United State Selective Service System drew lottery numbers, corresponding to days of the year, to determine who would and would not be drafted]

TS: Okay.

MH: But I think both of them enlisted too. I think we had—we had a real—again, because of Dad I think—

TS: Once they got their numbers maybe then then signed up?

MH: Yeah, that seems—But I hate—I won't swear to any of this now.

TS: That's okay.

MH: But he—he was—So these men are carrying that around for the rest of their lives, their children's lives, their wives. I can't believe it. That's when I'm not such a good pacifist. [both chuckle] You know?

TS: Yeah.

MH: Just absolutely the wrong—

TS: You just want to protest about it.

MH: Oh, yeah. We do, but it doesn't seem to—

TS: Change anything? Yeah. Was that one of the hardest things for you while you were in the Nursing Corps, was knowing that there's a war going on, or what might have been difficult for you?

MH: I think it was just seeing these kids. And when I was at Fort Leonard Wood—and I'd liked to Google [Internet search engine] this if I could figure out how do it—but they had—they called these kids something like McNamara's ten thousand, or something like that, and some of these kids were illiterate, but they raised the bar because they—

[Project 100,000, also known as McNamara's 100,000, was a program launched during the 1960s by the United States Department of Defense to recruit soldiers that would previously have been below military mental or medical standards. The program was initiated by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara in October 1966 to meet the escalating manpower needed for the American involvement in the Vietnam War.]

TS: I think it was a hundred thousand.

MH: Oh, I'm glad I misremembered that.

TS: I think so, yeah.

MH: Maybe that's why, because I've tried to look that up.

TS: Yeah.

MH: Would I find it under that?

TS: I think you might. I might help find that, so.

MH: Oh, I would be so grateful to you. I really—See, that's unconscionable isn't it? Unconscionable. If my brother said, "Yeah, I'll do this," that's one thing if I said it. That's one thing even if it's—the idea's crazy, but to take—

TS: But on the other hand, to play the devil's advocate for you, it wasn't a volunteer army.

MH: No.

TS: It was a draft and so—

MH: Yeah.

TS: —they needed foot soldiers.

MH: Yeah. And I think—I know they say that's a myth about a second lieutenant in Vietnam, his life expectancy was something like minutes. [chuckles] Something like—But that—That contaminated everything around us. That kind of knowledge that we were willing to do that, just—to me was just toxic.

TS: The war itself?

MH: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. And it's like so many things in the—in the human condition, you think somebody's in charge, somebody knows what—somebody—

TS: It spirals out of control. Well, the other thing going on besides Vietnam, you had the counter-culture.

[In the United States, the counterculture movement of the 1960s became identified with the rejection of conventional social norms of the 1950s. The people involved addressed issues such as women's rights, human sexuality, drug experimentation, and protesting the Vietnam War]

MH: Yes.

TS: Did you have any connection with that, or any—

MH: Maybe in my mind. [chuckles]

TS: What does that mean, Mary? I'm not sure what that means.

MH: I didn't get in—go to Haight-Asbury [San Francisco, CA] or anything like that, or Woodstock [Music and Art Fair] or—There, I was a good Catholic girl. [both chuckle]

TS: Okay.

MH: But I—It was interesting to me, it was interesting to me, and I can remember arguing passionately about the war.

TS: In what way?

MH: That it just seemed so crazy to me.

TS: Was this while you were in the service?

MH: Oh, yeah. In—With—

TS: Who were you arguing with?

MH: With other people in the service.

TS: Other soldiers?

MH: Soldiers, and I can remember one time there was a medical corpsman, we had this conversation. But it was always—I always felt like it was respectful, and it was safe. I never felt like I couldn't—

TS: Voice your opinion about it?

MH: Yeah, I never felt—Of course, maybe it was because I was so lowly. If I had been in other, higher circles or something, I might not of had that kind of freedom, but yeah.

TS: Well, you also raised your hand and joined, and that gave you a little bit of—some gravitas, as you used earlier, to actually speak your mind, right?

MH: Right. Right.

TS: You weren't speaking from the outside. You were speaking from the inside.

MH: Yeah, that's honest. I think—It just dawned on me when you said that, too—this kind of the subject though[?]
—but I think one of things besides Dad was, I knew a lot of older women who used to say, "Oh, I—That's something I always wished I would've done, been an army nurse." It seemed like I heard that a lot.

TS: Really?

MH: And so, I thought, "I'm not going to have those kind of regrets. I don't want to have those regrets." I—

TS: Was that, maybe, during World War II, when they had hoped that they could've joined; something like that maybe?

MH: May—I must—It must have been. If it were my aunts and cousins and things and it would be far enough after, if I can remember it—the memory would be maybe sweetened a little bit.

TS: Well, the difference between having—being in the Nursing Corps and being nurturing and caring for soldiers is a very honorable profession that I think is well respected.

MH: Yeah.

TS: And that's different, I think, from what—how some of the men were treated in Vietnam who were not—they were in a position of having to kill others.

MH: Yeah.

TS: And so, the lack—the level of respect there for the war that's not respected—

MH: See, and that's—Yeah.

TS: —is different kind of treatment.

MH: Yeah. And see, that's so dishonest, isn't it, to make them go and then—

TS: Or they don't have a choice and—yes.

MH: Exactly, so dishonest.

