

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Kate Germano

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 11 November 2016

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is November 11, 2016. It's Veterans Day. My name is Therese Strohmer. Today, I'm here, and we are at the Marriott in Greensboro [North Carolina]. I'm here with Kate Germano to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical collection at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Kate, could you state your name the way you'd like it to be on the collection?

KG: Sure. Kate Germano.

TS: Okay, Kate. Why don't we start off by having you tell me a little bit about your background? Where were you born and where are you from?

KG: I was born [March 1973] in El Paso, Texas, and I only lived there for a few years because my dad was commissioned in the army, and he ended up in El Paso because *his* dad had been in the army. And so, he went to school at the University of Texas, met my mom, and then they got married and had two kids.

TS: Okay, so did your father stay in the army?

KG: He did. I come from a long line of military. Actually, I shouldn't say a long line, it's two generations, but my grandfather served for about thirty years, and then my dad served for twenty.

TS: Oh, wow. So all combined, you're pushing a lot of years there.

KG: It's scary. I should have my AARP [American Association of Retired Persons] card, I guess.

TS: That's right. You should. When were you born?

KG: I was born in March of 1973.

TS: Okay. So you travelled around a lot?

KG: We did, to a certain degree, early on. My mother, who I credit to this day with, sort of, making me independent. She worked all throughout my childhood, and so she got to a certain point, after moving around and going to Germany, that she said, "Look, my career is important too," and she put her foot down. And so, my dad ended up moving and doing geo-bachelor [a married military member separated from their spouse, often for the length of their tour] tours, and just visiting on the weekends—coming home on the weekends—and my mom had her career.

TS: Really?

KG: And they had a great marriage. They were perfectly suited for each other.

TS: That's great. Where was his home place, then?

KG: They ended up—My dad was stationed at Aberdeen Proving Ground [U.S. Army facility] in Maryland, and so my mom got a really good job managing a retail store, and we ended up staying in Aberdeen. That's actually where my dad retired, and he still owns a home there.

TS: Does he really?

KG: Yeah, he does.

TS: Pretty neat. My brother-in-law actually works there.

KG: Really? That's crazy. Yeah, it's a big science and technology center now.

TS: Do you have any siblings?

KG: I have one sister, she's three years older than I am, and she lives in Houston, Texas.

TS: Oh, okay. She went back to her roots then, or maybe she wasn't born there. I don't know.

KG: No, she was. She was born in El Paso and, ironically enough, she—I'm getting ahead of myself—

TS: That's okay.

KG: Her senior year of college, she eloped with a marine lance corporal.

TS: Really?

KG: And they moved around, and then he—they ended up getting divorced, but he ended up settling in Texas, and because they had kids, she stayed in Texas too.

TS: I see. Okay. That's interesting. Alright.

KG: He was my first real experience with marines, and I'm surprised I joined even knowing him. [chuckles]

TS: We'll have to get to that; how you decided on the marines with the army history. So you grew up in Maryland?

KG: Yes. I say I grew up there.

TS: Okay. What town were you in?

KG: In Aberdeen.

TS: Oh, that's right. Aberdeen.

KG: Yeah, went to high school there, went to middle school there.

TS: What was that like? Were you in a suburban area?

KG: Aberdeen is really one—It's a little tiny town, and so it's about an hour away from Baltimore [Maryland], which is the next biggest town. Growing up, it felt very insulated, and other than the fact that I was lucky to grow up with people from all different backgrounds, all different walks of life, because of the military, most of them had a parent in the military, and so the town itself is very small, but it offered up a wide array of cultural experiences that I wouldn't have otherwise had.

TS: What do you remember about that? What kind of things did you enjoy doing?

KG: I remember—Now it's not that uncommon, but back then I remember going to school with kids who spoke Tagalog [Austronesian language], kids who spoke Korean, kids who spoke Spanish. The food was always—We shopped at the commissary on Aberdeen Proving Ground, and they always had a really well-stocked ethnic section, and so I grew up with that and it just—I never thought—

TS: So it was really multicultural?

KG: Yeah. And it was a great way to grow up as a kid. It really was.

TS: When you're a young girl, what kind of interests did you have?

KG: I was really athletic when I was a kid.

TS: Oh, really? Okay.

KG: I played a lot of sports. I tried dancing for a year, I think. I didn't make it through Brownies.

TS: No Girl Scouting for you?

KG: No Girl Scouting, but I spent a lot of my time doing sports.

TS: Okay. What kind of sports did you like?

KG: I played soccer, I played—Lacrosse was my love. I played field hockey; tried that. I swam. So I was always busy. And then in school, I was always part of the orchestra, until I was a senior, and I was always really active in student government.

TS: What did you do in the orchestra?

KG: I played the violin.

TS: Did you really?

KG: And I hated it; I hated it.

TS: Did you?

KG: I can tell you when my grandparents would come to visit, my parents would always make me do a recital and I absolutely hated it. I really wanted to play the cello when I was a kid, but I walked to school—

TS: So you couldn't carry it?

KG: That's right.

TS: Yeah. That's a big thing to carry.

KG: Yeah. But I just hated the violin. I hated it.

TS: Really? Did you stop playing, or do you still?

KG: I stopped—No, no, no. I stopped playing my senior year because I finally had the power to make the decision. [chuckles]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You say, "I'm done."

KG: Right. Right.

TS: You're enjoying sports, so you got to play a lot of sports, and active in your school?

KG: Yes, very much.

TS: When you're a young girl, in grade school—You can say where you went or not—what kind of interests did you have? As a little girl, what kind of dreams did you have about the things that were possible for you?

KG: I never thought the military would be something I would pursue. I can tell you that my parents were ahead of their time in that they never placed limitations on what I thought I could do. I was always told that I was going to go to college, and so for me, it just became part of the planning process. But I never—When I was a kid, I wanted to be a veterinarian, and then I realized that I wasn't good at math and I wasn't good at science. I mean, legitimately. Not because I'm a woman, but legitimately not good at math. I was always very interested in history, and I was really interested in law, so I thought I would pursue law school.

TS: Alright. Did you have any teachers that you really admired or had respect for that helped you chart your course?

KG: I had some great elementary school teachers that I will remember—Mrs. Menson is a great example. I remember when we finished a test when I was in elementary school, I pulled out a book after I was finished with the test, and she saw me reading, and she actually gave me a card that was all about how excited she was to see me reading, and that was sort of—very early on—I was probably in the second grade—that was a formative thing, because I recognized that not everybody likes to read. I just devoured books when I was a kid, still do.

TS: Voracious, right?

KG: Yes, voracious reader. But really, going through middle school and high school, I can't think of any one teacher, other than my science teacher in sixth grade, who really fundamentally shaped what I would be.

TS: Why? How did he do that?

KG: Well, *she* was amazing.

TS: She, look at me, I'm already—

KG: That's okay. Part of it was the time. When I was in sixth grade, it was when Christa McAuliffe was selected to go on the space shuttle, and so my teacher was very creative and she really found a way to connect kids to science in a really creative way. Having Christa McAuliffe go in space was—It was like there was a really incredible first

opportunity for her to teach about space, and so that sort of set the tone.

[Christa McAuliffe was an American high school teacher who became the first civilian selected to go into space. She was killed when the Space Shuttle *Challenger* broke apart during its launch on 28 January 1986.]

TS: When that explosion happened?

KG: It was devastating. I was in orchestra—

TS: You were in high school then, right?

KG: No, I was in middle school.

TS: Oh, middle school. Oh, wow.

KG: The *Challenger*. Yeah.

TS: What year was that? I forget. I'm trying to see if that's on here.

KG: Oh, boy. I don't—It would have had to have been in the 80s, maybe '86, something like that? I remember exactly where I was when that happened. I was sitting in orchestra, which I hated.

TS: How was your teacher? Do you remember her reaction at all? I wondered because of her interest in—

KG: I was out of her—Maybe it was when I was in sixth grade. I just remember the entire school shutting down, and I remember them wheeling in TVs on the AV [audio-visual] carts—

TS: Eighty-six. I knew it was on there somewhere.

KG: There you go. Yeah. I remember them wheeling in the AV cart into class, and I just remember it was devastating to watch that.

TS: Wow.

KG: Between that and Gaddafi [Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, was a Libyan revolutionary, politician, and political theorist] and the threat of nuclear war, that was kind of like—that set the tone.

TS: Did you have an interest in world affairs at that young age at all? Were you paying attention to politics and what was going on in the world?

KG: Yeah. In fact—

TS: Because a lot of people didn't.

KG: Now that I think about it, I did have a teacher who was great. Her name was Mrs. Fair, and she was one of the reasons that I enjoyed history. She was actually our creative arts and language arts teacher, but every day we would have to—Somebody would have to brief a different thing that was going on in history, and I just always remember the time during [Ronald Wilson] Reagan's [40th President of the United States] presidency where it was sort of like we were trying to figure out what to do with ballistic weapons and nuclear weapons, and it was really a tense time. I think, in fact, that year was the year that they showed that movie on TV that was all about nuclear war.

TS: *The Day After*?

[*The Day After* is an American television film that first aired on November 20, 1983, on the ABC television network. The film is about a fictional war between NATO forces and the Warsaw Pact countries that rapidly escalates into a full-scale nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union.]

KG: There you go. And so, it was a really stressful time to be a kid. It was probably a lot like what it was like in the fifties—

TS: With the Cold War.

[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)]

KG: Absolutely. Because as a kid, you don't really know how that whole thing is going to play out.

TS: Right. You don't have any context to think about getting through struggles, difficult times.

KG: Right, but she helped with that just by having us learn about what was really happening with it.

TS: Interesting.

KG: Very interesting. Yeah.

TS: You said your parents wanted you to go to college, so how did you decide where you were going to go?

KG: I, for whatever reason—Because I'm an idiot, I decided early on that I was only going to apply to two schools in Maryland. Loyola [University]—Both tiny, private schools—Loyola and then this school called Goucher [College]. I don't know why I picked those two schools, because I selected them before I even went and did visits on the campus to do my interviews. But that decision ended up shaping what ended up happening to me for the next five or six years. I ended up getting into both and I selected Goucher.

TS: Okay. That's one I've never heard about. I've heard of Loyola.

KG: It's tiny, at least when I was there; it was about a thousand people.

TS: Where's it at?

KG: It's right across from Towson State [University; now known as Towson University]. It's a tiny school located right across the street from a giant school. But it was very, very small, and it was widely attended by people way higher up on the socio-economic ladder, which I wasn't, and my mom at that time had a book store, and Barnes and Noble and all of the—At the time, it was Barnes and Noble, and then—I'm trying to think of the book store that closed. It was bought out by Barnes and Noble. But they kind of moved in and then her bookstore went bankrupt—not bankrupt but it—

TS: Kind of like that movie, right? [Perhaps referring to the 1998 film *You've Got Mail*.]

KG: That's right. And so, she closed the store, and at that point there was no way to help me with college, so I ended up having to quit playing sports. I was playing lacrosse at the time at Goucher, and I had to work full time and go to school full time.

TS: Where'd you work?

KG: I worked a variety of jobs. I worked at The Limited [former American clothing company]. That was my first job. It wasn't my first job, but it was my first job to pay for college. I worked at The Limited for maybe a year, and then I ended up selling these sweatshirts at a kiosk in the mall, and they were the more heinous sweatshirts. They had the fronts and backs of animals on them, and so—

TS: [chuckles] Right. I remember those.

