

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Donna Barr Brown

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 23 April 2016

[Begin Interview]

TS: Well, today is April 23, 2016. My name is Therese Strohmer. I'm at the home of Donna Brown in Maysville, North Carolina to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical collection at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Donna, could you state your name the way you'd like it to read on your collection?

DB: Donna Barr Brown.

TS: Okay, excellent. Well, Donna, thanks so much for having me here in your house. Why don't we start off by having you tell me a little bit about when and where you were born?

DB: I was born in Oil City, Pennsylvania—upstate around Erie—in Erie—and I was actually raised around Pittsburgh—outside Pitts—When my mother passed away my dad got remarried and we moved down to Scottdale, Pennsylvania that's—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: That's by Pittsburgh?

DB: That's outside of Pittsburgh.

TS: Outside of Pittsburgh, okay.

DB: Probably about two hours.

TS: Yeah.

DB: And—

TS: You said your mother had died when you were a young girl?

DB: Yeah. I was probably about two and a half. I'm not sure. So, I lived with my grandmother for a while, and then when my dad got married we moved down there and that's where I was raised, in Scottdale, Pennsylvania.

TS: In Scottdale?

DB: Yes.

TS: About how old were you when you made that move? Do you know?

DB: I have no idea.

TS: [chuckles]

DB: I don't remember. [chuckles]

TS: But you have memories about going up in Scottdale?

DB: Right. That's what I remember.

TS: Oh, okay. Now, do you have any brothers or sisters?

DB: I have—Basically our family was made up with a "your, mine and ours" family.

TS: Right.

DB: Okay. I had a stepbrother and then I have a sister. My brother passed away probably about four years ago and now it's just me and my sister.

TS: Oh, I'm sorry to hear about your brother. So your sister, where do you fall? Are you older or younger?

DB: I'm the oldest.

TS: You're the oldest? You're the oldest of everyone?

DB: Everybody.

TS: Oh, okay.

DB: I was oldest and my brother was like a year behind me and then my sister's about eight years younger than all of us.

TS: Okay, so she's a lot younger. Although it doesn't seem as young now, right?

DB: No, no. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah, What did your father do, then, when he moved to Scottsdale?

DB: He worked in a plant in town. I'm not sure what it was. I don't remember. But he was a factory worker all [my?] life. He used to drive trucks when he was in Oil City and then when he went down there, there was no, I guess—

TS: No trucking?

DB: Ye—Well, I guess my mother didn't want him—my stepmother didn't want him to drive. So he just worked in the plant, and it had something to do with wiring. I'm not sure exactly. Just they never talk—

TS: When you're a kid, you'd never really—

DB: Don't care. You know how that is. [both chuckle]

TS: Right. Exactly. Now, you said before we turned the tape on that it was a coal mining town. Is that right?

DB: Yeah. It—

TS: Or near one?

DB: Yeah, it was. I can remember growing up where they had—it's actually coke [a fuel with few impurities and a high carbon content, usually made from coal]—years ago, they had—I guess, I'm not exactly—Coal and coke is different but they put it in mines, and then I can remember it burning, and that's how they made the coke. And that's for heating, because I grew up with coal heating. That's what kept our house warm when I was growing up.

TS: Yeah. Was it a little tiny town?

DB: Not real big. It's grown a lot bigger but it's not real big.

TS: Not real big?

DB: Yeah. It's grown since I've left, but yeah, it was small.

TS: Small town. What kind of stuff did you do growing up as a child there?

DB: Basically, we was allowed to—it was really—We had a park down the street. We always played outside; not like it is nowadays. We'd go down to the park. It was a just a—We could walk everywhere in town. And so, that's what we did. We learned to play outside and do things like that. Ride our bicycles, roller state, all that good stuff; the normal kid stuff.

TS: Right. Did you have, like, little parties that you went to, like dances and things like that at all?

DB: No, not really. [chuckles]

TS: No, not so much?

DB: Unfortunately, I was just one of those child. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, you grew up in the sixties, right?

DB: Yes.

TS: Do you have any recollections from that time; like the music or anything like that? Any cultural—

DB: Kind of. I guess I can remember some—The Beatles [British rock band]; I can remember seeing The Beatles the first time on TV, because the TV was only so many channels.

TS: Right. And so tiny, right?

DB: Yeah, and I remember seeing—it was a big deal when The Beatles came on *The Ed Sullivan Show* [a variety television show that ran from 1948-1971], and stuff like that. I can remember when John Kennedy got shot, and things like that.

[President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, on Friday, 22 November 1963, while riding in a motorcade in Dallas' Dealey Plaza]

TS: Tell me about that day if you remember it.

DB: I think it was fifth or sixth grade and they let us all go home, and it was many hours sitting in front of the TV watching the funeral and things like that, because it was history.

TS: Yeah. In that time period, they had, like, worries about the Soviet Union and the Cold War. Did you do the duck and cover [a method of personal protection against the effects of a nuclear explosion] under your desks or anything?

[The Cold War was a state of political and military tension after World War II between powers in the Western Bloc (the US, its NATO allies and others) and powers in the Eastern Bloc (the Soviet Union and its allies in the Warsaw Pact)]

DB: I don't remember.

TS: Yeah.

DB: We probably did but I don't remember.

TS: Yeah. It wasn't like it didn't implant you for any reason.

DB: Yeah.

TS: Well, how did you like school?

DB: It was alright. [chuckles] It was school.

TS: Was it more like a social thing for you than a—

DB: Kind of but not—not really. It was school.

TS: Yeah. Did you have any subject or teacher that you liked ever?

DB: [pauses] It's terrible, I can't—

TS: Not necessarily?

DB: Not necessarily. I just did what I had to do.

TS: [chuckles] So you're just kind of getting through each day.

DB: Right. Yes.

TS: Now, as a young girl did you ever have any dreams or hopes to, like, grow up to do something in particular?

DB: No.

TS: Nothing?

DB: No. I hate to tell you that; no.

TS: No, no, I think it's a frequent answer because we're just day-to-day living. We're a child; we don't have a wide scope of what's out there.

DB: And not really, no. No.

TS: Yeah. Yeah, that's true. So you went through elementary school.

DB: Yes.