TS: Did you ever—Oh, I know what I was going to ask you. So your—Your brothers were drafted.

MH: Yes.

TS: Did they go in before you joined or after you joined, or somewhere in—

MH: My brothers—Because—My brothers both got out when I was in my first year in the—they were both out by the time I was in my first year.

TS: Okay.

MH: Because they—My older brother Francis took my younger brother on a road trip when they got out—when he got back—when Bill got back, and they were in a serious car wreck.

TS: Oh, goodness.

MH: And they were taken to Saint Rosa Hospital in San Antonio, and I don't even remember if the army gave me leave or what, but—so I went and—

TS: To where they were at in the hospital?

MH: —took—took care of them. And I wasn't home when they in the hospital, so evidently—I don't know whether I had leave, because it was at home.

TS: Right.

MH: I don't really remember that, Therese. But I went down and stayed with them. But I was still doing my time at Fort Sam.

TS: How long were they in the hospital?

MH: Oh—

TS: Did they bother recover?

MH: They both recovered. But they were in—They said my younger brother would never be normal, but—If what he was isn't normal, it should be.

TS: [chuckles] I understand. Yeah.

MH: He was just a peach.

TS: So they both recuperated?

MH: Yes. My older brother always had—I think he had PTSD. But my younger brother was so—he was just a different kind of mind set. It's really hard to get him upset or worried or—with the older one it's very intense and—

TS: Yeah.

MH: —it's different.

TS: Yes, it is different. So then you—At one point, you put in—you volunteered for Vietnam.

MH: Right.

TS: You want to talk about why you did that?

MH: I was hungry to go. I don't even—And I don't know why; I couldn't say why. I think it was just the idea of the need, but I was hungry to go. And I have a—We laugh. I still have a suitcase over there somewhere—not a suitcase, a locker—a footlocker I never got back. They had a fan and all these really great books, and an electric fan. And the only time in my life I've ever read[?]-wore perfume was when I was in army.

TS: Oh, really? Why is that?

MH: And so, it had some—I think because—because the patients enjoyed it so much. It seemed like it really heartened them.

TS: Oh, I see. Okay.

MH: I never wore it one day before or one day after. Isn't that strange? But they also—A lot of them back from Vietnam had these—I could find it blindfolded at a hundred miles, but this kind of—some kind of an infection. I don't know if it was pseudomonas [bacterial infections]. I've forgotten so much.

TS: It's on the mouth?

MH: No, the wounds.

TS: Oh, okay.

MH: On their wounds. But the smell was very distinctive and awful.

TS: Okay.

MH: So I think that kind of softened some of that too.

TS: Softened the smell that they were—

MH: Yeah. Some of—Or in my mind.

TS: Yeah. So talk a little bit about—So you volunteered for Vietnam. What—In what year would that have been, do you remember?

MH: It would have been in '67, because I was at Fort Sam when I did.

TS: Okay. Okay. And so, you volunteered and you got orders.

MH: Yes.

TS: But then you were—became ill.

MH: I got a port call; I had a port call.

TS: And apparently you shipped your goods over, or at least a locker. [chuckles]

MH: My fan.

TS: Okay.

MH: My fan and my books. [chuckles]

TS: You've made up for the books. I think we're okay now.

MH: But then my brothers were in the accident.

TS: Oh, after you got your orders?

MH: Before my—Yeah, after I got my ord—Before my brothers were in the accident, and when my—one of the nurses that lived in the apartment building that we lived in, her name was Diane Cameron, she was a captain, just a wonderful, wonderful woman. Generous and smart as a whip. I think she's the first one that she said to me—she said, "You look yellow. Your color is funny. You need to—" Well, I felt terrible but I thought it because of my brothers.

TS: Right.

MH: I, had no idea. So then I—I was jaundiced.

TS: Yeah.

MH: And so, they put me in the hospital and so—

TS: Was this after you cared for your brothers, then?

MH: Yes, yes.

TS: Okay, and they had—and then you—

MH: It was during that time.

TS: During that time, and so then they tested you and your—

MH: Yeah.

TS: How long was that for recovery?

MH: I don't really remember, Therese. I remember I was in the Providence Hospital [Providence Medical Center] in Kansas City, where I lived, for about—maybe a week or two.

TS: Yeah.

MH: And then I got orders for convalescence. I think it's—I can't remember how long that was. But then I went to Leonard Wood.

TS: Okay. So how did you feel about not going to Vietnam?

MH: Oh, I was heartsick.

TS: Still?

MH: Yeah. Every once in a while now, I think maybe it would've done me in, emotionally, every once in a while now, but it took me a long time to get there. And my husband says. "If you had gone, we just wouldn't have been", so maybe—

TS: That you wouldn't have met your husband?

MH: Well, I had already met him.

TS: Oh, you had?

MH: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

MH: But he just thinks it would've put me out of reach. Maybe it would.

TS: Maybe so.

MH: Yeah.

TS: So you do regret that? You felt—

MH: Oh, I did for a long time, just powerfully, just powerfully. But I think it might been naïveté on my part. It was hard enough to see him—Now, at Fort Leonard Wood, we didn't have any—or none that I remember—any Vietnam vets.

TS: No? Just local soldiers and things?

MH: We had a lot of recruits, because they do a lot of training down there and—no, I—But Fort Sam was—

TS: It was a lot? So it was about a year there?

MH: Yeah.