KG: Yeah, they were so heinous but people loved them. And so, I would work open to close everyday selling these sweatshirts, and do my school work, and that was during the holidays. And then after the holidays, we were shutting up the kiosk, and we had been located right in front of this jewelry store called Edward Arthurs [Edward Arthur Jewelers], and one day the manager came out and—His name was Dan, he was a great

guy—he came up to me and he said, "You work so hard. You're always doing something and straightening things and—"

TS: He was watching you.

KG: And he hired me. And I was able to finish school because he hired me full time, so it ended up being a positive experience. But I can tell you that working through college was really a formative experience in my life. It truly taught me the value of not being in debt. It taught me the value of working hard. Anything that I learned in college, I could have learned as a hobby, except for that.

TS: The experience of going through this journey to get your degree, and all the, kind of, struggles you had to put in to get there.

KG: Absolutely. And it also made me realize that when I—I had never considered the military, just because I didn't want to necessarily repeat what my dad had done. When you're a kid, it's kind of like, "Eh." But then I realized when I was a junior in college that because I was working in the civilian sector and I was sort of working a—not a corporate job, but it was civilian—It just wasn't rewarding, and I realized at that time that I was looking to do something where I could really feel like I was making a mark.

TS: What did you do about that?

KG: I applied to the [United States] Naval Academy, and this was actually when I was still working at the kiosk. I applied to the Naval Academy, but I was already in my junior year going into—

TS: Yeah, you'd have to go through four more years.

KG: They'd prefer, yeah. And I wasn't good at math. I think I already told you that. My SAT [Scholastic Assessment Test] scores were extremely strong for the verbal section, but not so much for math, and so I didn't get in, and that was a devastating experience.

TS: Never occurred to you that you wouldn't be accepted.

KG: Never. Because it was the first time in my life I hadn't succeeded at something I attempted, but it made me want it that much more, and so I started pursuing other options and I went to the naval recruiter. I fell in love with the navy after I went to see a graduation at the Naval Academy; my boyfriend's brother ended up graduating. I went to see a navy recruiter in Hyattsville [Maryland], and he basically looked at my transcripts, and I had, like, a 3.4 GPA [grade point average] and my SAT scores, and he was like, "Look, you're never going to get commissioned in the navy. It's just too competitive and you're not going to—"

And I'm crushed thinking, "Man, here I am working full time, I'm getting A's, and you're telling me I'm not good enough."

I walked out of his office, and directly across the hall was the Marine Corps recruiter—and I didn't know then but I know now after two tours on recruiting, they always lease space in the same buildings. I walked into the marine office and the gunny [informal abbreviation for gunnery sergeant] who was sitting at the desk asked if I was waiting for my boyfriend taking the ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery; test administered by the military to determine qualification for enlistment in the Armed Forces]—the test—and that was it. It was like, "No, I'm not here to wait for my boyfriend. *I want to get more information.*" And that was it. It just sort of—

TS: Did you look at any of the other services?

KG: I didn't[?].

TS: What was it that drew you to the Marine Corps, after your dad had been in the army?

KG: Yeah.

TS: And your grandfather.

KG: There were two things. The first was that the Marine Corps was the smallest branch with the smallest—the fewest women, and I thought, "Wow, if I really want to make a mark, this is where I feel like I'm going to be able to make that mark." And then the other thing was that they have the highest standards, and so from the minute they told me, "Our PT [physical training] test is the hardest, fastest, and our Officer Candidate School is the most challenging, and—"

At that point I was sold. They didn't have to do anything. They didn't have to sell me because the minute he told me about those two things, I was like, "Okay, I'm in."

TS: Were you graduating then?

KG: I was just going into my junior year of college, and so you can sign your contract—you have up to a year. On the enlisted side they call it the Delayed Entry Program, and it's just like that for the officers too. So I signed my contract in September, and then I—actually, it would have been my senior year. I signed my contract in September, and then I graduated in May, and two weeks later I was off at training.

[The Delayed Entry Program (DEP) is designed to give potential recruits time to put their affairs in order, finish school, etc. before shipping out for basic training or Officer Candidate School.]

TS: Okay. What did your parents think about this?

KG: Well, my parents knew—I remember the call that I got from my parents when my mom's bookstore was going under, and they called me home over Thanksgiving and basically

said, "Look, we can't afford to pay any of your tuition anymore." And I think their expectation was that I would move back home and go to a community college, and I said I wouldn't do it. And my dad and I actually had a significant falling out over that, initially, because he—by refusing to make the smart decision, and it would have been smart, in a way, he felt like I was not going to be able to be successful.

TS: Like you're sabotaging yourself.

KG: Yeah, absolutely. I will never forget that weekend because it was kind of like that was the start of the next twenty years of my life. If you set your mind to something, you can do it. My parents—I think because I had defied them in staying at Goucher, but I had succeeded, I think they were—When I came home and said I wanted to join the marines, they were like, "Okay. You can do this." It was really neat because my decision to join opened up a whole part of a relationship with my dad that I would never have otherwise had.

TS: Interesting.

KG: Yeah. They were very, very, very supportive parents.

TS: Excellent. And how about your sister?

KG: The irony is that my sister, when she was a senior—I told you she dropped out to elope with the marine—

TS: Oh, right. Oh, yeah, I forgot about that.

KG: She was actually in NROTC [Naval Reserve Officers' Training Corps]—It was ROTC; it was army ROTC. She was enrolled at the Institute—not the Institute—IND [The Institute of Notre Dame]; so a private Catholic school in Baltimore. And she decided that she hated ROTC and she was going to quit, and she lost her scholarship. So my parents paid for her school all the way through, and then she bailed on her senior year to marry the lance corporal. And so, she—my sister and I have never really been super close, and I think I was angry with her because she had an opportunity that she squandered, and I was resentful of that for a long time.

TS: Sure. Because then everything's lost for you. You've got to pull yourself up by your bootstraps, as they say, sort of.

KG: Which actually ended up being really positive, so I guess I should thank her for that. [both chuckle]

TS: There you go. Thank her now because you're on tape.

KG: Thank you, Stacy. You really shaped how my life turned out.

TS: Yeah. What about your friends, your social group?

KG: Sure. In high school, I think I told you, I was always really active in student government, and I was really active in sports. I didn't have a lot of close friends. I had one absolute best friend, her name was Kim Meyers[?], and she lived in my neighborhood. She and I met when, I think—She was a year older than I was, and we met when, I think, I was going into sixth grade. And so, we remained really close friends all the way through my junior year, and then she sort of found other friends, and was older, and was going to go to college, and we lost touch. But ironically, we just now—this year—got back in touch. I'm not on Facebook [social networking website], for many reasons, but she tracked me down through LinkedIn [business- and employment-oriented service that operates via websites and mobile applications], of all things, and now we're back in touch.

TS: Oh, great!

KG: In fact, she called me today.

TS: Oh, how nice. Really neat. Kudos to her.

KG: Yeah, yeah. I didn't really have a whole lot of close friends, but, ironically, I floated in and out of—

TS: In and out of social circles all the time.

KG: Yeah, and I was—

TS: Perfect for the military.

KG: Yeah. And because of the way I grew up and the culture that was very inclusive, I was able to fit in with a bunch of different groups. I was voted Miss Popular coming out of high school, which didn't make a whole lot of sense because I wasn't real close to people, but looking back, it all sort of fits in.

TS: That is sort of neat. Alright, so you've made a decision, you're going in. You graduate.

KG: I graduate, yes. Didn't even walk in my graduation.

TS: No, you're just getting your boots ready, right?

KG: Yeah.

TS: You said you were really active so you were really fit?

KG: Yes, absolutely.

TS: Did you know what basic training was going to be like there?

KG: Well, I was—To be honest, I was the recruiter's worst nightmare as a candidate because I worked full time, and so that year that you have waiting to go to training is really supposed to be the year that you're coming to the recruiting station regularly, weekly, to participate in PT, learn your knowledge, do little field experiments. And because I worked full time, I promise you that my recruiter never thought I was going to ship, because I was never there. And so, when I took over a recruiting station, I thought, "I am never going to let my candidates do that to me." Because you never know who's going to ship and who isn't, and that's the difference between making mission and not making mission.

TS: That's interesting. When I signed up, I just waited for my day.

KG: Isn't that crazy? It's not that way anymore. At least, it's not supposed to be.

TS: Really? Interesting.

KG: It is for women more than men. There's a lack of accountability for women when they join.

TS: I guess we can talk about this later, too, when you're in recruiting, but once you're talking to the recruiter, then they stay connected with you.

KG: Yeah, they're required to, and they're supposed to mentor you and hold you accountable and—but what were they going to do?

TS: Wow. I went in pretty blind. I mean, not totally blind.

KG: Yeah. But you know what they find, is that that affects attrition.

TS: I can see why. No, it makes sense. Interesting.

KG: I didn't have that issue though. My thing is, once I commit to something, for better or worse, I am in it to be there till the end, and so my recruiters were probably panicked. But I always knew I was going to go. I didn't really know what to expect because I hadn't been able to participate in those types of training events. But I held myself to a high standard for physical fitness anyway, and at that time, we only had to run a mile and a half. The women now have to run the three-mile physical fitness test, but when I joined I was like, "A mile and a half? That's so easy." That part wasn't hard for me at all.

TS: Tell me what it was like, then. What was it like to—It's not like basic, necessarily, but they call it something different.

KG: It's Officer Candidate School [OCS]. Essentially, you can come into the Marine Corps a few different ways, but for officer candidates who come right out of college, it ends up being a ten-week long training program, and it's super—

TS: It's a lot longer than I would think.

KG: Yeah. Well, yeah. Boot camp is thirteen weeks for us, so it's actually shorter, but it's super physical. And so, for me, I loved PT. I was all about it. And I didn't mind the yelling. That didn't bother—It was funny. I got into trouble so much for laughing. My drill instructors used to call it "showing your teeth," and I got so much crap every day because you would see the funniest stuff unfolding. At Marine [Corps] OCS, they have—Each of the candidates is required to be a candidate platoon commander or a candidate gunnery sergeant—company gunnery sergeant—so you have to fulfill these leadership roles, and they make you—they're sergeant instructors, they're drill instructors—you have to speak in the third person, and so if I was the candidate company platoon commander, and you have to be able to speak to the drill instructors and say, "Drill instructor, Candidate Platoon Commander, Candidate Germano wishes to speak to—" And when you're seeing this unfold, and you see people really cracking under pressure, it was funny. And the PT was amazing. I came out of there in fantastic shape, so it was fun.

TS: In the Marine Corps, I know that when you're enlisted, its women and men are separated. Is it the same for the officers?

KG: It's different. It's like it should be at enlisted boot camp.

TS: It's mixed gender?

KG: It's mixed from the standpoint that the women live in the same building as the men and you're part of a male company. And you participate in all of the events at the same time, so it's not boy-girl-boy-girl, but it's your—

TS: So the platoons, are they all—

KG: The platoons are all separated by gender, but at least you're doing the same thing at the same place with the same people. Very different from enlisted training, as I found out the hard way.

TS: Interesting. Okay. When you're commissioned in the Marine Corps, do you go for a certain field? Are you signed up right away when you sign up? How does that work?

KG: Only if you were to go aviation or law. Those were the two jobs that you could get ahead of going to OCS. For everybody else, those job assignments come after you complete the six-month basic school in Quantico [Virginia]. What ends up happening is, it's based on your class standing. You submit fifteen choices and you either get one through fifteen. It's based on your class standing, and sometimes you don't end up with what you want. My greatest regret as a marine is that I didn't push myself to do something that I wasn't comfortable with. I deviated between being a military policeman or becoming an adjutant [an officer who assists the commanding officer with unit administration]. I knew I was good at doing adjutant stuff, and so I went with that. My captain, who was in charge of

my group at the basic school, called me his little ball of sunshine. To me, I didn't know that was wrong. He didn't have the same sort of attitude with mentoring and shaping with the women as he did the men.