TS: Did you play any sports or anything in high school or anything like that?

DB: No.

[Recording Paused]

DB: —remember where we left off.

TS: I do.

DB: Okay.

TS: Okay, so you're growing up in a small town and there's not a whole lot to do, right?

DB: Yes.

TS: Did you start thinking about the Marine Corps before or after you graduated?

DB: I—You'll love this story; you really will. I didn't want to stay in that town.

TS: Okay.

DB: So a kid as we are—I—because I snuck behind my parents back and I went and saw the Marine Corps recruiter in our small town and he—

TS: Oh, you snuck around to see him?

DB: Yeah.

TS: How did you do that in a small town? That's tough.

DB: He came to the post office every so many days, and I knew she was teaching, and I was already graduated from high school so—and dad was working, so I don't remember how I—

TS: You had some time on your hands to go and do it?

DB: I don't remember how I did it but I did it. And then—plus I had a girlfriend help me. And so, I went down there and I told him that—and I was seventeen at the time—but there was no jobs in our town or anything else like that and I didn't want to stay there. I just knew I had—

TS: Wanted to get out.

DB: I had to get out to just see the world.

TS: Right.

DB: And so, I went and saw the Marine Corps recruiter because—I don't know why—it just—and I knew my dad was a marine—

TS: Oh, he was? Okay.

DB: Yeah. So I figured why not? So—

TS: Did you ever consider any of the other services?

DB: No.

TS: No? [chuckles]

DB: Never even thought of it. And—

TS: Maybe that's because your dad was a marine and you just thought just go into the Marine Corps, right?

DB: And I had to go take my dad to get the papers signed and—

TS: And so you're seventeen, right?

DB: Yeah, seventeen, because you had to be eighteen. I graduated from high school, I was seventeen, because my birthday May 10. And my mother wasn't home so I take it and I said, "Dad, I need you to sign this."
He said, "What is this?"
I said, "I want to go in the Marine Corps." And he went—And of course he—like, blank look. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, yeah, like got all white. [chuckles]

DB: Yeah. And he goes—And he says, "Why the Marine Corps?"
And I looked at him. I said, "Well, if it was good enough for you, it should be good enough for me." And that was my answer.

TS: Yeah. And he signed it. Oh, that worked.

DB: Yeah. He just—He didn't even—He didn't even question it, because what could he say? So yeah. And then I left in September when I turned eighteen. I had to wait until I was eighteen, I think.

TS: Okay. Because you couldn't go in until you were eighteen.

DB: Yes.

TS: Or you could sign up delayed [entry] or something.

DB: Right. Like that—So when I was eighteen, yeah. Because I turned eighteen when it was beginning of September and then I went to boot camp after that.

TS: Now, do you remember when you signed up, did they say, "Okay, you can have this job or this job," or did they say, "When you get there we're going to figure out what job you have"?

[Speaking simultaneously]

DB: I don't—

TS: Or it's kind of fuzzy?

DB: I don't remember. I think we had to take—

TS: Tests?

DB: I think we had to take a lot of tests, and I don't remember, so I guess that's what they figured out what you could do and what you were aptitude—what you could do. And I was never really good in school so I'm surprised I got to do what I got to do. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, maybe you weren't so good at the testing in school but maybe learning is a different thing from testing, right?

DB: That's right. Yeah. Testing-wise I'm never good but if you show me something I can—I'm fantastic.

TS: Yeah. It's not the same thing.

DB: I'm a practical person.

TS: Hands-on.

DB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: And military is quite a lot about hands-on.

DB: Yeah, that's it. And I think once—they did that once we got to boot camp, I think. I kind of—I don't really remember but—

TS: Well, okay, so you get to boot camp. You went in September?

DB: Yeah.

TS: To Parris Island [South Carolina]. And you're living in Pennsylvania, so did you fly, take a bus?

DB: I think I flew.

TS: Okay.

DB: I think my parents had to take me to Pittsburgh and got in the airplane.

TS: Okay.

DB: To be very honest, I don't—I really don't remember.

TS: Yeah. Well, those things, they come out of our heads so quickly; you're in the moment.

DB: Yeah. It's like, "Oh, you're here." [both chuckle]

TS: Yeah. Alright, so you get to Parris Island. Do you remember anything about when you arrived there or that experience?

DB: I do. I must have flew because we actually took a bus, I think, into Parris Island, and I do remember getting off that bus and having the drill instructors there and it scared you—the bejesus out of you. [chuckles]

TS: Were you scared?

DB: I didn't know—it just—the way I was raised it was like, "Oh, what the heck?"

TS: You didn't really know what to expect.

DB: No, I had no idea what to expect. But growing up the way I did it was really—wasn't hard for me to understand and to listen and to do what I was told.

TS: Okay. So you were pretty disciplined in that way.

DB: Yes.

TS: Okay. So when you're going through basic training and you're having that experience, are you second-guessing yourself at all or are you just glad to be there?

DB: No. Never second-guessed myself.

[Speaking simultaneously]

TS: No?

DB: Never. I had trouble getting through because I think, after two [unclear] they had—I had to—because I think it's normally eight weeks?

TS: Something like that.

DB: And so, I had to go a couple more weeks. They put me back to another platoon because they knew I had the potential. So I had to go to another platoon and when I actually—I graduated—I think I started out at another one—I don't remember—but I actually graduated.

TS: Okay.

DB: Yeah, so—it's just because it took me a little while to get it all.

TS: Now, do you remember the kind of things that you did in basic? Well, you've shown me a picture of you getting a shot. You said you had a story about that.

DB: Yeah. I always had a [chuckles]—I just—the drillers—because they'd line you up for—and they'd line you up to get these shots and I'm just a scaredy-cat as it is.

TS: Well, those gunshot things are pretty intimidating.

DB: Yeah. Well, and coming from a small town, I didn't know. I didn't know. And so—and they have you on both sides and—So I remember the first time I got it—and I was scared to death as it is—I took two steps and [snaps fingers] I went out.

TS: Oh, did you really?

DB: I fainted.

TS: After the shot?