TS: Was there anything particularly difficult, physically, that you had to do in the army?

MH: I don't think so, other than the boots. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah, I can see. I see how that could be.

MH: I don't think—I don't think at all. I think that—Well, we were on twelve days—twelve hours days—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, twelve hours days. Yeah, you had pretty—

MH: That was a little bit—I wouldn't call it—I wouldn't call it hard, but it was a different kind of rhythm.

TS: Yeah.

MH: But no, I don't think I ever had to do anything difficult.

TS: No.

MH: Other than see these kids.

TS: The emotional part.

MH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Well, did you feel like the time that you were in the Army Nurse Corps that you were treated fairly?

MH: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, treated well, yeah.

TS: Yeah? Was there anybody in particular that you would like to talk about that was, like, a good mentor for you as a nurse or just as a person?

MH: I'm trying to think. We had very little contact with women nurses above our grade.

TS: Oh, you did?

MH: Very little. If they would come through as a supervisor, it was—it was just a slam, bam, thank you. It was—It was—At least, that's my memory of it. I had a ward master—I wish I could think of his name—at Fort Sam, that was just saint—saintly. I mean, he did teach me. He did teach me. I came from the hospital, Saint Mary's. I knew how to give a good back rub when I finished. I mean, did well on all my national tests in everything as far as practical, and then I went to Kanas City General [Hospital] for—I worked there for a couple of months before I got my orders and that was good experience, because that was in a male trauma unit, and so we had a lot of gunshot wounds and that kind of stuff. So that was real experience for me. But I would say that ward master was—and it seemed like he was—he used to box. I wish I could think of his name, because I have something about him in the poem.

TS: Oh, you do?

MH: But he was just—knew everything, knew where everything was. Anything that you needed was there. Just competent. Competent.

TS: Yeah? So he helped transfer really good skills to you, in that way?

MH: Oh, I—He was there to offer [unclear] how much [unclear]. [both chuckle] But he definitely would. And it was just—I would have people come up and say, "Lieutenant, here's another cup of coffee for you to let get cold."

TS: Yeah.

MH: And I just thought that was the kindest, most generous—I mean, yeah, I was treated very, very—very, very well.

TS: Well, we hear sometimes about sexual harassment and—

MH: I never had a moment of that. I never had a moment of it. I had—I would say some of it was—it was—I don't know how to put into words. But we would go to the Ratskeller after—after—when we were down there for basic, and there would be music and dancing and it would be loud and it would be fun. But I can remember one time, we pulled a chair away from under the table and some—this man came over and said that he was the adjutant for someone. Well, we didn't know what—we didn't know the language. And they—he wanted to see me. So there was a lot of stuff that I thought was playful or just engaging, but nothing that I would feel was—was malicious, or—no, I—

TS: A little flirty, but not crossing the line?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MH: Oh yeah. I think flirty, all the time.

TS: [chuckles] Yeah, okay.

MH: It was just all the time. In the poem I've got a line where the patients will always say, "Hey, Lieutenant, want to feel my new leg?" [both chuckle] Because they always—"Well—" and then they'd have you feel the real one.

TS: Yeah.

MH: [chuckles] Of course, you'd do dressings and stuff so that wasn't necessary, but it was—it was just a way for them to be eighteen year old men. And so, that was—that was constant, but never anything that I—I think there was a real—Oh, I wish I [unclear] had a good enough [unclear] for the way I was treated.

TS: Good camaraderie and—

MH: I don't know.

TS: Better word than that.

MH: I felt cherished.

TS: Oh, okay. That's a great word.

MH: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Well, that's sweet. That's a sweet way to look at it.

MH: Yeah. Yeah, I really did.

TS: Now, so today, what women can do in the military, compared to what they could do then, and even in the Army Nurse Corps.

MH: Yeah.

TS: What do you think about that?

MH: I'm thrilled. I'm just thrilled for it. I really do think that women, if they are allowed to, if they're educated and given some responsibility, might save the world—no, not might, will. I mean, I really do believe that; that that's where the energy needs to go and the education, instead of holding them back.

TS: Yeah.

MH: Yeah, I'm thrilled; I'm absolutely thrilled. And I have granddaughters. Yeah, I—

TS: But now they're going into the infantry.

MH: Yeah.

TS: What do you think about that?

MH: Yeah. I don't believe in shooting people. [chuckles]

TS: But, I mean—So if we're going to have it—if we're going to have an infantry and a woman can do it, so should she be able to have that opportunity?

MH: I guess—If I'm going to be honest, I'd have to say, yes. My real problem with that is, I remember how—and I was couple years older when I was in the army; I was two years older when I started nurses' training than most people in my class. So I had a little bit more time to mature. And I was so surprised by everything.

We had a goat—a goat lab and they brought this goat in that was shot up, and we were supposed to learn how to debride their wounds and everything. I thought—I mean, it just seemed so crazy to me. So I haven't gotten over that.

But for a woman that—You know what? I think eighteen is too young to know that you want to be in the infantry, to be real honest with you. I think thirty might be a little young. [both chuckle] So I don't know.