TS: When he said you were a little ball of sunshine, what did that—

KG: He wrote that on my eval [evaluation].

TS: What did that mean though?

KG: Well, exactly. Instead of saying, "Very competent at X," he just sort of pushed me to go the traditional female route, which was admin, and I didn't realize it until later on. I just figured, well, this is what happens.

TS: So you were able to get what you wanted though—

KG: I got what I wanted, but in the long run, it didn't allow me to really push myself the way I should have challenged myself.

TS: I see. Interesting.

KG: I was disappointed for taking the easy road.

TS: Well, I think maybe joining the marines isn't the easy road in the first place.

KG: No, but it's—Your job is sort of what defines you as a marine, so not only did I take the easy road, but then I became an adjutant, which was a traditionally female role. It was known for being a female role, and that sort of becomes the stereotype for the rest of your time. And I didn't start my time in the Marine Corps as any sort of gender warrior. I didn't really even know—I didn't know that sexism existed because I didn't grow up in that culture, but when I look back now, I realize that I sort of set myself up to experience things that later shaped my perspective in a very unique way, I think.

TS: We can talk about that some more as we get through it, but that's really interesting that you say that. So the framework growing up didn't prepare you for some certain challenges that came up.

KG: Right.

TS: Well, you probably were prepared in some ways to face them, but not to expect them, right?

KG: Yeah, especially when you're joining a service that says it has the highest standards; for everybody, not just men.

TS: Right. Your first assignment, where did you get to go? Do you have a dream sheet [a list of duty assignment preferences] in the Marine Corps?

KG: When you graduate, along with submitting those top fifteen choices for MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], for your job, you also get to submit your top—I think it was five back then—your top five geographical preferences. It covers every region of the world and you just rank them one to five, and I had not been to the West Coast, ever, in my life, and I thought, "Wow, this could be a really neat experience." And so, I chose the West Coast and that's what I got. I remember sitting in the classroom at the basic school with, probably, two hundred other students and they were issuing the orders, and I got my orders and I was like, "Oh, my God, Twentynine Palms, California!"

And all of the other prior service marines in the room were like, "Oh, no!" I'm thinking Twentynine Palms sounds so beachy, and it was the middle of the desert; in the high desert.

TS: Yeah, you didn't look it up, maybe.

KG: Right, there was no internet back then so it was kind of hard.

TS: That's true.

KG: Absolutely.

TS: How was it, then? Tell me about your first feelings about when you were there. Where did you live, and those kinds of things?

KG: Sure. I ended up driving from Maryland to California.

TS: Oh, you drove across the country.

KG: And it was so cool because I stopped in all these—I stopped at Graceland [museum and former home of Elvis Presley in Memphis, Tennessee], I stopped at all these neat places, and I ended up driving into Twentynine Palms at night, and so the lights in the basin made it look like it was this huge metropolis. I'm like, "Okay, I can do this." I grew up—well, I didn't grow up—but I was born in the desert so I thought, "I can do this. No problem." I went and I checked in to the TLF—the temporary lodging facility—and go to bed and wake up the next day and think to myself, "Where were all these lights coming from?" Because it's tiny, but being on a base that was so small was actually a neat experience because I was able to do a lot of things that I wouldn't otherwise have been able to do.

TS: Like what?

KG: Well, I started off at headquarters battalion and I ended up being a legal officer. I ended up going to the security officer course because we just didn't have a lot of people, so I

had like, fifteen collateral duties [task or tasks carried out by a military member that lie outside of their main role]—

TS: You had a lot of different hats you're wearing.

KG: A lot of different hats, and it was a great experience always being the junior person on the staff because—

TS: I don't hear that phrase very often. [chuckles]

KG: Yeah, I know, it sounds counterintuitive, right? But I didn't take any shit, and so I think I was able to quickly establish that I was there to do a good job, and I wasn't going to put up with a lot of crap, and it was like I was able to make a mark. And then after a year at headquarters battalion, I was actually selected to go to the Comm. [communications] school [Marine Corps Communications-Electronics School] right down the street, which is the largest formal MOS school in the Marine Corps, and I became the adjutant and legal officer there, and that was a great job.

TS: What did you do?

KG: And I met my husband there so I [unclear].

TS: Well, that's sweet. Can you explain to people who don't know what an adjutant does? Can you explain what that means?

KG: Sure. They've actually changed the name. Now we're manpower officers, which is kind of sad because, historically, the adjutant always carried a little gold pencil on their—it was like a braid cord—and they would take notes for everything the commander said, and then when the time came to develop battle plans, the adjutant was the one who actually drew the lines of battle. By the time I became an adjutant, it was nowhere near as thrilling, war, close to the historic—yeah. The adjutant, historically, was also the billet [a specific personnel position, assignment, or duty station] that was responsible for planning the security for the headquarters element in times of war, so that was one thing that I was responsible for within my job, and that was rewarding. But one of the other things I learned quickly was that I was responsible for casualty tracking, and notifications whenever there was an accident, or an illness, or a death. And so, it was a good job, but it was also—it could be a very stressful one, and a sad job, because of that.

TS: Sure. Very emotional. When you said originally you didn't take any "crap," I think, might have been the word you used.

KG: I think you need to bleep that out. [chuckles]

TS: That's a safe word, I think. I have heard much more descriptive. But what kind of things are you referring to?

KG: As the junior person on the staff, I check into my first unit, and I'm a second lieutenant, and I am bombarded by captains who want to give me their stuff—their collateral duties, their tasks—and so I learned very quickly that I had to draw boundaries, because as the adjutant, you're the direct—you report directly to the commander. And as the legal officer, you provide the commander direct legal advice based on your consultation with the staff judge advocate. So I didn't have time to be picking up dry cleaning, and all the crazy other requests that you would get as a second lieutenant, and so I think by standing my ground, that sort of let people know that I wasn't—I was there to do a job and I wasn't there to do favors.

TS: But you established that right away?

KG: Absolutely; yeah, absolutely.

TS: In Twentynine Palms—This is '97 we're talking about?

KG: Yes.

TS: If we're looking at the demographics of that particular place where you're at, how did it break down?

KG: In terms of men and women?

TS: Like men and women, different ethnicities.

KG: It was awesome. For the first time in my life, I was one out of five officers who were women. The women on base were either spouses, daughters—really, that's it. There were literally five of us, and so it was like being Miss America. It was like having your pick of the litter, because we were so outnumbered. There was an infantry regiment on the base, and so the infantry regiment and infantry—AAV [Assault Amphibious Vehicle] marines, they comprised the bulk of the population there. And then there were some aviation support elements as well. It was pretty cool. I'm sure I wouldn't have met my husband otherwise.

TS: Some women said they feel like they're in a fishbowl, right?

KG: Yeah.

TS: And that that attention sometimes is overwhelming.

KG: Again, it's like looking back—when people assume you're a spouse, it's not like being in a fishbowl at all. People avert their gaze because they're nervous that if they come onto you or they try to pick you up that you're going to be somebody that could get them in trouble. But in wearing my uniform around the base—Again, looking back, you start to connect the dots, but at the time I didn't realize that sexism was a thing.

I remember walking through the PX [post exchange: on-base retail store] area, and it was sort of like an outdoor stores, pavilion area, and so when you walked out of the little stores, you had to put your cover back on, and I remember walking out of the PX as a second lieutenant and seeing a lance corporal walk in, and I kid you not, he did the typical lance corporal thing where you'd look on the ground to avoid saluting. And so, I touched him on the arm and I was like, "Hey, I don't want to be a jerk, but, I mean, come on, really? You can see I'm an officer. Do me a favor." And so, I corrected him, and before I even got back to my unit, his commander had called my commander to complain that I had assaulted him by touching him on the arm, as opposed to the bigger issue of I corrected him, which is what marine officers are supposed to do, and I was not a jerk about it. Looking back, that's kind of like, "Huh?"

But my commander was really good about it, and he was like, "Yeah, okay. I took the call. Just do me a favor and don't touch anybody when you're going to make a correction." And that was it. But that was sort of like—looking back you're like, "What?"

TS: Right.

KG: It's just interesting.

TS: The reason that he didn't want to salute was just because he didn't want to salute an officer?

KG: I want to say it was because he didn't want to salute an officer, and not because I was a woman, but again, looking back in hindsight, you realize things that you would never—

TS: Do you think he would have told his commander that a male had touched him on the arm?

KG: Never! Never! But, again, looking back, I never considered myself to be different. Because we talk such a good game about men and women serving equally and—but looking back it's like, "Really, Germano? What an idiot."

TS: Well, you don't know what you don't know.

KG: You don't know what you don't know, and it took me eighteen years to really figure it out.

TS: But you liked this assignment?

KG: I did. It was fun, it was—I liked learning new things. I really liked doing the legal stuff. I was enjoying the challenge of being in charge of a much larger group of marines at the Comm. school. And then I got a call in, I think, November of 1999. My husband and I got married in 1999 and—

TS: Okay. The millennial year.

KG: Yeah. Absolutely. The Y2K year.

TS: Yes.

KG: We were going through all kinds of madness with Y2K.

TS: Yeah, they worried about all the computers.

[The Year 2000 problem, or Y2K, is a class of computer bugs related to the formatting and storage of calendar data for dates beginning in the year 2000. Problems were anticipated, and arose, because many programs represented four-digit years with only the final two digits — making the year 2000 indistinguishable from 1900]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

KG: With the computers shutting down. Joe, the first six months of our marriage, was in Okinawa [Japan] on UDP, Unit Deployment Program.

TS: What did he do?

KG: He was infantry. And so, that was really hard being married and not being together. But I got a call, while he was deployed, from a captain who I had worked with, who asked—he was on recruiting duty and he said, "Look, we've got a billet coming up, and I know you, and I think you would be the perfect person for this job." And he said, "You're going to have to convince the commanding officer that you can do it, as a woman, but I think you're perfect for it."

And so, I got an interview with the CO [Commanding Officer] of [U.S.] Recruiting Station Orange [County] in Irvine [California] to become the OPSO/XO [Operations Officer/Executive Officer]. I met with Major Lamsin[?], who looked like he was ancient, and convinced him that I could do that job, and that was fantastic.

TS: What was his concerns?

KG: "You're going to be emotional. This is a tough business. You're going to have to be the one saying no. Can you say no and accept that people are going to hate you for it?"

I was like, "I pretty much live that life now."

So he took a leap of faith, and I ended up being the first female operations officer, maybe, in the nation, but if not, definitely the second. I think I was the first. I didn't know that at the time. But it was the best job ever. It was amazing. I really found out that I am good at math—

TS: [chuckles] Awesome.

KG: —and I found out that I'm really good at data analysis. And so, we took that station from low caliber applicants—

TS: And this is in 2000?

KG: It's in 2000, yeah. And I actually ended up staying there an extra six months because 2001 happened, and then Joe went to Iraq, and I ended up extending for six months so that he could come back and we could rotate to Expeditionary Warfare School together. But it was a great job.

TS: When you're the XO, what are your responsibilities?