DB: Yes. Right—So they brought me to, and of course the drill instructor was furious with me because I fainted. So the next time—I think I got woozy the next time, which I was—I think it was the second or third time. I can't remember. But I do remember that drill instructor standing, like, about right here—

TS: Right at your nose?

DB: Right at my nose and giving me the devil saying, "You will not—" and telling me I wouldn't have—took two steps and out I went.

TS: [chuckles] Out you went as you—

DB: Even after the drill instructor hollered at me.

TS: You fainted?

DB: Right, I fainted again. She was furious with me. Furious.

[Speaking simultaneously]

TS: Well, it's not something you can control.

DB: So after they realized no matter what they did I was going to go out, that's just the way it was. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, did you have to recover in CQ [Change of Quarters] or they just kind of pick you up and—

[Change of Quarters is a tasked duty, usually for a twenty-four hour shift, in which a service member is to guard the front entrance to the barracks and/or other duties as assigned]

DB: No. They just—smelling salts and I would be fine.

TS: Oh, yeah, smelling salts.

DB: Oh, I hated those things. Yeah. And to this day I have trouble, but that's just the way I am.

TS: Yeah, it's just the way your body works for that.

DB: Yes.

TS: Now, was there anything particularly difficult emotionally or physically in basic training for you?

DB: Yeah. It just—The running, but it's not like the women do nowadays. It was hard but just—you have to get used to it and work yourself up, and thank God I was raised being active as a child so a lot of it was—

TS: You're used to being outdoors and—

DB: That's right, so that was good. That wasn't hard. A lot of it wasn't that bad. I think—

TS: [unclear] this for a second. Keep going.

DB: I think the worst thing was going through the—

TS: The gas chamber?

DB: The gas chamber is just—that was not one thing I'd ever want to go through again. But yeah, basically—I guess I'm one of the weird ones; it really wasn't that bad.

TS: Wasn't so bad?

DB: No, no.

TS: Did you have an obstacle course or anything like that?

DB: No, we didn't have to do that when I was in.

TS: No? Just gas masks, right?

DB: Yeah. And in there it says we had to have, like, a garden party. That's when you go out and clean the yard and mow the grass, so it was like—

TS: Oh, right.

DB: In that era we didn't have to fire a gun or anything else like that. So it would just—basically learning how to conduct yourself as a marine, as a lady, because that was really, really important. We used to go through classes on how to sit, to walk. I was just—

TS: Did you have makeup classes?

DB: Yes, we had makeup classes, which to me was hilarious. But a lot of it—When you come out of high school, I didn't know what makeup was; never even knew what it was. I thought it was funny I had to learn how to walk. Well, I already knew all that. [chuckles]

TS: How to walk? How to march together, right?

DB: Well, no. It just—They just—

TS: Oh, like how to walk like a lady?

DB: That's right.

TS: Oh, okay.

DB: That's right. And go up and down stairs.

TS: Did you really? Okay.

DB: Yes, yes. Little things like that. Yeah.

TS: Now, did you have the gloves that you wore?

DB: Yes.

TS: And you had the purse?

DB: Oh, yes. The little black purse and little white gloves.

TS: Now, did you have glasses at that time?

DB: No.

TS: So you didn't have to wear the Clark Kent [fictional character in American comic books] kind of glasses.

DB: No, no, no. I didn't.

TS: How'd you feel when you finally graduated, then?

DB: Like a big weight was lifted.

TS: Yeah?

DB: Yeah.

TS: It was just like a relief?

DB: Yeah.

TS: Were you pretty proud of yourself too?

DB: Yes, I was, very proud; very proud. Yeah.

TS: That's good. Now, did you go take a leave or anything between that and your first base, or what happened?

DB: Oh, after that I think I went home on leave for a week or two weeks, and then I came to [Marine Corps Base] Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

TS: Okay. And so, did you pick Camp Lejeune?

DB: No, it was picked for me. [both chuckle]

TS: Yeah? Now, did you know by this time what kind of job you were going to be doing?

DB: Yeah, they told me a 3121 [military occupational specialty code for Freight Transportation Clerk] but I had no idea what that was. [chuckles] I had no idea.

TS: So you were like, "Just whatever job they give me will be fine"?

DB: Yeah.

TS: You're just like, "Let me get away from this little—"

DB: They told me it had to do something with transportation but that's all I know, and you're clueless when you're going through boot camp. You go, "Okay, whatever." You just do what you're told.

TS: When you got to Camp Lejeune, was it all on the job training or did you have to go through a training course or anything?

DB: No, I—the field I was in was all on the job training.

TS: Okay.

DB: And I was very fortunate and very lucky I had a lot of good Staff NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officer] that taught me well.

TS: Taught you what to do. Well, describe a typical day, if you can.

DB: Okay, well, what I did is in transportation. I worked moving—at that time, I was working for—where they move the personal effects of the marines, on and off the base; that's what we did. I worked on the household goods side. So it was interviewing all ranks, all female dependents and stuff, and doing their paperwork.

TS: Just females? No males?

DB: No. Sometimes you'd have the husband but sometimes the wives would come in. As long as they had power of attorney they could come in and set up the stuff for their—

TS: So it was any marine?

DB: Yeah, yeah. At that time there wasn't a lot of females around so—

TS: Oh, that's true.

DB: —so the wives, if they had power of attorney, they could come in and take care of the stuff to move them from Point A to Point B. And so, at the time I think I was working in receiving so it was getting all their stuff back. Say if they were in [Marine Corps Base] Camp Pendleton [California], we'd have all their paperwork and then get their stuff moved to where it needed to go, like into housing or out of town, and stuff like that. That's mainly what—

TS: What you did?

DB: Yeah, I talked a lot on the phone.

TS: Yeah, did a lot of paperwork.

DB: A lot of paperwork. Right, yeah.

TS: But you didn't actually have to go inspect anything?

DB: No, no. A lot of it was office work from day to day.

TS: Okay. Was it an 8:00 [a.m.] to 5:00 [p.m.] kind of job?

DB: Yes.

TS: Yeah. With the lunch in the middle?

DB: Yeah.

TS: Now, did you live in the barracks?

DB: Yes, I did.

TS: How was that kind of living? That would have been different for you, then, right, having grown up—

DB: Yeah, yeah, it was very different, but at that time all the females were in one barracks, so—

TS: No men?