TS: Yeah. But anything else, like being a pil—fighter pilot, and on ships and submarines and—

MH: Oh, I think—They had something about, I guess, some problems with harassment on a submarine. But they seem so claustrophobic, I wouldn't—what woman in her right mind would get on with all those—I mean, no, thank you. [chuckles]

But I do think that women should be able to, except for infantry, that's the one thing. I think eighteen might be—might be young to decide that. But I think for—to be on a submarine or all that other stuff, it might not be their cup of tea, but they'll learn from it. So I think you're competent to make those—but to make a choice at eighteen and then not have your legs for the rest of your life, I—

TS: But you could do that in any field now, the way that the wars are.

MH: Yeah.

TS: You could be a truck driver.

MH: Yeah. I don't like blowing things up either.

TS: Yeah. [chuckles]

MH: I just really have a problem with—Even if it was old people, even if they took someone my age and had them drive a truck, but not these kids.

TS: Yeah.

MH: It's just too much to lose.

TS: Well, do you—at the time, in this era of the sixties, did you have anyone that you admired, like, politically or in that spectrum?

MH: I think—I think [Dr.] Martin Luther King [Jr.] and obviously the Kennedys; I mean, I think we were all, kind of, smitten. But I think Martin Luther King—I think I—I knew when I heard him that he was the real deal. There was—I would put him first.

TS: Yeah.

MH: Yeah. I remember after he died I used to iron my clothes, and they had a record in the [unclear] Public Library with all his speeches. I'd just iron—iron—[chuckles]

TS: And listen to the record?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MH: —and listen to the speech and weep. But no—It was in my lifetime, he would be—he would be—I almost felt like about Dianne Feinstein [United States senator]. The other day I thought what courage—

TS: Oh, with the torture report?

MH: What courage. Yeah. I think that may be my second act of political heroism in my lifetime, or my second political—real, real, real, heroic. Yeah. Because you know that's going to cost her. Probably already has, but—

TS: Yes.

MH: And how interesting, Therese, that you'd call it torture. How interesting. [chuckles]

TS: Why?

MH: You know what we call it now?

TS: No.

MH: Enhanced interrogation techniques. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, my mistake. I didn't realize it was an acronym, kind of—EIT, I think, is what they called it.

MH: Is it E—yes, that's right, EIT; enhanced interrogation techniques. Yeah, yeah.

TS: That's interesting. Well, how about Robert [Francis] Kennedy?

MH: I think he was probably more substantial than John, but I remember going to see [President] John [Fitzgerald] Kennedy when I was in high school. My cousin took me.

TS: Oh, you did?

MH: And I would—I was really interested in politics when I was young. I really thought it was a force that people could—I don't think that anymore.

TS: For change?

MH: Yeah.

TS: You don't think so anymore?

MH: No, no.

TS: What do think it's for now?

MH: What I think politics are for now?

TS: Where you saw it before as a young person as a force of change, what do you—

MH: Now I think it's a force for—what's the right word?—for putting changes—for legislating changes that will keep the people with the power and the money in their position, and keep everybody else out of it. That—That thing that was passed last night, or the night before, it was supposed to be a gift to the—

TS: [unclear] or something.

MH: —gifts to the banks, or the politi—It just seems like—And what—I think what's so amazing about it is having seen somebody like King, they're not embarrassed; they're not embarrassed. They'll stand right up and say—The guy we just elected, sent to our Senate, they're not embarrassed about only being for a small percentage of their—

TS: Oh, I see what you're saying.

MH: Yeah, so I don't think it's a force for change anymore, it's more a force for concrete—putting—

TS: Protecting the status quo.

MH: Yeah, and enhancing, I think. They were saying about that Keystone Pipeline [System], what that's going to cost if it goes through, and we're in the ninth inning as far as fossil fuels—using fossil—so we're going to spend that kind of money, annihilate another old forest, it just—Yeah, yeah. I used to—We used to write letters and do all that protesting. And I guess we still do a little bit of it, but not with the same kind of hope. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, because maybe it's that kind of—that's changed; the way that we can impact the political process is maybe a little different—

MH: Yeah.

TS: —here today. It's interesting.

MH: Yeah.

TS: Well, a couple other things I want to ask you about too. So we talked a little bit about the counter-culture and you told me you were a good Catholic girl and that.

MH: [chuckles]

TS: So that's fine, Mary.

MH: Now I need to rethink that. [both laugh]

TS: You go to Woodstock and your mother tried to get you to have a beer when you were seventeen. But what about the women's movement?

MH: Oh, I've always been—I've always been—So that's fine and merry. And I don't think—I think again, feminist, that word is kind of my global warming; it's a poor—it's a misnomer.

TS: It's like the word liberal.

MH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That it's more—That I think all human beings should be treated the same, educationally, and—everything. Opportunities.

TS: At the time that that was happening, so you would've been just getting out of the service probably then, but did it influence your thinking at that time, or do you think that it reinforced the way that you felt things should be?

MH: I think it reinforced—I think my mother was a feminist before—

TS: Before the term was used?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MH: She had no idea—That term wouldn't mean anything to her, but she was absolutely unequivocally—She told the story when my dad was—she and Dad were fairly newly married, I was a baby. One night Daddy was getting ready, he was going to go out and he was going to play cards, and—and so Mom put her coat on, too, and Daddy said, "Where are you going?"

And Mom said, "I'm going with you."

And Daddy says, "You've got a baby."

And she says, "So do you." And her—she was always—"Either both of us are going to be married or neither one and it doesn't really—I don't really care which way it goes." I mean, that—But that was—It was an honest—

TS: Yeah.