KG: When I became—Generally, what happens on marine recruiting duty is you do the operations billet first and then you become the XO, so I ended up being dual-hatted for six to eight months where I did both. But as the XO, you're essentially responsible for the good order and discipline kind of stuff, because it's not the same personnel slate I'm recruiting because there's so many across the nation, so you're very limited in terms of staff. I did the legal stuff, which I already knew. I did the investigation stuff, which I already knew. The coolest thing that I did was—You manage the budget, you manage the vehicles, all that stuff, but the coolest thing I think the XOs do is they do NROTC scholarship applications, and so I was able to go out and meet kids and recruit them and train them. It was almost like being an officer selection officer, to a certain degree.

TS: How does it work for the NROTC?

KG: It's a highly competitive process, so you have to be physically qualified; you have to be medically qualified; you have to be mentally and morally qualified. You have to go through this extensive application process, do interviews, so I was responsible for that from start to finish, and I think in my last year that we were there, we ended up winning more NROTC scholarships than any other recruiting station in the region.

TS: And so, they get a scholarship for—

KG: Unlimited. They could go anywhere they wanted as long as there was an ROTC unit within—

TS: Is it for four years?

KG: Four years, yes. Four years. And the cool thing was that there were actually marines who were enlisted who competed for this scholarship as well, so that was really neat.

TS: Interesting.

KG: Yeah. It was really cool being able to mentor these kids so that they would be competitive. I really enjoyed that part of the job.

TS: Okay. What did they used to call that? Boots to something? There's a phrase they use to—

KG: We call them Mustangers.

TS: That's right, Mustangs.

KG: Yeah, yeah. They're still called that.

TS: Oh, I know what I was going to ask you about this. There's a perception in certain places that say military recruiting, they're predatory, they create conditions for kids who don't really know a lot; make promises.

KG: Yes. And that was exactly what was happening when I got there. Absolutely. One of the first things that I did when I got there, after I figured out what my job was, was I started looking at our attrition data, both in the delayed entry program, that year-long period before they ship, to boot camp. And that was exactly what I was finding, is we were living hand to mouth from the standpoint of the mission cycle. The new mission starts on the first and it ends on the thirtieth or the thirty-first, so you essentially have thirty to thirty-one days to make mission. And then there's a shipping mission on top of that. Recruiters who don't succeed end up enlisting kids who otherwise should have been screened out, but they're doing it so they can make mission. When I got to Orange [Recruiting Station Orange County], what I found was that our attrition for our delayed entry program was very high, and our ASVAB scores were very low, which ended up translating into us trying to make mission the last day of the month at midnight. We literally used to stay open until, like, ten o'clock at night to make mission the last day.

And so, by analyzing our attrition and then teaching the recruiting force and my CO what we could do the mitigate the attrition, and then showing them why that would make their lives easier and give them more quality of life and more time off. We were able to take that station from being an average station—and it was the second largest station in the nation—to being the top-quality station. So that was really significant.

TS: When you're talking about the attrition, is that like they didn't make it through the training?

KG: Right. They don't even—Some of them don't even make it to training. The delayed entry attrition is you have a kid who joins. You say, "Okay, you have six months to get ready to go and then you ship to recruit training." And they just fall out.

TS: Abandon ship.

KG: Right. They lose their commitment.

TS: Are there more that were falling out there than falling out after they—not making it through the training? I'm just curious because I'm wondering, even after you've screened

out all these ones that don't make it—not screened out but they fall in—and then there's still a bunch more that don't—

KG: Generally, what you find is, when you have problems with how you enlist applicants, you have problems with how they do at boot camp, so there was a parallel sort of trend happening. And the cool thing about the data in learning that[?] map, is that you can actually show, literally, the life cycle of an applicant and all of the risk factors. That was the first time I really recognized that I love to teach and I love to identify trends, and so that was a really—that's one of my favorite billets. If I told the average marine recruiting duty was one of my favorite jobs, they would think I was lying. But it truly—It was great. I loved it.

TS: Right. You had a good connection.

KG: Yeah. And it defined how I looked at the rest of the Marine Corps.

TS: Yeah! These are the people that are the foundation.

KG: That's right. So when I left there, and I had a marine who was having trouble with something, it was a great way to, sort of, figure out why they were struggling with academics, with drinking, with—just by looking at all those risk factors and how they played into their enlistment process.

TS: What kind of changes did you make to improve, not necessarily quality of the person, but the person that was going to be able to make it through?

KG: It started with prospecting. Recruiting is selling, and if you think that the one kid that you have an interview with and sit down and talk to, if you think that one kid is going to be enough to make your mission of enlisting two kids, then that's a problem. In other words, it's all math. You have to start with what number of contracts you're required to write per month, and then you have to, sort of, know how many kids it'll take to generate one interview, how many kids it'll take to get that one interview to qualify at MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station], and et cetera.

TS: Right. You've got to get all the no's before you get that one yes.

KG: Absolutely. So that was a really neat experience, because, like I said, up to that point I thought I was really bad at math, but it turns out I'm really not that bad at math. I just didn't know how to use it. So it was fun.

TS: So your husband is over in Okinawa for part of this?

KG: Yes. Right.

TS: A year tour or something?

KG: He was—Yeah, it was one year. I said six months. He'd actually been to Okinawa prior to us getting married, for six months, and then when we got married, the next month he left for a year deployment. It was an unoccupied tour. He came back. He was an infantry officer and he ended up going to [U.S. Marine Corps Base] Camp Pendleton [California], so it was cool. We got to live together for the first time.

TS: Yeah. How nice.

KG: At that point, he decided that he had pretty much done everything he wanted to do as an infantry officer. He was a captain, I think, at that point. He put in for a transfer to public affairs. He equated it to really wanting to use his brain.

TS: Gotcha. Right.

KG: He became a public affairs officer, and then 9/11 happens, and then the world changed.

[The September 11, 2001 attacks, or 9/11, was a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda on the United States on the morning of 11 September 2001. The attacks killed 2,996 people and injured over 6,000 others.]

TS: Tell me about that day, for you.

KG: I remember—Our days were really early on recruiting, just because it's such an arduous and difficult duty, and so I remember being at the gas station in uniform. We had to wear deltas; the blue trousers with the red stripe. I had just heard on NPR [National Public Radio]—

TS: You're in California, still, at the time?

KG: That's right. And September 11th was my mom's birthday, so I woke up thinking, "Oh, great, I'm going to call my mom, see if she got her present." And so, I had just heard about the first plane driving to the gas station, so I sat in my car, and then the second plane. And at that point, I remember putting gas in my car and looking around and wondering if everybody was hearing what I was hearing.

TS: So it's like, 6:30 in the morning or something.

KG: It was super early, yeah. And so, then I got into the car and I drove to work, and then the Pentagon happened. I was the XO at that point and I immediately had to go into making sure that all of our families were accounted for, because a lot of my recruiters were geobachelors [a married military member separated from their spouse, often for the length of their tour] and—not many but there were quite a few who actually came from New York and had family—

TS: You have to explain what geo-bachelors is.

KG: Sure. Geo-bachelor is someone who executes orders, but leaves their family with—

TS: Because you said this about your dad.

KG: Yes, yes. You execute orders but your family stays behind for whatever reason, because they want [unclear] family, whatever reason.

TS: Okay. So you accounted for everyone?

KG: We accounted for everyone but, God, it was unbelievable. To this day, it's—I mean, I'm sure it's trite. It was a formative day of my life.

TS: Well, many people in the military, and outside the military, say there's before 9/11 and after 9/11.

KG: Yeah, absolutely. Everything changed. Literally, that day I got home—I finally made it through the phone lines to talk to my mom. I literally got home, and that night, Joe's unit—He was part of 1st Marine Division, and they were being spun up on originally going to Afghanistan, and then they ended up sending other units to go and they were tasked with preparing to go into Iraq for the WMD [weapons of mass destruction].

TS: At the very beginning?

KG: Yeah. It was maybe three months later. So they spent all this time spinning up to do these things in Afghanistan, and they ended up getting tagged to go into Iraq.

TS: Now, did he have to go back to infantry or did he stay in public affairs?

KG: No, he stayed in public affairs but he became General [James] Mattis' public affairs officer. General Mattis is—I don't know if you know, but he's this legendary scholar warrior figure in the Marine Corps. So I extended on recruiting duty. Joe left in January. They did the invasion in March. He got into a shootout, with several of the marines he was with getting shot up. I'll never forget sitting at work and I get an email from him—Comms. [Communications] were so sporadic; I hardly ever got to talk to him. And so, I'm sitting in my office—

[James Mattis is a retired U.S. Marine Corps general who served in the military from 1969 to 2013. From 2016 to 1 January 2019, he was the U.S. Secretary of Defense under President Donald Trump.]

TS: This would be 2003, then?

KG: This would be 2003. I'm sitting in my office and he—So you're right. You're right. In 2001, we were talking about going into Afghanistan. He was originally going to go into Afghanistan. They ended up going to Egypt to do exercises, and then in 2003 he deployed. He started preparing in 2002, at the end.

TS: Gotcha.

KG: And I'm sitting at work checking my email and I get an email from him, and the text of it was, "Hey, I didn't really want to have to tell you this, but—" And you read that and you're like, "Holy cow." It turned out he was in a pretty significant ambush, and the lawyer who was with them ended up getting shot through the arm, and I think the hand and the ankle. And then one of his marines ended up getting shot through the shoulder. And so, Joe ended up putting his infantry background to good use by doing the MEDEVAC [medical evacuation], and he saved their lives.

TS: But he was okay?

KG: He was fine, yeah. I made the mistake of jumping out and surprising him as soon as he got back—

TS: Oh, no.

KG: —and I wasn't even thinking about—

TS: PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] and stuff.

KG: Scared the bejesus out of him.

TS: Yeah.

KG: He came back in June and then we went to school together.

TS: Okay. This school is the Expeditionary Warfare School?

KG: Yes.

TS: What is that? What are you supposed to learn there?

KG: It's really the transition point as a young captain, where you are going to go from a billet like recruiting or an operational tour, and you're going to deploy to the next senior billet. And so, as marines, we pride ourselves on being expeditionary, and so it was really the school that taught me the fundamentals of what deployment was like, what I would be responsible for as an adjutant, getting on and off ship, logistical loads, how to plan for those. It was really a great course, and it was a great year because Joe and I were able to live together with no deployments. It was great.

TS: Yeah. At Quantico, are you in the housing there?

KG: We actually lived in Fredericksburg, in Virginia, which was amazing. We had a great time. And my parents were close so it was a lot of fun.

TS: That's right. Yeah.

KG: It was great.

TS: Then you're going to move on to the next stage of your career?

KG: Right. I got a call. We were dealing with the monitors who do orders—they cut orders to tell you where you're going to go next—and I got a call from my monitor asking if I wanted to be on a ship as part of a Marine Expeditionary Unit, which is a big deal. There are only eight of them throughout the Marine Corps. So I was like, "Well, yeah. Absolutely. It sounds like a great opportunity."

So we ended up going to Okinawa, and for the first time, Joe was the one who had a staff job and I was the one who was able to deploy. My unit in Okinawa—the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit—traditionally stayed in the Pacific Command area of operations, but because of the shortages of marines, we ended up getting deployed to Iraq. So my unit was already in Iraq when I got there, and I had to fly out there with two other brand new marines and meet them in country.

TS: From Okinawa?

KG: Yes, which is, in and of itself, hysterical.

TS: Yeah. You said 2004 is when that happened. Is that right?

KG: Yes.

TS: So you were just a year in, and 2004 would have been like—not a lull, but not as—

KG: It was before the surge.

TS: Right. It was not as intense as it became.