DB: No men. No. In fact, you couldn't even—if a man [unclear] out in the barracks—

TS: They weren't?

DB: No.

TS: They didn't have a visiting hour?

DB: Nope. No, no, no. Well, they had a—I think they had a—like a—

TS: Day room?

DB: A day room, thank you. You could come in there and they'd sign in but they couldn't come back to your—

TS: I see, your room.

DB: That's right. And at that time it was all open squad bays. There was no such thing as having a room.

TS: No?

DB: No.

TS: How many were in the open squad?

DB: I don't know, but you figure it's probably—

TS: The length of this side of the house here?

DB: Yeah, probably.

TS: Pretty good.

DB: Yeah. I don't know if you've ever been to Camp Lejeune but some of the buildings are long and yeah—

TS: I have been there but it's been a while. I don't remember seeing—So this is, like, a barrack set up with the cots.

DB: That's right.

TS: Were they double?

DB: Double.

TS: Oh, okay. Wow.

DB: And then, we had—

TS: Your footlockers?

DB: We had footlockers and wall lockers.

TS: Walk lockers.

DB: And a lot of times we were—there wasn't that many of us where we could have our own cubicle ourself so we'd fix it up—blocked up so we'd have some privacy.

TS: Yeah. Now, did you have inspections and things like that?

DB: Of course. Yes. You had to make sure everything was clean and you always have to have—even when they had field day—you had to have clean everything because you didn't go anywhere until field day was done, at least once a week.

TS: What was a field day?

DB: A field day is where you clean the floors, clean the restroom, the bathrooms and stuff like that. That's what they called a field day.

TS: Oh, yeah. [chuckles]

DB: Yeah, I'm sorry. [chuckles]

TS: No, it's alright. I think we had a little different field days in the air force.

DB: It's just—Basically it's just when you did all the cleaning. And they still call it field day.

TS: Now, did you have any kind of special duties that you had to do, like, after hours or extra on weekends, or anything like that?

DB: Well, sometimes you have to stand duty in the barracks, so that might be up all night or just depends. The front desk, somebody was always there, especially at night. So it depended—Once I got corporal I'd have to go around, but other than that [unclear]. And I think I stood mess [area where military personnel eat] duty one time.

TS: Okay.

DB: Did not like that.

TS: Why not?

DB: I don't know why but I didn't like that. [both chuckling]

TS: Who likes mess duty? No one.

DB: Yeah, I really didn't care for that.

TS: Well, was there a curfew? Did you have to be in by a certain time?

DB: I think so. I want to say we had to be in by 10:00 [p.m.] during the week.

TS: Yeah.

DB: I'm guessing.

TS: A little bit more flexible on the weekend?

DB: I don't remember.

TS: Yeah.

DB: I really—I'm sorry. It's been many years. I don't remember.

TS: That's okay. Those are details that we just let go. You explained your main responsibility. Now, what were your supervisors and people in charge of you like? Did they treat you well, do you think?

DB: When I'm a worker—stationed—Oh, yeah. I had no problems. In fact, I was probably the first female—I think I was the first—I don't think there was any other woman marines there; I was the only one.

TS: In the section?

DB: So [unclear] to tell you anymore?

TS: [chuckles]

DB: Yeah, I got—Yeah, I was treated very well. It was very fair. A lot of them, sometimes you have to put them back in their place.

TS: Yeah? How'd you do that? What kind of things would happen that you'd have to do that?

DB: Well, they'd just flirt with you to the point it was like, "I don't want to be bothered. Go away." Because I just—I didn't want to date anybody that was—I worked with.

TS: Okay.

DB: And for years I didn't. And then finally I did one time and got my heart broken so I said, "Never again."

TS: Yeah.

DB: Never again.

TS: Sometimes they talk about when women first integrated into male-only spaces like that, that there was some vulgarity and crass kind of talk. Did you ever experience any of that?

DB: No. I don't remember. I really don't think so.

TS: Yeah?

DB: Because I can say I had a couple good master sergeants that were very good. They were all ornery [bad-tempered].

TS: They were ornery? [chuckles]

DB: Yeah. All ornery.

TS: They weren't just ornery to women, they were ornery to men, too, you mean?

DB: I do remember my boss at the time, he was—I used to get so furious with him because I was the only female and he thought I should bring him his coffee.

TS: And you thought—

DB: And I did it for a few times and finally—I don't know how I got out of it, but I think he got transferred and I didn't have to go to him anymore. It was like, "Ugh." Yeah, yeah. Because he—the office was all open and he'd scream my name, and of course I went running because that's what I was taught to do.

TS: Right. Well, and he had rank on you too.

DB: Yeah. And he was—I think he was a warrant officer at that time, so yeah. But that was the only thing I really had to deal with that sticks out in my mind, but after a while it went away.

TS: When we think about things in the news about sexual harassment and that kind of stuff, is that anything—

DB: Oh, no, I never had to deal with that.

TS: Nothing like that?

DB: No.

TS: Any of the people that you worked with, did you look up to them as a mentor or anything; like, that were really helping you either with your job or how to get through things in the Marine Corps?

DB: Yeah. Well, as—more job-wise, because at that time the women had nothing to—yeah, I'd say job-wise.

TS: Job-wise?

DB: Yeah, more than anything, because the men at the time really had nothing to do with—as long as we did what we were supposed to—the women's side—they never bothered us.

TS: Right. Well, it was more, like, maybe the women managed the women administratively—

DB: Yeah, yeah. The women—Yeah, because that's where I got all my to-do lists and they just had to make sure I was where I was supposed to. Other than that, you never saw the women unless you really got in trouble.

TS: Okay.

DB: So as long as you did what you were told—

TS: Did you ever get in trouble?

DB: No.

TS: Okay.

DB: I was afraid to.

TS: [chuckles]

DB: I wanted to stay in, that's why.

TS: You wanted to stay in.

DB: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. So you enjoyed it?

DB: I did. I guess I'm one of those weird ones, but yeah, I did.

TS: Well, I don't think it's weird.

DB: No, I did.

TS: What was it that attracted you to like it as much as you did?

DB: It just—I knew back home there wasn't nothing to do and I had to get out and learn something different.