MH: And she loved my dad all her life. I mean, they were—

TS: Did he go out that night?

MH: No. Oh, no. Are you kidding? He was a smart man.

TS: [chuckles]

MH: But it was just—it was—

TS: So she believed in that idea of sharing the parenthood and sharing—

MH: Oh, absolutely.

TS: Yeah.

MH: She just felt like she had a—she had—she never had any doubt about her intrinsic value.

TS: And now, she had never gone to college or—

MH: No, no.

TS: Had she gone through high school?

MH: She went through high school, yeah. Yeah, I don't think my dad finished high school, he was on a farm in Nebraska, but Mom—What really surprised me about Mom, is it was so—she wouldn't understand any other different—she just was such a—such a natural position for her, and sort of naturally—

TS: Yeah. So you wonder about for her mother and her mother's mother, that chain of—

MH: Well, her mother was not that way, she was a very—very elegant woman. She had seven children and my grandfather left her when she was pregnant with the eighth one during the Depression.

TS: Wow.

MH: And my grandmother never stopped loving him. And my mother thought that was—I mean, she's just—

TS: Couldn't understand that.

MH: No, I mean, it was just beyond—beyond what she could—So she was very different.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So her mother, then, raised seven, eight kids by herself?

MH: By herself.

TS: During the Depression.

MH: During the Depression. Yeah, yeah, very success—Well, I don't know whether—maybe I shouldn't say very successful, but they survived. They survived intact and healthy. And grandma used to say that they would rent out one of the bedrooms, and then to whoever they rented that out to, when they could no longer pay, that person would, kind of, be part of the family, and they'd rent it out to somebody else who—

TS: Who could pay?

MH: And so, it got to become kind of a mob—mob scene.

TS: Where did they grow up?

MH: Kansas City, Kansas.

TS: Yeah. So the same place that you—

MH: Yes.

TS: —would call home, I guess.

MH: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

TS: That's amazing. What about your thoughts on—So we talked, I think, before we turned the tape on. I can't remember if we had this discussion where you said that one of the women that wanted to go in the army with you, she got married and then got pregnant and then she couldn't go in. We talked a little about that, right?

MH: Right, yes we did.

TS: So—But the other thing was, that you couldn't be a homosexual at that time. It was well before "Don't Ask Don't Tell".

MH: Right. Right.

TS: Just don't be, I guess.

MH: Right. Right, exactly.

TS: So had—Were you aware of that at the time? Was there any—Did you have any contact with any kind of—

MH: I don't think—I don't think I really—It would be hard for me to put a date on that. I know when I was at hospice, I had a lot of patients with—

TS: With AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome]?

MH: —with AIDS. And I just really felt so comfortable in those situations. Absolutely at home. But at what point I became aware, I'm not really sure. But I've never had anything but a real affection and a real ease. I—What I think is kind of funny, heterosexuals don't do that well. [chuckles]

TS: What do you mean?

MH: I mean, really. Heterosexual relationships. Talk about iffy. I don't know. I just don't—

TS: Oh you mean, like, a fifty percent divorce rate?

MH: Yeah. I just don't—I just don't understand. Love, to me—love is a good thing.

TS: Right.

MH: If it's—I've never had that kind of sense that somebody would be less human for—I just never had it.

TS: So this whole transformation of the military accepting homosexuals, and allowing for marriage of them, that's okay? You think that's fine?

MH: Absolutely, absolutely. I'm hoping the church will catch up with the military. [chuckles] Really.

TS: Yes.

MH: And I don't think—I mean, the arguments against it for the military were, I think, specious. Oh, they'll be in the showers, or in infantry, and in battle or something like that.

TS: Yeah.

MH: I just think that's absolutely—underestimates the people, the situation.

TS: Right, doesn't give them credit for just working with the person next to them.

MH: Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

MH: As you would do if somebody was trying to kill you. [chuckles]

TS: There you go. Well, tell me a little bit about, then, when you decided that you were going to leave the Army Nurse Corps.

MH: Oh, it was really my husband. I would have stayed in.

TS: Oh, you would've?

MH: I would've stayed in. I think I would've. I mean, I felt like I would've.

TS: Why do you think you would've stayed in?

MH: Oh, because it was—I loved—Like I said, I was well treated, I loved the patients—the population that I was taking care of and—I mean, it was a—we were—I thought we were well paid, well taken care of, leave time. It just seemed to be—It's just seemed to be ideal. If I wanted—If I wanted a family, and I think that—at the time I think I kind of thought it was an either/or thing. I don't think young women think that anymore.

TS: Right, well, I think it wasn't until the seventies that you could actually have a child and stay in the service.

MH: Oh, is that right?

TS: Yeah.

MH: So it was right on that line.

TS: They—Right around the time of Vietnam they started to do some waivers, and I think the Army Nurse Corps was first because they really needed to keep the nurses.

MH: Oh, that's interesting.

TS: But it wasn't really until the seventies where it became an official policy. So maybe you didn't really have the option to stay in.

MH: Yeah, yeah. I don't know. I don't know. But, I—

TS: Were you married—Oh, right, the last month before—

MH: Yes.

TS: —in August, right, of '68?

MH: Yes. But I had—We had—I had met my—Well, I really met him in high school, but I was very bookish [chuckles] and he was not. So, I mean, we didn't—

TS: So you knew him but you didn't date or anything?