KG: It was right—

TS: Like 2005 wasn't—right—when it really kind of heated up?

KG: Well, it was right when we were planning for Fallujah II, and so, ironically, I showed up in theater [an area or place in which important military events occur or are progressing] November 10th—so it was yesterday—in 2004.

[The Second Battle of Fallujah was a joint initiative between the Americans, Iraqi and British forces against the Iraqi insurgent forces. The battle took place in Fallujah, Iraq during November and December 2004 and is considered the bloodiest battle of the Iraq War.]

TS: Twelve years ago.

KG: Isn't that crazy? And so, I showed up in theater November 10th, and I met my boss, Colonel Miller, who was an amazing guy; best boss I ever had. And he had just lost his first marines in the city of Fallujah. And so, really, that was what kicked off hand-to-hand fighting in the city. It was devastating and we lost a lot of marines.

I learned, really, fundamentally, what an adjutant does in Iraq, because I was responsible for tracking the casualties, making sure the next of kin notifications were being done in CONUS [Contiguous United States], in the United States, getting combat replacements. It was really, really challenging. But my boss was amazing because he recognized the toll that that was taking on me, and he gave me other jobs to do.

TS: Instead of just having only that?

KG: Only dealing with casualties. I mean, it really was devastating. At one point, in January, we were tasked with providing poll security for the first Democratic elections.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: For the election?

KG: And so, our unit that had been in Fallujah, and had experienced all of these casualties, ended up being tasked at the last minute to provide election support, and in the middle of the night, two of the helicopters crashed and we lost thirty-one marines and sailors in one fell swoop. I mean, it was absolutely devastating to have that happen.

But I was really lucky because my boss allowed me to do things outside of that field, and so I became one of the primary people planning the retrograde from Iraq back to Kuwait, to the ships, which was a great experience. I was able to put all that stuff I learned at Expeditionary Warfare School to work. But then he selected me to be the executive officer of troops on the ship, which is a big deal.

TS: Wow. Yeah.

KG: And he also selected me to be the officer in charge of the headquarters element of the MEU [Marine Expeditionary Unit], which meant I had non-judicial punishment authority. I mean, it was a big deal.

TS: Why do you think you were selected for those positions?

KG: Well, I know it was in part because of my work ethic, and I assume it was in part because of my leadership. I assume it was those two things.

TS: Yeah.

KG: It was great.

TS: You're feeling like if you do your job, do it well, show good leadership—

KG: Yes, absolutely.

TS: —be disciplined, make sure that you keep the—

KG: Absolutely. So up until that point, I never thought there was a different standard for women. I was always one of the only women. Colonel Miller was an amazing CO because he encouraged women on his staff. He had a female Comm. officer. He had a female staff judge advocate, he had a female intelligence officer, he had a female adjutant, and I didn't realize how revolutionary that was at the time, but most male colonel infantry officers going into Iraq would be hand selecting men that they knew for those positions, and he didn't. And he held us all to the same standard. He had high expectations for all of us, and when you screwed up, you knew you screwed up, but he would drive on. He was amazing. I loved him. He's a four star now.

TS: Is he?

KG: He's either a three star or a four star. Great guy though.

TS: Tell me a little bit about being in Iraq. You said you were at Al Asad [Airbase in Iraq], is that right?

KG: Yes.

TS: Where did you have to live?

KG: I transitioned to Al Asad. We, as a unit, transitioned to Al Asad and built up the infrastructure. We transitioned from living in GP [General Purpose] tents—the big, huge tents—to living in, what we called, "cans" [military slang term for Containerized Housing Unit, or CHU]. They were essentially like Conex boxes, sort of. It was generally two or three marines per—

TS: The box?

KG: Because we found that the tents were just too dangerous. There was a huge fire in a tent from, I think, somebody smoking a cigarette right before I got there.

TS: Really?

KG: And the tents would go up like that [snaps fingers]; they were completely flammable.

TS: Very combustible.

KG: Absolutely. So we lived in "cans," and I ended up becoming the headquarters—or I took the headquarters' company commandant's "can" because he was off at another location. So I was really lucky because it was just me in my "can." I used to have people over for movies.

But Al Asad was kind of a weird place because it was this gigantic airbase. All of the planes—Saddam Hussein's [5th President of Iraq] planes—were still there, and so every time we would take a helicopter and you'd lift off, you would see—after the dust settled, you would see all of those aircraft. They looked like little toy planes. They were bunkered in but they were all still there; it was the weirdest thing.

We were not on the main side of Al Asad. It was so big that there was actually a main side, and then there was a little side. We were on the crap side.

TS: [chuckles] Who was on the good side?

KG: The aviation squadrons, and rightfully so, man. Those guys were working triple overtime. They flew missions when they shouldn't have, because it was clearly interfering with crew rest. Their maintenance hours were low, but they did an amazing job. I mean, they were providing close air support for the marines in Fallujah and everywhere else. That was a great tour. I've never felt more like a marine than on that tour.

[Close air support (CAS) is air action by fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft against hostile targets that are in close proximity to friendly forces and requires detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of those forces]

TS: Yeah? Why?

KG: Because I felt like we were all committed to the same mission, and partly because I had a great boss. I just felt like we were all committed, and then—

TS: Working together?

KG: Yeah, towards the same end. And it just felt like we were living up to the idea of "always faithful." It was hard. It was emotionally difficult. It was challenging just from an operation tempo perspective, but it really meant something.

[*Semper fidelis* is a Latin phrase that means "always faithful" or "always loyal." It is the motto of the United States Marine Corps, usually shortened to *Semper fi*.]

TS: Did you have any thoughts at the time about the protests that were going on in the United States?

KG: No, only because Joe and I—We were moving to an apartment, and he was getting ready to go to Iraq, and we saw protesters. We were like, "This is wrong." But once we got there, it was so bloody and it was so constant that you couldn't think about anything else. It was constant operations; constant, constant, constant. So you didn't think about any of that. And by the time we got home, you're not thinking about that because you're planning for the next thing that you have to do. So the riots—or not riots—but the protests didn't really affect us at all.

TS: You're just doing your job.

KG: Yeah, yeah. And even when we were in California, when Joe was deployed, I think the people—most people in America believed that WMD existed in Iraq, and so they felt like there was a true purpose. And it wasn't until later on that we figured out that none of that was true. Joe and I talk about that all the time.

TS: Yeah. You're still at Okinawa. Let's see, where do you go? Oh, you go back to recruiting.

KG: Yes. I became—I was selected for major, I pinned on major, and then I was selected to be a commanding officer in San Diego.

TS: How was that different than your previous experience?

KG: Because I was the guy in charge. The mission was mine. As an OPSO I was sort of steering the ship, but as the CO, you're responsible for everything your marines do or don't do. And when I took over my station, we had so many bad things happening. We were fifty thousand dollars in the hole for the budget. Don't ask me how somebody would let that happen, but we were fifty thousand dollars in the hole. I had recruiters sleeping with female applicants. I had recruiters sleeping with each other's spouses. It was a disaster, but it was a disaster that I could fix.

TS: How did you fix it?

KG: I laid down the law. The first day, when I took over my change of command, within an hour I met with every single staff noncommissioned officer in charge of the recruiting offices and I laid down the law, both in terms of the quality that I would accept and in terms of conduct. And recruiters are funny. They know they hold you hostage to a certain degree, because if they don't like what you're saying, they'll just not make mission.

TS: Right. And then that makes you look bad.

KG: They did that one time; my first month there. I said, "Look, I'm not going to accept kids with felonies. I'm not going to accept fat kids. I'm not going to accept kids who are not capable of being marines."
And they were like, "Oh, yeah, yeah."
So mission day comes and we missed mission, and it was the last time we ever made miss—missed mission.

TS: How did you change that around?

KG: Well, at that point, they knew I wasn't going to be held hostage, and they also knew I had to give—

TS: Wait. So it's like, they're bringing people forward and you're saying no, you're not accepting them.

KG: That's right.

TS: They thought you would just roll over and say, "Oh, we're so close to mission."

KG: Yes.

TS: I see. Okay.

KG: Absolutely. And so, part of it was dragging people, kicking and screaming, to change, and then the other part of it was education. I was lucky because I had had that Orange [Recruiting Station Orange County] experience and I knew what we needed to do, but I also knew that I had to convince the recruiters that this is what we needed to do. Every month, we starting making—we moved back our mission day. As our quality improved, we were bringing in fewer kids, but making mission, but we were able to bring in fewer kids and focus on improving their performance so that we would have less attrition. And when you have less attrition, your mission goes down. And that means that you can make mission earlier in the month, and then your recruiters can spend time with their families, and take time off, and actually take leave, and actually go to schools. And so, by the time I left, we were literally making mission on the first of the month. And then they had two weeks where they would prospect really heavily to fill up their buckets for the next month, and then two weeks to do whatever it was that they wanted to do.

TS: Okay.

KG: I'm not saying it was easy. I still had people that I was dragging, kicking and screaming, every month, but the vast majority of my people understood why it was important. It doesn't mean they liked me—I was very strict—but there was a benefit. There was a "what's in it for me" for them. It made a big difference. And when I left, we were quality station of the region, we were—and that's out of, like, twenty-four recruiting stations. And then we had the lowest attrition rate for the recruit depots for women and men in the entire history of the Marine Corps. I felt really good about that.

TS: You should have. Let me backtrack a minute. When you were talking about when you got there, you had—you need me to—you want me to—

KG: No, no, no. I'm good. I'm good.

[extraneous discussion of room temperature redacted]

TS: You had some issues with the recruiters sleeping with the recruits?

KG: Yeah. Dipping in the pool.

TS: Right. One, how do you find out about it? And two, how do you actually fix that? Because it's been a problem.

KG: Yeah.

TS: It's not new, right?

KG: Absolutely. One, you fix it by being engaged. As a commander, I could have very easily sat in my office and not really been engaged with my recruiters, but that's just not me, and so I was out and about every day in my recruiting offices. Not only was I out and about, I was looking at how they were recruiting, I was attending poolee [a person in the delayed entry program for the military] functions, PT functions, talking to the recruits, and I totally changed how we were bringing in women. Our attrition rates for women were astronomical. We were losing, literally, 50-75% of all the women we would enlist, either in the deck or when they went to boot camp. And so, what I said was, basically, "Look, from now on, I'm going to interview every single woman that you want to declare as a new working applicant." That's what we call them before they go take the physical. And it only took one. It only took one young woman having psychological issues from a history of abuse—it only took one—for everybody to get the message.

And so, being engaged like that, and talking to the recruits, and talking to the recruiters, tells you everything that you need to know. And also, trusting but verifying. Looking at their recruiting paperwork and backtracking to see if the kid is a legitimate interview or—I'm pretty sure that I blew their minds in a bad way. I'm pretty sure that a lot of my recruiters hated me, and I'm okay with that, because if I'm the thing that prevents you from getting NJP-ed [non-judicial punishment] or court-martialed, or prevents you from getting a divorce, I'm totally okay with that. But I literally—I ruled that place with an iron fist.

And it sucked, too, because when you're leaving, if you've been the iron fist, people don't necessarily—they're celebrating that you're leaving, but I know we accomplished amazing things together, and I keep in touch with a lot of those folks. It's kind of like you have to leave for them—You have to get distance for them to really understand why—It's like being a parent, I think.

TS: Right. And then they can reflect and say, "You know? I see that worked out."

KG: Yeah. I keep in touch with a lot of them. They're good, good kids.

TS: Excellent. Where did you go after that? Oh, you went back to the college.