TS: Okay.

DB: I had to break that—that breakaway from home. Does that make sense?

TS: Yeah, sure.

DB: It just—I just had to see the world, and that's what I wanted to do but I never did.
[chuckles]

TS: Well, you got to see Camp Lejeune.

DB: Well, I had—I met my first husband, fell in love, got married, and I had the chance to go to [Marine Corps Station] Iwakuni [Japan] and I gave that up to get married. And sometimes I kind of wish I would've done that.

TS: Done something different.

DB: Yeah.

TS: Well, you can't see the future either so you don't know.

DB: Yeah, you can't. I got a beautiful girl out of it so—

TS: There you go.

DB: Yeah.

TS: Well, so you're working, you're living in the barracks. So it's, like, '70—you were there from '70 to '73?

DB: Right, I got out in April of '73.

TS: Seventy-three, okay. This is a period that we had talked about on the phone a little bit. You said that there was a lot of racial tension going on. Do you remember what happened with that around Camp Lejeune?

DB: Alls I know—it just—I do remember at that time and a lot of it I don't—I just remember sometimes they would have—I don't know—I guess they weren't riots but they were just—

TS: Protests?

DB: Protests; maybe that's a word for it. And they would secure us down to our barracks where we'd have to come back in off liberty [granted time off].

TS: Oh, they would?

DB: Yeah, because unfortunately the area we were in, we were surrounded by men barracks and everything so they would secure us in. We actually had guards that walked our barracks.

TS: The guard?

DB: Yeah, men did actually walk the barracks to—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Protection?

DB: I guess protection because they just weren't allowed in. But yeah, I do remember—I remember standing in the barracks and seeing just rows and rows and rows of guys standing in protest, behind the barracks.

TS: Oh, yeah?

DB: Yeah, because the bowling alley was behind us and I just can remember that. I guess that's the biggest thing that stands out in my mind.

TS: Did it make you afraid at all?

DB: No, because I didn't know any different.

TS: Okay.

DB: I was raised with very little blacks [African Americans], so to me, you was raised—I treated people like I wanted to be treated. To me, we're all the same inside. They have the—I just—I don't know any different; that's the way I was raised. So these people that were discriminating, I'm like, "Well, why? What's the problem?" I can never understand that because that's not the way I was raised. Because I didn't have anybody around. If you're up there in Pennsylvania, there wasn't anybody.

TS: Right.

DB: I think there was one black person in my whole high school, in my graduating class.

TS: Yeah. So you didn't have any kind of sense of what they were going through—

DB: No.

TS: —or worries about how you were going to treat them?

DB: Yeah. I just—And they'd start with me, I'd go, "We're all human beings. Let's just talk like human beings." That's—But you don't—

TS: Well, because the period when you're going through high school and then you're getting into the Marine Corps was a lot of social turmoil within the whole country. Was that something that you were tuned into at all or was that outside your world view at that time?

DB: I really—I saw it but I didn't understand it. I guess that's a good way—I saw it but I didn't understand why they were doing all that. As you get older you understand, but at that age you're clueless. If you're early twenties—

TS: You just want to get through your day and go to your—

DB: That's right. Do what I have to do and, "Don't bother me."

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Go out and have some fun at night. [both chuckle] But Vietnam was going on. Did you have any thoughts about that, with the anti-war protesting or—I mean, you're in the Marine Corps. Nothing?

DB: I guess, no. I'm sorry, I didn't.

TS: Well, you don't need to be sorry.

DB: No, I just—No, I didn't even—I just never could understand why. We're all here to keep our country safe.

TS: Okay, right. Right. Because that's the way that you had been raised; your father was a marine. Was he in World War II?

DB: Yes, he was, and my dad never talked about it; never talked about any of it. And until I met Charlie—because he never cared for my first husband—but he met Charlie one time and Charlie and him got to talking out on the front porch and he shared stuff with Charlie that my mother didn't know.

TS: Right.

DB: Because a marine to a marine.

TS: Right.

DB: It's just—

TS: They had a connection.

DB: They had a connection, and here to find out—and I'm not sure exactly but he—My father was in a very bad fight in, I think, Guadalcanal.

[The Guadalcanal was a military campaign fought between 7 August 1942 and 9 February 1943 on and around the island of Guadalcanal in the Pacific theater of World War II. It was the first major offensive by Allied forces against the Empire of Japan]

TS: Okay.

DB: He actually was on one of the islands. So alls I know—remember waking my dad up from a distance; you never got near to him when you woke up because he was coming up swinging.

TS: Okay.

DB: Yeah, so—but I never knew why. So when Charlie told me that, I'm going, "Oh! That answers all that—"

TS: Makes a lot more sense.

DB: That's right. So other than that I just never—I was always raised to respect the country and I guess—

TS: Yeah. While you're working, did you do stuff for fun while you were at Camp Lejeune?

DB: Oh, yeah. [unclear] kids—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: What kind of stuff did you do for fun, Donna?

DB: Yeah, yeah. Just kids, and they probably did a lot of things they shouldn't do, and you looked back and go, "Oh, Lord." Because you figure I never—I never knew what liquor was or anything until I got down here. So unfortunately, that's just the way it is. You sometimes drink too much and do things you shouldn't do. [both chuckle]

TS: Right. Those will just remain unsaid.

DB: That's right. [chuckles]

TS: Okay, gotcha. But you're enjoying it. So maybe going to parties and stuff and going out to movies and—

DB: Yeah, we did on the base, because there was such a small group of us. We used to like to get dressed up. And so—And you'd go to the club and go dancing and stuff because there

wasn't many girls around and we all didn't have cars. So we'd get dressed and go to the—we would be allowed to get into the NCO [Non-commissioned Officer] Club at that time. Because there wasn't—so, we'd have—of course—and then, of course, the guys would buy us all kinds of drinks and we didn't have to worry about it because they had a girl to dance with.

TS: [chuckles] There you go.

DB: Yeah, so—because at that time only very few of us had cars and I didn't so I—

TS: You didn't have a car?

DB: No.

TS: You were dependent on other people to, kind of, get around.

DB: Yeah.

TS: That's a lot of military all the time too.

DB: Yeah.