MH: No, not at all. And then when I was in nurses' training, we re-met and, we had really—we had planned to marry my senior—the senior year I was in school, but I was going into the army, I wasn't going to do that.

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

MH: Oh, he didn't think it was a good idea.

TS: Oh, we didn't talk about that. I guess I didn't realize that you had known him before.

MH: No, no, he didn't think it was a good idea and—

TS: But he—So were you dating at that time, then?

MH: Yes.

TS: And you were engaged?

MH: Before we went to—Yeah, but—Yes. And you don't want to ask him about this. [both chuckle]

TS: Maybe I do.

MH: No. Yeah, we were—we were engaged before I went down to Fort Sam. But yes, I—I had a wonderful time at Fort Sam. [both chuckle]

TS: Understood. That's very interesting though that he didn't—he didn't really want you to—to go in.

MH: No. I think it was—

TS: But how old were you? You were still very young.

MH: No. I really—Well, I was—I was almost twenty-five when we got married, so I would've been twenty-three—about twenty-three—

TS: Twenty-two in—

MH: —when I went into the—

TS: Yeah.

MH: Yeah.

TS: Still very young.

MH: Yeah. In those days I was considered over the hill. [chuckles]

TS: Were you, at twenty-two or twenty-three?

MH: Well, because the cool kids got married in high school.

TS: Oh. Okay.

MH: Or right out of high school. I mean, that was not uncommon.

TS: Interesting.

MH: To marry at almost twenty-five was—But I really—it wasn't very interesting to me, the idea, but I—at some point I did want a family.

TS: Did you enjoy this independence that you were having as a young single girl?

MH: Of course. Of course. And when my daughter, after she finished school says she wants to get married, and the daddy of the guy she's going to marry said, "Isn't this just wonderful?"

And I said, "I don't think so." I wanted her to have some time, but she didn't want to. She seems very happy so.

TS: Well, that's good.

MH: Yeah. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah. That's true. You can't live vicariously through your daughter, so there you go.

MH: No, but I do think the women, it's especially important that they—you can care of things—you can—you—

TS: Well, it reminds me of what you said about the nuns who said, "Go back home and think about—and pray on it," I think is what you said.

MH: Yeah.

TS: So they knew that you needed to—

MH: Yeah.

TS: We can get so emotionally connected to what we're in and not see the big picture of our lives.

MH: Yes, absolutely. And then to have somebody generous enough to say—if they were looking out for their own interests, like bulking up their numbers.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Recruiting.

MH: [chuckles] Yeah, recruiting.

TS: They would've taken you right in.

MH: Exactly, exactly, but they were—

TS: Very caring.

MH: I was very lucky in my life. Yeah.

TS: Yes, it sounds like they were really terrific. So what did you think, then, when you got out? Were you—How did life change for you?

MH: Oh, geez. I think the changes more had to do with, when I got out—more—instead of just being about separation from the military, all of the sudden I was young, married, pregnant, morning sickness, and that kind of—

TS: Okay.

MH: That whole—

TS: Did you get pregnant right away?

MH: Yes.

TS: Okay.

MH: Well—

TS: Now, I'm wondering if that had anything do with the bachelor's quarters. [both laugh]
Just saying.

MH: It may have. Well, I had a month, because my chief nurse said—I went in—I was—I had a—kind of a bad—and I had gone into the emergency room and my chief nurse made a comment to another nurse that, "Oh, she's probably just disappointed that she's a good Catholic girl, that's not pregnant the first—" That was her—[chuckles]

TS: Two weeks. Yeah. Well, your son—your first son was born in '69. What month was that?

MH: Yes. In May. [chuckling]

TS: I understand, okay, very good. I think you did just fine. That's funny. So you went into motherhood, then, and—

MH: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Yeah.

MH: And that was—I tell you, I think that was harder for me than going into the military.

TS: Really? Why do you think so?

MH: Because all of a sudden, I went from being competent—or kind of competent and willing to be taught.

TS: Well, you had gone through training.

MH: Right, right. And on my own, to—to—I mean, it was just—it was dizzying. And the first year—we laugh about this now—I thought if we got a divorce I would go to hell. [chuckles] So—Because I thought, "Who needs this? This is too hard." It was just too hard.

TS: Right.

MH: I was used to being independent—

TS: Right.

MH: And then I was sick when I was pregnant. I think that had a lot to do with it.

TS: Yeah.

MH: But see, that's another way the church really, kind of, kept us from ourselves, protected us from ourselves. Of course it's hard, duh. I mean—

TS: Right.

MH: But you know, I'm so grateful now; it's almost fifty years.

TS: Yeah, that's terrific. That's terrific.

MH: But at the time I thought—it was really a motivator to—I thought, "You can't get a divorce, it's not an option."

TS: Right. So it made you stick in there. Interesting. Well, did you—do you think your life is any different because you did join the Army Nurse Corps?

MH: Oh, definitely.

TS: In what way?

MH: Oh, I had that time—I had that time, and I think, just like being in Japan, just like my experience as an army brat, it was just built on top of that—those—sometimes I can be kind of anti-male. I mean, when I look at the world, and I see who is doing the—exploding the buildings—

TS: The patriarchy, anti-patriarchy maybe.

MH: Exactly.

TS: [More than male?]?

MH: Exactly. Yeah, because I have sons and grandchildren and wonderful husband.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: It's just the structure of the society, rather than—yeah.