KG: Yeah. After that I went to Command and [General] Staff [College] and then I—after that I went to be the aide.

TS: Okay, so the Command and Staff College is another check, going through your promotions.

KG: Yes. I earned my master's degree there.

TS: Oh, you did. Excellent. What'd you get it in?

KG: My thesis—my project—was on how corruption impacts failing states, and it was fascinating. It was—I loved studying it. Then I became the aide and I realized that corruption exists in the Pentagon. [chuckles]

TS: [chuckles] Not just failing states.

KG: Right, right. The Pentagon is a failing state, right?

TS: Awake now, right?

KG: That's right.

TS: Let's talk about that. You were the marine aide to the Secretary of the Navy in 2011.

KG: Right.

TS: Who was the Secretary then?

KG: [Raymond] Mabus [75th Secretary of the U.S. Navy]. He's still there. He's ending his time with the new regime, but yeah.

TS: Your husband had worked with him earlier?

KG: No, my husband worked for the Commandant of the Marine Corps.

TS: The commandant, okay.

KG: He was the public affairs officer for five commandants.

TS: Okay. Alright. What was he like?

KG: Mabus?

TS: Yeah.

KG: When you leave Command and Staff and you get selected to be the aide, it's a big deal, but my thing was, "Wow, this is so cool, because when we do all this travelling around the world, I'm going to finally see how policy is created." And then I got there and realized I was a glorified baggage handler, and nobody wanted to—it just was not—As an aide to a general, I think the relationship's probably different, but, I mean, I rode in that guy's vehicle twice. We were relegated to different vehicles, carrying bags, getting yelled at whenever there was a slight glitch in the delay or a take-off of the plane.

TS: So you're coordinating events[?]?

KG: Yeah, it's all logistics. That's all it was. I was really good at it but it was just, "Jesus, this is not what I—"

TS: Thought it was going to be?

KG: Right. Mabus is a huge photographer—animal photographer—and so, literally, we were planning trips to embassies around the world just based off of where he hadn't been. He had a huge—he probably still does—a map in his office with pins in it. And you think you're going to be planning these trips around strategic goals having to do with national defense strategy, and what ends up happening is you're planning trips so that he can go to these countries, check off the block in his passport, and take pictures on his executive time. It was almost like being part of fraud, waste, and abuse to a certain degree, because you're planning these trips and you're like, "Jesus. We're going to visit a country without a navy and without a Marine Corps. What?" That's what it was like.

TS: Was that frustrating?

KG: It was *very* frustrating. And the really frustrating part was that the senior civilian advisor to Mabus—his name was Mr. [Thomas] Oppel—He was the most temperamental screamer. He was a screamer, and he drank a lot on the plane. They would always have wine. And we used to land at countries at 2:00 in the morning, and he'd get off the plane and he'd be hungover.

The first time I travelled with them overseas, we were supposed to be flying to Hawaii, from Hawaii to Guam, from Guam to Africa, all over Africa, and it ended up happening that a helicopter crashed with Navy SEALs aboard, so we ended up having to backtrack all the way back to the U.S. to go to the Dover [Air Force Base] ceremony where they get the remains.

[The United States Navy's "Sea, Air, and Land" Teams, commonly abbreviated as the Navy SEALs, are the U.S. Navy's primary special operations force and a component of the Naval Special Warfare Command.]

This is going to sound really stupid, but I get really airsick, and so I had one of those patches behind my ear, and I woke up the first day we were there in—we were in Singapore when we had turned around—and I couldn't see. And I think I'm dying. I literally couldn't see unless I had something in front of my face like this, and I'm dying, but I have to plan this retrograde back to CONUS, all of these different stops, because the aircraft was so small it had to refuel. It was really complex. I couldn't see.

TS: What kind of plane were you flying in?

KG: It was a UC-35. It's one of those executive jet type planes. And Mr. Oppel is screaming at me because the pilot said we would need X amount of time to be able to take off. I'm thinking to myself, "I think I'm going blind. I literally cannot see, and you're screaming at me because it's not happening the way you want it to happen." And I'm literally reading stuff like this. It didn't even register. I finally found out through the embassy physician that it's the patch; that if you rub the patch and then rub your eyes, it causes your eyes to dilate like this.

TS: Oh, I see.

KG: That was my first experience with Mr. Oppel, in Singapore, getting screamed at. And then that was pretty much the full year. That's how he was. He was just a jerk.

TS: So the corruption that you talk about in going wherever you want to fit your particular interests—

KG: Yes, which he enabled. It's just like, "Ugh." I ended up talking to the commandant of the Marine Corps about it.

TS: Did you?

KG: And also, Colonel [Patrick] Work, who I loved, who was the head of naval operations, I think—I can't remember—but I told them; I was wrestling with my conscience everyday going in and I couldn't do it anymore. When I went in—and I'll never forget—the lieutenant colonel, he was the commandant's aide—I'll never forget him looking at me and saying, "Well, this is what gray area's about and you're going to have to learn to operate in the gray."

And I'm just thinking to myself, "Are you serious? We would never let a lance corporal operate in the gray, right? So why would it be okay for the Secretary of the Navy?"

TS: How did that go with the commandant?

KG: They basically said I needed to learn to adapt to be able to operate in the gray, and that was it. And it was a year and then I went to MCICOM [Marine Corps Installations Command].

TS: Okay. This was your real first experience where you're—

KG: Yes. It was my first experience as a lieutenant colonel working with senior officers, and it was also my first experience in realizing—Really, when I became a major, I really started to realize I don't fit in. I really—I've gone all this time thinking I fit in, and that what I've been doing is enough to fit in, and I really don't fit in.

When I was on recruiting duty, when we started doing really, really well, when I was a major, we would have these conferences every month where all of the eight recruiting station commanders from the 12th District would have to come in, and we would have to brief each other on our stats [statistics]. And it was the first time that I recognized my peers didn't appreciate me doing well, and for a long time—

TS: Now you're in competition, big time.

KG: Terrible, right?

TS: Yes.

KG: And so, it was kind of a wake-up call. Then I got to the Pentagon and I started working with generals and admirals who—literally, a guy could say something in a meeting and he would be, "Oh, yes. That's a great idea." But if I said something, it was kind of like—

TS: Saying the same thing.

KG: Yeah. I mean, it was really the first time I experienced that, so that was kind of—that was—

TS: Eye opening?

KG: Yeah. It was sort of beginning of changing the lens.

TS: Can we take a little break?

KG: Yeah, absolutely.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Okay, we're back. Thank you for the break.

KG: Sure.

TS: One thing I wanted to ask you about before we got into your next assignment at the MCICOM, is that when you signed up for the Marine Corps, did you have some expectation of how many years you were going to stay in, what you were going to do, or anything like that?

KG: I really didn't, and I didn't because I didn't want to follow in the footsteps of my dad. [chuckles]

TS: You didn't necessarily make [unclear].

KG: Right. And I also found early on that people, like my peers, who would say, "Well, I want to stay in until they kick me out in thirty years." I just found that to be disingenuous. It was almost like, if you're in it to stay in it from day one, then you're not really focused on the needs of the institution as much as you're focused on your needs.

TS: Isn't that what most people do though?

KG: Well, I didn't find that out until I went to the Pentagon. Honest to God, my time as a lieutenant colonel was truly transformational.

TS: Yeah. At what point, though, did you decide to stay?

KG: The Marine Corps gets this hook in you. What ends up happening is, you get these amazing job opportunities, and then you become a major, and then you do the financials, and you're like, "Holy crap, I have eight years before I could retire, and I'd be throwing away a million dollars in retirement." At that point, you're still having fun, you're still getting really choice jobs, and it's like, "Oh, this is so cool." Then you become a staff officer permanently, and then that's it. I got command a second time but you can see how that turned out.

TS: Right, right.

KG: Yeah. Your primo jobs—

TS: We'll talk about that though, right?

KG: Yeah. But your primo job opportunities decrease almost proportionally to the number of years that you have in.

TS: You wouldn't think, necessarily, that's what would happen.

KG: You wouldn't, until you learn the innerworkings of the Marine Corps and you realize just how many support requirements there are. So when you become a lieutenant colonel, for example, and you get to the Pentagon, the chances that you're going to be doing

programming for money, five to ten years out—they call it the palm[?] cycle—they're pretty good, and so you don't consider that—you don't even know about it when you're a captain or a major, and then you got to the Pentagon and you're like, "Shit. I am stuck in this building for five years, because now I'm in this job, and then I go to do the money part."

TS: Yeah.

KG: I said the bad word again. [chuckles]

TS: I think you're doing fine on the words. That's okay. The support side of the military, which doesn't get a lot of attention—

KG: No.

TS: I mean, of course, we've been in wars for a long time, so the focus is not on that—

KG: So the real bad part, for me, was that I was on the facilities side; I was on the base side. MCICOM is in charge of all of the installations throughout the world, and it is not a glamorous or sexy job. It is—You're, literally, tracking maintenance projects and problems. I was in charge of the civilian workforce for the entire Marine Corps, and it's the largest civilian workforce—Of the entire Marine Corps, we have the largest slice. I shouldn't say I was in charge of the entire thing, but we had the largest slice—

TS: For the installations?

KG: Yeah. For the entire Marine Corps. So imagine I get to MCICOM, and all of the sudden I'm in charge of civilian employees for the first time ever, and in the federal system there are all kinds of—"You can't to do, you can do this," so I'm learning all that. And then on top of it, sequestration hits and I'm in charge of the furlough for the largest workforce in the Marine Corps, so that was not a fun experience.

[The budget sequestration in 2013 were automatic spending cuts to United States federal government spending as an austerity fiscal policy as a result of Budget Control Act of 2011]

TS: No, I'm sure it wasn't.

KG: Yeah.

TS: So you're at the Pentagon, and had you been there before?

KG: No, I got—after I graduated from Command and Staff I went there, and then I didn't leave till 2014.

TS: What was it like to walk in the Pentagon?

KG: Initially—I was going—my first time in the Pentagon—Joe had worked there for the year before, so my first experience going to the Pentagon was for my interview for the SECNAV [Secretary of the Navy] job. It was like, "Oh, this is so cool." You walk in and it's all wood paneling, and these portraits of all of these previous Secretaries of the Navy, and you're like, "Wow, this is such a cool place." And then you realize that you don't have any windows, it's extremely restrictive on where you can and can't go. You have to have a badge on you, and if you forget—You have to walk a mile to get to the gym. The people—like the civilians who work in the building—don't even make eye contact.

TS: No?

KG: No. Don't even make eye contact. I get there and I'm all chipper, "Hey, good morning. How are you?" Nothing. No response.

TS: What was that? A ball of sunshine?

KG: Yeah, little ball of sunshine, right? It was bizarre. It's almost like—my husband— Luckily, we were able to commute because we worked their together. It was like, "Time to make the donuts." Remember that commercial? "Time to make the donuts." You'd see all these guys trudging into the Pentagon, trudging around like it's the worst thing on the planet, and it saps the motivation out of you.

["Time to make the donuts," was the catchphrase of Fred the Baker, a popular advertising character for Dunkin Donuts.]

TS: Yeah?

KG: Yeah. And then I moved from the Secretary's office, which was beautiful, down to MCICOM, which was literally in the basement. No windows. No sunlight. And, I mean, it's just like, after a while you just feel like you're losing your mind.

TS: You need to go outside and get some fresh air.

KG: Yes! But to get outside—

TS: You've got to go up and over and around—

KG: Right, right. Yeah.

TS: So you're in the building that was attacked, too, on 9/11.