TS: How about the food? Did you eat the chow hall food?

DB: Yes, I did. It wasn't very good, but yeah—especially a lot of junk food.

TS: A lot of junk food.

DB: Yeah. Unfortunately, you did eat a lot of junk food and stuff because the mess hall food. Or you ate at the—there was a club right beside us and we would go over there to eat a lot of times.

TS: Yeah. Were you influenced at all by the women's movement, the feminist movement, at that time?

DB: No. I'm sorry, no.

TS: Well, when you think about it today, and you look back at the changes of how they were trying to open up new jobs and things for women, did you have an awareness that it was happening?

DB: Yeah. It just—I guess I did—yes, I did—because there's a lot of things we couldn't do as women in the Marine Corps. You figure at the time, I probably never would have got out of the Marine Corps, but I had to because I got pregnant at that time so I had to. But other

than that I probably would have stayed in, and now the rules have changed so much where women can stay in.

TS: Right, right

DB: Yeah, so.

TS: Well, when you signed up were you thinking, "Okay, I'm going to get out of my little town and see what happens"? Or did you think, "I'm going to get in the Marine Corps and that's what I'm going to do"? Or did you just not know?

DB: I didn't know.

TS: Yeah.

DB: I just—You take one day at a time, worry about tomorrow when it gets here.

TS: Yeah. But once you got in there, were you thinking about staying in?

DB: If I hadn't met my first husband I probably would have, because I didn't want to come back home.

TS: Okay. But you did meet your first husband?

DB: Yeah.

TS: You said you got pregnant and then—Did they make you get out right away, or how'd that work?

DB: No, once you couldn't fit—when the uniform changed and you couldn't fit in uniform you had to get out.

TS: That's how long. So you could stay in for a little bit?

DB: Yes.

TS: What about for the medical care and things like that?

DB: No.

TS: Nothing?

DB: No.

TS: Was your husband in the Marine Corps?

DB: Yes, he was.

TS: So you were covered under him as a dependent, then?

DB: Right, yes. As a dependent, yes.

TS: I don't know how long you were married, but was there a difference as a dependent and then as active duty?

DB: Yeah, kind of. But you just kind of know where to go, what to do, what you need to do.

TS: Right. You know where the commissary's at.

DB: Yeah. You don't really—yeah, you just—yeah [unclear] a little bit. I can't imagine any other life beside—you figure I've been around the military all my life.

TS: Yeah. Do you feel like you were treated fairly during the time you were in the military? Was there anything that you wanted to do—like you said, either as a woman or just in the job you were at—that you didn't get the opportunity to try?

DB: Not in the military, no. Because what I did—There wasn't any opportunities there to do it.

TS: Oh, okay.

DB: They weren't there to—You knew what your limits were when you were there so—

TS: So you knew already what the rules were? Like, "Here's the parameters you can work in."

DB: That's right.

TS: Yeah. Well, did you ever get any kind of award that you were particularly proud of or anything like that?

DB: No, I just got my promotions.

TS: That's good though. But you got out as a corporal in three years, that's pretty good.

DB: Yeah, I can't complain. I probably would have gotten more if I would have stayed in.

TS: [chuckles] Did you have any favorite music that you liked to listen to?

DB: I just love oldies. Still do.

TS: Oldies? What are the oldies? You have to define what oldies are.

DB: The sixties. The fifties.

TS: Yeah.

DB: And every now and then I like the old jazz.

TS: Okay, yeah. That'd be fun. Now, there's a couple of things that happened right around the time you got in; like, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated in 1968 before you went in. Do you have any memories of that?

[On 5 June 1968, presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy was fatally shot shortly after winning the California presidential primaries during the 1968 elections]

[On 4 April 1968, American clergyman and civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated by James Earl Ray, a fugitive from Missouri State Penitentiary]

DB: I remember it but that's about it.

TS: Just that it happened?

DB: Yeah.

TS: Just like as an event.

DB: Yeah, it was an event.

TS: There wasn't anything going on around you in Pennsylvania.

DB: Yeah.

TS: Well, let me ask you about thoughts of today. Okay, so a controversial thing is, when you were in in the seventies there weren't supposed to be any homosexuals in, right? And in the nineties they had "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and then that's since been repealed, and so now they can be openly gay or lesbian in the military. Did you have any thoughts at the time about that, or do you have any thoughts now on the way the policies have changed?

["Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is the official U.S. policy on military service by gays, bisexuals, and lesbians. The policy prohibited military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted homosexual or bisexual service members, while barring openly gay,

lesbian, and bisexual people from military service. Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed 20 September 2011]

DB: Honey, they've been around for a long time.

TS: [chuckles]

DB: And you've got to realize when I was in there's a lot there.

TS: Yeah. Were you aware of it at the time?

DB: No, I learned the hard way.

TS: What does that mean?

DB: Just when they'd make passes at you.

TS: Oh, yeah?

DB: Yeah, so, you just—you deal with it.

TS: Yeah. Same way you dealt with the men?

DB: Yeah, it just—yeah, unfortunately, that's just the way it—yeah, but you just—but I had a lot of them that were very good friends. Once they know, you don't have to worry about it.

TS: Okay, so you just put up the boundary and then you just stay friends?

DB: That's right. I said, "I'll be your friend but—"

TS: "I'm not doing anything else."

DB: That's it. Yeah. Yeah. That's it. And I don't approve of a lot of it, but you know what? To me, it's just a very touchy subject.

TS: Yeah?

DB: Yeah. It's just—It's just the way it is.

TS: Yeah. Well, what about the issue of women in combat? So now the three women passed the Ranger School [intensive 61-day combat training course]. They're on submarines.

DB: You know what? It—I don't—You know what? I just think on some of that—it's just our bodies are not made for all that. I just think if they—because I know myself, with my age I am, if I had to redo a lot of things, I probably wouldn't do a lot of stuff I did because it's—I'm paying for it. Our bodies are not—women's bodies are not made for all the endurance and everything when they put them through that training. They're going to pay for it later, but you're not going to know that until twenty years down the road.

TS: Well, some women might say, "Well, there's some men that can't do it either."

DB: And I understand that.