MH: Yeah. But—I forgot what I going to say.

TS: You said sometimes you could be anti-male and—

MH: Oh, the—I think the men that I took care of in the army, I mean, nobody could be—nobody could be anti—

TS: Very special, and they treated you probably just like a gem.

MH: Absolutely, absolutely. And I'm glad you clarified that for me, I would hate to be anti-anything.

TS: Sure.

MH: Except exploding buildings, [both chuckle] shooting people, but not any—

TS: It's the structure of the way that things are working and who's in charge of those things, are mostly men.

MH: Yeah, but not any—any human[?].

TS: Right.

MH: Yeah, I don't want to be that way.

TS: Well, you don't—Mary, I wouldn't—I don't think anybody would ever guess that you were anti-anything, except for anti-war.

MH: [chuckles] Oh, okay. I'll take that.

TS: I think that that's—that's very—and that's interesting how you can embrace the army, and it seems like you do embrace it.

MH: Absolutely, Absolutely.

TS: The people—and how it shaped your life.

MH: Absolutely.

TS: And yet say I don't like what the army does, as far as making more, so.

MH: Yeah. Yeah, it's definitely—if not a paradox, a conundrum. I mean, it's—But I never thought—Growing up, I never thought my dad had anything to do with—my dad wouldn't have anything do with it.

TS: He's cooking.

MH: Yeah, yeah.

TS: He's feeding the troops.

MH: Yeah, he's quiet and kind. So I just never associated with—I never associated it—the military with anything except an abundant life.

TS: Yeah.

MH: Skating.

TS: Sure, because that was your connection as a child.

MH: Yeah.

TS: And even your experience was nurturing while you were in.

MH: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Well, did you ever see yourself as any kind of trailblazer in the—in the army?

MH: No, I don't think so.

TS: No?

MH: I don't think.

TS: There weren't that many nurses at that time that joined. Not relatively to—

MH: It's funny, because I noticed—like, when I got off the plane it seemed like there was a welcome committee. [chuckles]

TS: Was there?

MH: But I thought, "Isn't that strange." But you think that, it makes me think about—I wonder if that's—I wonder if they just—that was—there weren't many so they—there was a very—it was very welcoming. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah. Who welcomed you?

MH: I think the one man's—I'm trying to think of what it—He was a man I had met at Saint Mary's Hospital and he was at Fort Sam at the time and he brought—he brought a lot of people with him, but it just seemed to be over the top.

TS: Yeah.

MH: Definitely over the top of what I would've—

TS: Right.

MH: —would've expected. I just knew—I knew one.

TS: Well, we still do things—still do things like sponsoring when someone's going to a new base and they have somebody there that can guide them.

MH: I think that's a—Isn't that nice? Yeah, yeah.

TS: Yeah. Well, because you're—you're not with your family and you're moving around.

MH: Right, right.

TS: Yeah, it's a good system.

MH: And maybe that's what that was. [chuckles]

TS: The welcoming committee was, yeah. That could be.

MH: The welcome wagon. [chuckles]

TS: Now, have you—have you ever used any of your veterans benefits?

MH: My GI bill. My GI bill.

TS: And what did you use that for?

MH: For anesthesia school at Kentucky University [University of Kansas?], and if—I think if I had it to do over, I would've studied philosophy or something. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, really?

MH: Yeah. But I was—I was in that—When we were young, we were always—you've got to be able to support yourself.

TS: Have a trade.

MH: You've got to—Yeah, that was—that was the primary push.

TS: And philosophy wasn't a trade.

MH: No, but I think that would've been great fun. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah, I'm sure you would've been really great at it. And you said earlier, I think, that you hadn't any experience with the VA [Veterans Affairs] at all?

MH: No, no.

TS: Nothing at all?

MH: Not that I can think of; I hope I'm not telling you a story.

TS: Well, that's okay. That's alright.

MH: Okay.

TS: It's not like—We're getting a little snapshot of your life here in little pieces. It doesn't—

MH: Okay. My neighbor would go the VA at lot and then—so I—through him I had some—would talk to, but not directly for my—for myself.

TS: Right. Well, did you have—Oh, your three children, did—have any of them joined the service?

MH: No.

TS: No. Would you have encouraged them to, if they—

MH: No.

TS: No. Would you discourage them?

MH: I think I would now.

TS: Because of the era that we're in?

MH: I think I would, yes.

TS: Yeah.

MH: And it's so—it's so different; it's so different. It's not—It's not everyone—it's not everyone in the army—it's just a—the people who don't have a lot of options, that's the way it seems to me now. The people who don't have a lot of options that have to go. And I don't think they're taken care of as well as we were, I really don't.

TS: You don't think so?

MH: No, do you?

TS: I don't answer those kind of questions on tape. [chuckles]

MH: But will you tell me later? [chuckling]

TS: Sure.

MH: Thanks.

TS: So—Well, because I think it's complicated.

MH: Oh, it is.

TS: It's complicated.

MH: It is, it is.

TS: And it's hard to know—I'm not in the service anymore.

MH: Yeah, and I wouldn't put you on the spot. I forget that—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: No, it's quite alright. I know it's still running so we—

MH: [chuckles]

TS: Okay. But times have changed.

MH: Yes.

TS: I mean, I think it's true. But it's interesting that you say that because in some ways it's very similar now to when it was in the Vietnam—We have this war.