KG: It was. The part of the building where Joe worked, the e-ring, I worked on the far end of the e-ring.

TS: Like, on the opposite side?

KG: Yeah, like where the commandant's office was. But where Joe's office was, the senior civilian litigator—lawyer for the Marine Corps, his office was the one that was hit by the plane. Not *his* office but—

TS: They were renovating then, right?

KG: I'm not sure.

TS: I thought that's what I had—

KG: I'm not sure. I mean, it's scary because that kind of puts it into perspective.

TS: Yeah, that you're right there. So it wasn't all glamor? [both chuckle] Oh, I need a video camera for that. We're not catching the—

KG: That was the eye roll. I just rolled my eyes. No, it wasn't glamorous at all. It was a lot of hard work and a lot of non-recognition.

TS: It's like sales, right? The next day is different. It doesn't matter what you did yesterday.

KG: Yeah, it's just skull drudgery. It was just nonstop skull drudgery. Ugh. I was really, really happy to leave there for sure.

TS: You and your husband both have careers.

KG: Yes.

TS: Did he outrank you?

KG: Nope. He was a year senior to me but we were the same rank.

TS: Same rank, okay.

KG: Yeah. He tried to pull that stuff once in a while. Joe—

TS: Technically, he outranked you, then.

KG: Yeah, he did, time and grade. But he's always been a super progressive person. He was a punk rocker in college, and he was a rock climber in college, and a lot of the rock climber leaders were women, and so they would have to carry all their own gear, all their own rope, navigate. He had a really solid appreciation for women with strength, and so he just

never fell into the trap that women can't do things. He's always been my most staunch supporter.

TS: Is he still in?

KG: No, no, no. He retired the year before I retired.

TS: Okay.

KG: Yeah. We said we would do twenty [years] and that's it.

TS: How did the Marine Corps treat you as a couple for assignments and things like that?

KG: They tried to keep us together, and what they try to do is they say, "Okay, well, within a fifty-mile radius, where can each of you be assigned so that you live together?" And we just had a lot of deployments, and so we might have lived in the same house but he was gone or I was gone. And then he went to Iraq. Then I went to Iraq. I was on ship for, literally, a year and eight months, almost constantly.

TS: That was when you were in Okinawa?

KG: Yes. Yeah, it was just—they try to do their best to keep you together, but it's hard; it's a tough life. That's why we don't have kids. I cannot imagine juggling all that with being a parent.

TS: Yeah, very tough. We didn't— actually when you were in Okinawa—talk about the ship. A lot of the discussion about women in the military—especially, they wouldn't allow women on ships in the navy—

KG: Right. For a long time.

TS: Yeah. What was it like?

KG: By the time I got there, it was fine. Women still had their own berthing [a shelf-like sleeping space] areas. We had our own bathroom. But I never had—I never met with any resistance on the ship. People—

TS: No? Well, you, of course, are an officer.

KG: Yeah, but I was also the executive officer of troops, which meant I was the senior representative for Colonel Miller, other than Lieutenant Colonel DeLuna, and I never met with any resistance from the executive officer on the ship or anything like that.

TS: Okay. How did you hear about things, though, that were happening with the enlisted? How did that filter up?

KG: I had to do inspections, and so I—First of all, I was responsible for NJP, so whenever—

TS: What's that?

KG: Non-judicial punishment.

TS: Oh, yeah.

KG: It's like administrative punishment. Whenever somebody got into trouble in the MEU headquarters element, that section had to come to me so that we could talk about what needed to happen with that individual. That was one way. And then the other thing is just by walking around and asking open-ended questions, and seeing really what's going on. And then there was the one time I walked into my office on the ship, the S-1, and found one of my marines and her husband sleeping with each other underneath the desk where we sorted mail, so that was a great experience. Yeah, just some of it's being in the right time—or the wrong place at the right time, and then some of it's just talking and probing and inspections.

TS: When you say ask open-ended questions, what kind of questions would be appropriate?

KG: Well, so instead of saying, "Hey, are you having a good day?" Yes or no. You would say, "Hey, so tell me about when the last time you talked to your mom and dad was," or something like that. And I got it from recruiting. So yeah, you just learn more about what's really happening, particularly because our optempo [a measure of the pace of an operation; increases with the intensity of and number of operations] was so high, so there was always somebody who was struggling with something. And if you didn't ask the right questions, they were only going to give you the information that they thought you wanted to know.

TS: Right, right. Okay. Well, at the Pentagon, were you eager to get out of there?

KG: I was very eager. But I was selected for command the second time there, and [Marine Corps Recruit Depot] Parris Island [South Carolina] is a big deal to get selected for because it's the only place where female marines are made, so you're competing with every single other female lieutenant colonel for that command spot. But it meant that I was going to have to leave Joe.

TS: Okay. He's still at the Pentagon?

KG: He was at the Pentagon at the time, and we owned our house in [Washington] D.C. and we knew that's where we wanted to retire, so when I got the results of the board, I was really happy because it was something that I really felt like I wanted to do, but at the same time, I was really sad about going home and telling him. And Joe, being the guy he is, called me and told me, "Congratulations." That's just the way he is. I'm sure it hurt, I'm sure it sucked, but that's what he did.

TS: Tell me about when you got to Parris Island. Did you have any idea of what to expect?

KG: A little bit. I knew what I knew from recruiting duty, and then my predecessor and I had been doing turnover from February to April, and I actually went there to visit in April. So I—That was when I really saw what the segregated training was like, and talking to her, I knew the problems that existed.

For example, we had two drill instructors who were getting ready to go to court-martial for abusing recruits and drill instructors, and so that was happening right as I was getting there. I was aware that there were all kinds of issues with recruits being abused. There were problems with the drill instructors sleeping with each other, or sleeping with their spouses. Similar like recruiting, but the difference with the drill instructors was they were all females, and so I had a large number of homosexual drill instructors who were engaged in relationships that weren't appropriate from a command perspective. And so, it was disrupting good order and discipline.

TS: The lesbians were sleeping with each other?

KG: Yes.

TS: Or the other people's partners?

KG: Both. And also, some of the female recruits, and so it just becomes this sort of this Peyton Place [a phrase, based on the novel, movie and TV show of the same name, which means a place or group that outwardly appears respectable but upon closer examination is found to be secretive or sordid]. I knew I had to get those things back in the box. The thing I didn't know was how poorly the females were doing in terms of their performance. I had no idea until I got there.

When I got there, I knew that the first thing I wanted to do was tell the marines what my command philosophy was. I had three tenets; it was confidence, accountability and pride. And then after I told them what that was and defined it and gave them my expectations, I wanted to do a training evaluation on the similarities of 4th Battalion and [unclear], because the same types of abuses were happening in both places. And so, we did that, and I tried—

TS: Can you explain that a little bit more?

KG: Yeah. So what was happening—and I knew this because of the court-martials that were going on—recruits were being abused by drill instructors. The recruit training order is very specific on the types of interaction you can have with a recruit. You're supposed to keep one arm's distance, you're not supposed to use foul language, you're not supposed to refer to them as objects. It's to try to maintain some degree of humanity, while also creating—instilling in them core values. All kinds of bad stuff was going on when I took over.

TS: Is it all women run?

KG: Yes.

TS: I mean, are all the—

KG: Except for one staff officer, it was all women. I think anything extreme is bad, right?

TS: Right.

KG: Anything extreme is bad. Segregation creates this hyper-masculine culture on the other side of the base, which is all bad. But then on my side of the base, we were separated by time, distance, everything. We were on the side of the base that was near family housing, and the male battalions were all located on the same side of the base, like, a mile down the road. When you think about that, that's kind of weird in and of itself. And then you think there's so many oddities about why we're out here on our own that it's like—

TS: Because you've got to work together when you're out.

KG: Right. And it just becomes this really weird—Even the architecture of 4th Battalion was weird. The passageways to get to the classrooms—because we didn't go the same classroom facility that the men used, generally, for like, 99% of the classes. But even the catwalks going from the squad bays to the classrooms, were too narrow for the women to carry their weapons, and so they weren't drilling on the move, and they weren't learning how to be comfortable with their weapons, and doing the safety rules on the move, and manual of arms. It just all started to come together that we were different, and not in a way that was of a benefit to the Marine Corps, because if a third of your class every class goes UNQ on the range clearly there's—

TS: UNQ?

KG: —Right. yeah, unqualified—clearly there's a problem, right? Because if your recruits who become marines aren't comfortable handling their weapons, and just barely qualify with their weapons, they're going to combat. Some of these women were going to combat within six and eight months of finishing their MOS schools. We're putting them in harm's way because we don't expect for them to perform well on the rifle range. It was like it just all—I started looking at all of our stats, and asking a lot of questions that made a lot of people uncomfortable.

TS: What kind of questions would you ask?

KG: I would ask my boss, who was a male colonel in charge of the regiment, I would say, "Hey, why don't we hike with the men? We're doing the same distance. Why are we hiking separately?" Right before the Eagle, Globe and Anchor ceremony, which is the culminating event for a recruit after the Crucible, we would end up on the parade deck so that the recruits could stand in formation and get their Eagle, Globe and Anchor emblems, and we weren't allowed to hike together to that same location. I would get to the formation and they would have rows of chairs set up behind the female platoon just in

case they got tired and needed to sit. And it was like—So I would ask my boss. I would say, "Hey, I want to hike with the men. I want to take away the chairs." And I did. "I want to start tracking out stats and make sure that we're competitive with our male counterparts here. I want to make sure we're improving our physical performance and lowering lower extremity injury rates. I want to make—" And he—I would always say, "But I need help. I need this. I need more people. I need—" and he wouldn't help. He *refused* to help; refused to engage. So we had a very difficult relationship right off the bat.

[The Crucible is the final test in Marine Corps recruit training. It is a fifty-four hour field training exercise demanding the application of everything a recruit has learned until that point in recruit training, and includes a total of forty-eight miles of marching. It simulates typical combat situations with strenuous testing, hardships, and the deprivation of food and sleep.]

TS: You're trying to make these changes—

KG: For the institution!

TS: Right, I understand. And so, when you go and you talk to him, and you say you want to make them and he's not giving you the support—But what does he say about what you're trying to do?

KG: Not a word. Never supported it, never—He was a passive aggressive person, and so he wouldn't say anything. He just wouldn't support. It would be like sending emails into the ethernet net, or requesting appointments with him, to come in and sit with him, and having no appointment made.

TS: It was like crickets [slang term for silence].

KG: Yes! That's exactly what it was like.

TS: You're going about doing what you think is best with really no feedback, negative or positive.

KG: Right. Right. The irony is, we were making such significant progress in improving the performance of the recruits and the drill instructors, and we were tracking it on a monthly basis. I did a class with all the drill instructors and I was like, "Look." I showed them ten years of data with charts and arrows.

TS: Up and down, just depending on who's in charge?

KG: Yeah. And I said, "Hey, why is it that women aren't shooting as well as men?"

TS: Because *your* women are a crack shot.

KG: Right. There's no physiological reason. The Marine Corps relies on physiology to explain everything about women, but the reality is that there's no excuse. There's no excuse for them not being able to run faster, there's—And so, I got buy-in from my drill instructors—90% of them—and the 10% that I didn't, made my life so difficult. But the 90% were the reason that we started shooting in the 90% range.

TS: How long did that take?

KG: It only took three months!

TS: Really? And it was at like 73% before?

KG: Yeah. It was between sixty-nine and 71%, I think, was the average.

TS: Okay. That's where you had 30% that weren't qualifying.