TS: Or that if you have a woman that can do it—

DB: But you really think the skeletal[?] between a man and a woman is just—we're not made—

TS: Right. Well, the average man and the average women, right? But what if you have a women that is capable and able to do it? Should she have the opportunity to try?

DB: If she wants to, but I think she's going to pay for it down the road.

TS: [chuckles]

DB: It's just as simple as that. I really, really—and the man is, too, but our bodies are not—even though they're able to do it and everything, in the long run it's going to play such a toll down the road—

TS: When you get older?

DB: That's right.

TS: Yeah. Well, I can feel that right now for sure. [both chuckle] When you talk about when you had to leave the service, you sound like you're a little bit sad, I guess, that you had to do that. But you also knew the rules, right?

DB: Right.

TS: So you knew that that was going to happen.

DB: Yes.

TS: And so, looking back, like—that policy of forcing women who are pregnant to get out—was that a policy change that you would agree with?

DB: Oh, yeah. I think it's fine. In fact, it changed—I was working and it changed and I wanted to go back in and he [DB's first husband] said, "No."

TS: Oh.

DB: Yeah, so I—and I would have went back in if—

TS: It probably changed pretty quickly because they had that suit, I think, in '75.

[In *Crawford v. Cushman*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit held that the Marine Corps' regulation requiring the discharge of a pregnant marine as soon as pregnancy is discovered violated the Fifth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution]

DB: Yeah, and I was working. In fact, I got out and I worked in town a little bit then I went back to civil service. So I was working on the base and I wanted to go back and he—yeah. But you know what? Everything happens for a reason.

TS: Right, right. You keep moving on.

DB: Yeah, so.

TS: Well, did you consider yourself, or do you consider yourself, a trailblazer, having been a very small percentage of women in the military, but an even smaller percentage of women in the Marine Corps, right? At that time.

DB: Yes. Yes, I do. The Marine Corps has been very good to me. The service life has been very good to me. I have no complaints. [chuckles] When I worked civil service—because if I'd stayed at home I wouldn't have had that.

TS: Right.

DB: So I actually—

TS: If you'd stayed back in Pennsylvania?

DB: That's right.

TS: Okay.

DB: I actually retired from civil service. I had thirty-seven years.

TS: Did you really?

DB: Yes, so I have no complaints. The field I worked in as in the Marine Corps, I actually went to work as civil service.

TS: Oh, you did? Okay.

DB: Yes, because my same boss—I started down there on the floor, and then I went from different jobs, and then when I transferred and went to [Marine Corps Air Station] Cherry Point [North Carolina]—and when I actually retired out of Cherry Point, I retired as a Transportation Officer out of Cherry Point. If I had stayed at home, where would I—I wouldn't have had that job. So you figure I have dealt with the military all my life, and when they find out—when you deal with marines, when they find out you were a marine, of course, it's the comradery. And so, you could talk the talk and walk the walk with them.

TS: So you stayed in that environment for a long—

[Speaking simultaneously]

DB: That's right.

TS: Well, for a long time.

DB: All my life.

TS: All your working life, right?

DB: Right. I didn't retire until 2009. Yeah, so—and between my military time and my civil service time is thirty-seven years.

TS: Yeah. Well, that's terrific. Have you had any experience with the Veteran Administration at all?

DB: I just finally got signed up with them. In fact—

TS: Did you? Okay.

DB: I finally have—I have an appointment. They're finally going to accept me under the Camp Lejeune water system.

[From the early 1950s to the late 1980s, thousands of troops and their families were exposed to unhealthy levels of contaminants from leaky fuel tanks and other chemical sources while serving at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Former

service members exposed to the contaminated water can now apply for veterans disability benefits, under a new federal law]

TS: Oh, okay.

DB: And so, I have an appointment the first of May.

TS: So you'll figure out how that system works.

DB: Probably nothing will happen but—

TS: Well, and your husband is retired so—

DB: Yeah, and he's—I finally got him to go a few years back. We won't talk about that but yeah, finally. And he got it right away, and I knew he would because he had some issues, so he got, like, 60% right off the top. And I could care less but I—somebody—a friend of mine said, "You need to go." Because you figure when I got out it wasn't talked about like it is now.

TS: Right.

DB: So I finally went and everything, so yeah.

TS: Good. You worked as a civilian but in the military environment. Do you think there's some things that civilians maybe misinterpret about the military or the Marine Corps that you would like to—

DB: Oh, don't get me started on that. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, tell me a couple things that you think you'd like to tell them right now.

DB: It just—I don't think—I think military life and civilian life is so different. I couldn't imagine being around just nobody that knew about the military.

TS: You think that it is very different?

DB: It is very different.

TS: Okay.

DB: It is. The life, the talking. My husband would probably tell you the same thing. That's, I think, one reason we've stayed in this area, because you're just so used to it. I go home and I see the difference, the way—I'm not saying I have a lot, but when I looked at what my mother and my father had, and my sister, I just have made a better life for myself.

TS: More opportunity?

DB: More opportunities, and it just—yeah. The life has just been better because working for the government, or however you want to put it, it's just there. And you just see so much more and so many different people. Look, I never would have met you.

TS: That's right.

DB: So it's just—And you meet—And now that I—I volunteer with the USO [United Service Organizations].

TS: Oh, okay.

DB: So I do that. I get to—I've always said when I retired I wanted to sew. I'm a sewer, so we try to make—I make quilts and stuff. I go to seniors. And so, I'm doing other ways; it's just going back to veterans.

TS: So you're giving back?

DB: Right.

TS: But is there something that you'd like to say, "Dear civilians, this is something you don't understand about people who are in the military or military life." Is there something that you would like to say to that question?

DB: I don't really know what to say because they just—it's hard to explain. I just don't know how—It just—I really don't know how to put that into words. I really don't. I guess the biggest thing—a few weeks ago—My nephew was in the army for six years and he went back home to Pennsylvania and he's been miserable ever since he's been there. And him and his wife are getting—my sister's really upset because they're getting ready to move back down to Texas around all the military that he was raised—and he says, "I don't understand."

And Sherri says—my sister says, "I don't understand."

TS: Why he wants to go back to that?

DB: Yeah, right. I says, "Sherri, it's different. I don't know how to tell you this, but it's different."