MH: Right.

TS: Well, one war going on, but still, people are going home with broken bodies, as they say, right?

MH: Right.

TS: Do you think there's anything in particular that you would want a civilian to know about what it was like to be in the Army Nurse Corps that they may not know or understand or appreciate?

MH: Oh, yeah. But I don't know that—I don't know that you can get it second hand. I don't know that you can tell people. It seems to me like there's so many human beings can't say

to each other. Like, I made a note the other day about something—even if your life depended on it, like if I said, "The house is on fire," and you turn over and put the pillow over your head. But we do that every day in a lot of different ways. So I would love—I would love—because I think if everyone knew, it would not happen anymore. It doesn't fix anything.

TS: War.

MH: Yeah. It doesn't fix anything. And then these kids have to go through forty or fifty years with those broken bodies. And when I see them and they'll say, "Oh, I'm going to walk and I'm going to do this," and it breaks my heart because they have no idea what that's going to be like.

TS: Yeah.

MH: They have no idea. No, I—I would love—I would love it but I don't know that that's possible.

TS: Right, right. Well, on that line, then, what does patriotism mean to you?

MH: Oh, my, my. It means—I think it means an enormous gratitude for the lack of being born in a country like this; enormous gratitude. A responsibility to say—I mean, I think a democracy depends on people that are intelligent, well read, look at their things, and are willing to discuss it and learn from each other, open—I can't imagine the privilege of being born here. I mean, it just—I really can't. And sometimes it worries me that—I mean, that's a lot to lose; that's a lot to lose. And we're not taking care of our bridges. For a while there we weren't taking care of our vets. How many of our vets are homeless? So—I mean—But I'm not one of those "love it or leave it" people. I think it's got to be more—it's more complicated and we've got to rise to that complexity. But the gratitude is just—just overwhelming.

TS: Yeah. Well, that's a great—that's a great statement. I don't actually have any more formal questions. Is there anything that you would like to add that we haven't talked about? One thing we haven't talked about is what got you through writing the poems. I guess I should ask you about that.

MH: Talking[?] is another lifesaver. When my youngest son went to college, I had always lusted after an English degree; always, all my life.

TS: Next to philosophy. [chuckles]

MH: English first, then—

TS: Okay.

MH: But you know what? I could almost study anything, to be honest with you.

TS: Yeah, I'm sure you could. I can see that for sure.

MH: And I went to—There was an ad in the paper, I was still working at hospice, and the women's club in Raleigh was offering an scholarship for five hundred dollars, and I thought—and a friend of mine, she ran the Catholic worker house in Kansas City, she came out with me and she was going to go to this scholarship application with me, and I thought if I get in to [North Carolina] State [University]—if I get this scholarship and get into State, I will just go long enough to take Shakespeare; that was the first goal. And when I got—My advisor said, "Now, you need math and Spanish and all this kind of stuff."

And I thought, "Yeah, why?" And I walked out and I signed up for Shakespeare.

TS: [chuckles]

MH: And so, it was—Oh my—

TS: You got the scholarship?

MH: I got the scholarship and—and was halfway through the Shakespeare class, and just—almost delirious; I was having such a great time. It was just wonderful. I understood Shakespeare, I could not understand my teacher.

TS: [chuckles]

MH: I could not understand what he was saying, but Shakespeare, I—

TS: Right.

MH: But there was an old guy in my class, older than me—the two of us—and we had to do a scene from Shakespeare, so I thought, "Oh, Jesus, now I'm not even going to stay for the whole semester but it's been great."

So I—And this guy's name was Keith Peterson and he said, "Mary, let's do this scene in Henry V; you be the old nurse, and I'll be the young princess."

He's bald and old professor, and I said—and it's in French. I said, "Oh, Keith—" because I hadn't told him I was going to quit before I had to do this scene.

TS: [chuckles]

MH: So he said, "I'll teach—"

I said, "I don't know French"

He said, "I'll teach you phonetically."

Anyway, I really didn't want to quit. And he kind of—I thought, "Well, maybe we can do this." Well, we were a smash. [chuckles]

TS: I bet. I bet you were.

MH: Oh my goodness. And then I got more scholarships, I never had to pay for anything, and I gave the speech at graduation.

TS: Yeah.

MH: So it was really—it was a highlight for me, and that's—I was in a creative writing class with my son Patrick and some woman in the class said, "Do you write poetry?" And I thought poetry—I've said this before—was like being a saint, you had to be born to it. I had no idea it was something you could do. And just—So I started writing and—

TS: So what year was that?

MH: I graduated in 2000.

TS: Yeah. What did you graduate with?

MH: English. [chuckling]

TS: English literature?

MH: BA [bachelor of arts] in English.

TS: Excellent. Oh, good. Very good. Well, that's great. That's a great story.

MH: I was—I was—just felt so, so lucky. I mean, it was just—it was just—it was abundant.

TS: Just fell right into it.

MH: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Very nice. Well, it's been a pleasure talking with you today.

MH: Oh, Therese. [chuckles]

TS: I can't wait to come back and see you again soon.

MH: Yeah, Well, come back in the spring because my flowers are beautiful.

TS: Well, have to do that. Well, I'm going to go ahead and turn this off unless you want to add anything else.

MH: No, I—But thank you; I want to thank you.

[End of Interview]