She says, "Really?"

I says, "Yeah."

TS: Like, that sense of comradery and security, maybe?

DB: I don't know how to put it into words.

TS: Well, you don't have to. It's okay.

DB: Yeah, but she was very upset because she couldn't understand why. But I'm on this side of the fence and I understand why because I could never come back home and I just—not after all these years.

TS: A lot of people describe the military and the environment, even afterwards, as a family.

DB: Yeah, yeah. That's a good way to put it. It is. I have family here. We have very good friends that are retired—been here—good ol' Chicago boy—

TS: [chuckles]

DB: And he cooks and we all go over and [unclear] we all get together. And I've had Christmas, I've had Thanksgiving. I used to have them here but I don't anymore because my little white one out there, I can't have any—

TS: Yeah, yeah. Your puppy dog.

DB: Yeah, because I used to have—We used to trade back and forth. I've always had a house full of people, but now since my youngest child [referring to dog], son—but yeah, it is. It's a good way to put it, family.

TS: And so, it's a family that we make, right, as we go along, and yeah, it's hard to give that up.

DB: It might not be blood but it's still family.

TS: Right, right. Well, if a young woman were to ask you, or a young man were to ask you, about going into the military, what kind of advice would you give them?

DB: I go, "Go for it." I'd say, "If you don't know what to do with your life, if you don't want to go to college and you don't know what to do, you need to go in some type of service. If it's not the Marine Corps, something, and to find direction in life because it's a good way to find that direction.

TS: And you kind of had touched on this question, but I'm going to ask it to you directly instead of just having you answer it indirectly. But how do you think your life has been different because you joined the Marine Corps back in 1970?

DB: It just—I can't imagine it without it.

TS: I knew you were going to cry, Donna. [both chuckle] That's why I said, "No, no"

DB: I'm sorry. I just can't imagine it without it.

TS: Yeah. It's like a part of you now, right?

DB: Yeah. I have a wonderful husband; we've been twenty-eight years. I never would have met him. I would have some redneck from the hills probably, miserable. [both chuckle] It just—shame on you!

TS: I just got kicked. I think that's a first in an interview. [both chuckle] That's alright. Well, no, because I can tell that you have a very strong, emotional feeling for what it's done for you.

DB: Oh, yeah.

TS: Yeah. I'll give you another to make you cry. You ready?

DB: Oh, shame on you! [both chuckle]

TS: What does patriotism mean to you?

DB: Oh, my Lord. Patriotism. Love of country, people. I don't know what else to say. But yeah, love of country and the people and just the whole United States. It just—And it's something this country doesn't have, and I think that's half the problem that we have right now.

TS: You think we're losing that sense of patriotism?

DB: I really do. I really do. When I see somebody stomp on the flag, I just like, "You don't have a clue, people." I just want to take them out and just shake them. I mean—and that's—

TS: Get your dog on them! [both chuckle]

DB: It's just—And I think it's what's wrong with people; they haven't a clue. Because there's so much history in this United States and we should care about where it came from and they don't.

TS: Yeah. Do think they have a disconnect from the military? Is that part of it, do you think?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

DB: Maybe. And I think—

TS: The recent wars we've had.

DB: And I think—But they only hear one side of it. They're not listening to the whole story.

TS: What do you think they're missing?

DB: I just—I just think they only want to hear what they want to hear. It just—unfortunately, like, back in the '70s when Vietnam was, I think a lot of times when you think about it, it's the same principle now. If you think about it.

TS: You mean being against war? The anti-war sentiment.

DB: Yeah. That's right. But it's a different way—Terrorism in this world, it's real. And that's something people don't understand. It's a real thing and it just—I guess living around a military base you—because I'm more sense of what's going on and stuff like that. And people just—When you're away from it you don't understand a lot of it.

TS: You don't feel like it's going to happen to you.

DB: And with the volunteer army services, a lot of kids don't go in anymore; male or female. The whole family—core of family is not there like it should and I think that's a lot of what problems—Don't get me started. I could go on forever. [both chuckle]

TS: That's what I'm all about, is getting everybody started.

DB: But you know what I'm saying. It just—the core family is not there and that's one reason a lot of the families and the way the world is—It's just they're growing up without mothers or fathers or—They don't know right from wrong, even though sometimes mine was—there were some things I don't like to talk about, but I still had a sense of right and wrong, what to do, manners, and how to talk to people. A lot of these kids are so disrespectful to adults, and being older, I see it now. They're so disrespectful. I just want to slap them. And I look at them and just say, "Come on, young man, young lady. Come on." It just—That's what's wrong with the world, because the parents, the families, they don't teach the kids. It's sad.

TS: When you went into the Marine Corps, do you think you were pretty independent at that time or do you think you had a—Because here you are, you're flung away at eighteen and you're doing stuff all on your own.

DB: Yeah.

TS: What kind of values do you think that you gained from the Marine Corps?

DB: The independence.

TS: But you had to be pretty independent to, like, sneak around and get that signature and—

DB: And I was but—

TS: Do you think it reinforced the sense of that?

DB: That's right. I think because of what I was raised it just—I knew to make a better life for myself that's what I had to do, is to come away from everything. And if you talk to a lot of women, a lot of women have done that. A lot of men have done that to get away. I know my first husband was running moonshine [beverage with high alcohol content that is illegally distilled to avoid taxation from the government]. That's why [unclear] stand in front of a judge [unclear] said, "You go in the Marine Corps or—" [chuckles]

TS: Right.

DB: In that time, there was a lot that happened that way.

TS: Yeah. Well, would you do it again?

DB: Yes.

TS: Yeah. In a heartbeat.

DB: In a heartbeat.

TS: Well, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you wanted to mention?

DB: I can't think of anything right now.

TS: We pretty much covered it all.

DB: I think so. I think so. I've enjoyed it. I hope—I'm sorry for getting emotional.

TS: Oh, no. It's quite alright. It's just the course of the—

DB: Of life.

TS: —of bringing up things you haven't thought about in a long time too. Well, Donna, it's really been a pleasure to talk with you. I'll go ahead and shut it off then if you don't have anything else.

DB: No. [chuckles]

[End of Interview]