KG: Yeah. It was insane how quickly we were able to change it.

TS: That's how many cycles in three months?

KG: It was like, three! It was literally three classes. Within three classes we were already shooting 90%, 91%.

TS: What did the drill instructors do differently for the training for that?

KG: What they did was I forbade them to be—we call it "slinging stress." When they go to the rifle range, the recruit training order says they're not allowed to cause stress. They're there to be instructors and coaches. And so, the three phases of recruit training are designed so that the drill instructors shift from the disciplinarian during the first phase—You go the rifle range at the beginning of second phase, they become more of a coach and mentor, and then by the third phase, they're more of a real marine to marine, subordinate to senior relationship, kind of thing.

When I got there, there was no division between the phases. The drill instructors were screaming at kids. They were causing the young women to pee their pants because they wouldn't let them go use the restroom. It was terrible. It was humiliating, horrible, unproductive, nothing-to-show-for-it kind of behavior. And so, I eliminated that. And then we focused on having the drill instructors be the subject matter experts in the squad bay so that in the evenings for free time, they can instruct the recruits, get them into the shooting positions. We hung up targets in the squad bays from day one of training so that they understood, "This is what you're going to see." We had the male coaches come in and provide instruction in the squad bays, and after a while they started doing it on their own time because they started to see that women really could shoot, and we changed the perception. But I never got any buy-in from my boss, ever. Not once. It was terrible. It was like there's cognitive dissonance happening. We're trying to do all these things and

you're ignoring it, and you're making me look like I'm a jerk, and I'm mean. So it was hard.

TS: Yeah. You're working on the firing range. You're working on the lower body extremity injuries. What kind of things would you do for that?

KG: We have a physical trainer. Each of the battalions has a physical trainer, and there are very specific rules that you're supposed to follow in how you observe and identify and report injuries. What we were essentially doing, is we were torturing recruits who were hurt—You could see that they were hurt but the drill instructors were saying things to them like, "If you go to medical, you're going to get dropped, and if you get dropped, you're not going to graduate." So we were keeping recruits long past their injury—

TS: Right. And so, that's only exacerbating their problem.

KG: Catastrophic. Hip fractures. When I got there—The week before I got there, there was a recruit who was running the motivational run, which is the day before graduation when all the family members come. So on a simple three-mile formation run, her hip fractures; like, literally, cracks off—the stem of where the ball is, literally cracks in half, and that's the kind of pain and injury that we were causing recruits because we weren't following the right procedures. So we started getting our physical trainer to go into the squad bays to observe, to ask questions. I really started driving my officers in the companies to do regular interviews, asking open, probed questions with the recruits so that the recruits couldn't be asked questions like, "Have you been injured in training?" And they would say, "No" because they wanted to graduate. They would be asked stuff like, "Hey, when's the last time your knee bothered you?" And then all of the sudden, recruits are just diarrhea at the mouth, and you start to identify where problems are. That's how we did it.

TS: Okay.

KG: And we started using stretching kits and the foam rollers.

TS: Yeah, that seems to really do a lot; I've learned personally.

KG: Yeah. Absolutely. The bands. Absolutely. We had them, we just weren't using them. Crazy.

TS: At what point did you then start facing resistance?

KG: Well, I always faced resistance from my XO, who was—Her thing was she wanted to be the buddy. As the XO, you're supposed to be the next in command, which means, essentially—the thought is that you and the CO are supposed to be speaking the same language and doing the same things to enforce the same policies. She would do things like go behind my back to talk to the company commander I had just counseled for not doing something, and she would say, "Wow, I'm really sorry the CO talked to you."

TS: Undermining you.

KG: Yeah. "I don't know what you think but I thought it was wrong that she talked to you that way." And so, she started taking notes. And she knew that Colonel Haas [the regimental commander] and I had friction, and so at every opportunity when she would go to the regimental headquarters, she would make a point of telling him, "Well, the marines are really unhappy." Meanwhile, we're changing history in reversing the trends for these stats, which should tell you right off the bat, the marines aren't going to do it unless they believe in what we're doing. But it ended up turning into this saga where the 10% who didn't want me to be involved, thought I was infringing on their territory, thought I was too hard on them for making them do leadership stuff that would be expected anywhere else in the Marine Corps—that 10% ended up being my demise. Absolutely. Absolutely.

TS: The minority seems to do that.

KG: Yeah, scary.

TS: Yeah, scary things can happen. This is a really traumatic experience for you.

KG: Yeah.

TS: Did you feel betrayed?

KG: I felt like—I've used the term cognitive dissonance. I couldn't understand—I spent 75% of my day working really long hours out with the marines, at their training events, observing them giving instruction, watching them at drill, talking to them, engaging with them. I knew I had bad apples. I literally had counseling entries for the bad apples because I was documenting performance issues, like any leader should, to, one, try to improve their performance, but, two, because that's what leaders are expected to do. So I knew I had the bad apples, but I also knew I had my finger on the pulse of the battalion. And marines, when they would check out, I would sit them down and say, "Hey, what could we do better? What can we do differently? How are things better or worse from the time that you got here?"

And they were saying things like, "Things are so much better. We have so much more time. We're not so stressed out. We're not being hazed." I'm hearing this stuff on the one hand.

And then on the other hand, I have my boss calling me into his office and saying, "Hey, I just want to let you know your marines are telling me that they're unhappy with you, that they think you're mean and abusive."

And so, I literally felt like I was losing my mind; literally. There was about a four-month period where this whole investigation, command climate survey, was playing out, and throughout that four-month period, I literally wanted to kill myself. I literally wanted to just end it because I couldn't understand why I was being called a bad leader, and so that never really got resolved. I mean, it was really hard knowing all that stuff was going on, and still having to act normal at work. It was really hard.

TS: The resistance to change—just change in a neutral sense, no matter what it is—

KG: Is hard, yes.

TS: —is hard, but when you get results from that change and then there's a backlash—the way that you talk about the 10%, when you're looking at the drill instructors and things like that—How long are they there?

KG: They're there for three years.

TS: Three years? Okay.

KG: Here's the thing. I alluded to this earlier, about the extremes being bad; both all male, all female.

TS: Yes.

KG: When I did turnover with my predecessor, she said, "Look, it's tears or cupcakes. They're either baking you cupcakes or they're sitting on your couch crying."

And I'm thinking to myself, "That is total BS [bullshit] because where else in the Marine Corps would that be okay?" And what I found was that because we were segregated, and it was all women all of the time, it was just as bad as the other extreme because there was a heightened sense of feeling that you had to overcompensate because your male counterparts didn't respect you, and so you had to be meaner and tougher, and it was just incredibly stressful for the drill instructors to keep up that pace and that type of persona. And so, in trying to remedy the tears and cupcakes thing, I became my own cause of my demise, because in saying, "Look, the way you're acting would never be okay anywhere else in the Marine Corps," that became me being mean because I—
[chuckles]

TS: Because your expectations were higher for what was going on.

KG: Right! And so, when I talk about the extremes, that's exactly what I mean. That's why segregation of recruit training is not a good concept, because you can't have the extremes and inequality at the same time. It just doesn't—It's not productive. Yeah, the cognitive dissonance of that whole experience was mind-blowing.

TS: You lost your command, right?

KG: I did. I got called in after this investigation—By the way, the general did an investigation because he was told to. So as the command climate survey comes out and the results are dismal, everybody had the same password to fill that thing out. I had marines from other units filling out my command climate survey, and we knew that because it was documented. I had marines who had left the battalion who were filling it out.

TS: It was an online survey?

KG: Yeah, and everybody had—What do you want to know the XO did? She sent it out to everybody she knew who would write up a bad thing. And so, the command climate survey is out there and it's—

TS: Is it something that's done regularly or—

KG: It's supposed to be done once a year, but the colonel only did it because he was getting complaints and he wanted—he was trying to fire me. This is happening at the same time at headquarters Marine Corps at the Pentagon the women in ground combat roles was going on, right?

TS: Right.

KG: The commandant is having staff meetings—and Joe knows this because he's still at the Pentagon—The commandant is having staff meetings where my name is being brought up as someone who potentially needed to be relieved, before any investigation was done. They were getting all of the data, all the changes to the shooting scores, and it was freaking people out because the commandant was the only one who asked for an exception for women in the infantry, of all the services. What we were doing conflicted directly with the results that they wanted to show for the integrated task force test. As I'm dealing with this on the Depot, the commandant and the staff at the Pentagon direct General Williams to do an investigation about my leadership. I was never interviewed.

TS: You weren't?

KG: How do you do an investigation that is potentially to relieve someone and not interview that person?

TS: You were never interviewed?

KG: I was never interviewed. I was told—When I walked in with all of the documentation about the marines who were struggling, I was told, "That stuff isn't relevant. I'm not here to investigate them. I'm here to investigate you. And oh, by the way, you can give me a statement on how you perceive your command climate to be." So I give a nine-page statement on what I perceived to be the command climate. Never called in for an interview. How is that possible?

TS: Well, that's what you call a kangaroo court [a court where the outcome is pre-determined by the reputation of the defendant, and the principles of law and justice are disregarded], I think.

KG: So that's what happened. I got called up to the general's building and I was relieved. And, out of all the commanders that have been relieved in the Marine Corps, for whatever reason—misconduct, abuse of authority, whatever—the Marine Corps took the unprecedented step of putting out a—Usually, what they do is they send the press a

statement that says, "So-and-so was relieved due to loss of good trust and confidence in their ability to lead." They issued a scathing statement about me to the press within, like, forty-eight hours.

TS: Not just saying that your—

KG: No! It basically said, "She was abusive. She was mean. She was tyrannical."

TS: Wasn't there a similar situation at the army's recruiting?

KG: Oh, I don't know.

TS: It seems like—

KG: Maybe.

TS: I should have checked this out, but it was—

KG: There was a sergeant major—female sergeant major, I think—who was in a similar boat. In fact, she got reinstated, but I—so I get fired?

[In 2009 Command Sergeant Major Teresa King was appointed as the first female Commandant of the United States Army's Drill Sergeant School. In early 2012 King was placed on suspension from her duties for six months and investigated for undisclosed reasons. King retired from the army in 2013.]

TS: But she had to go through a—

KG: Yes. My IG [Inspector General] thing is still ongoing.

TS: Oh, is it? Okay.

KG: Yeah, and they take, on average, four hundred and sixty days to resolve. How horrible is that? And only 11% of reprisal cases are founded, so I'm batting zero.

TS: Okay, so you retired. What would be the end result of this? Clearing your name, one, but—

KG: There wouldn't be any remedy other than me being able to have the negative paperwork in my record pulled, and, basically, just being able to say to people, "Look, I was right. This was completely wrong."

TS: Right.

KG: Yeah. So I come home, and within forty-eight hours, not only has the Marine Corps released this incredibly insensitive and damaging statement about me to the press, they've released the investigation to *The New York Times* [newspaper]. *The New York Times* has the investigation posted on their—unheard of. Unheard of. Tell me what's wrong with that picture. How do you explain that?

TS: Yeah, interesting. But you still have to serve out some time?

KG: Yeah. I ended up going to the Navy Yard. Luckily, I was back home with Joe. But I went to the Navy Yard, and I had been assigned—as a collateral duty, I had been assigned to the Navy Parole Board—the [Naval] Clemency and Parole Board—when I was MCICOM, and I really enjoyed it. The monitor was a really kind soul, and he asked me where I wanted to go. He gave me the listing, and that was one of the job openings. So I got to be the presiding officer for the Clemency and Parole Board for my last eight months.

TS: Yeah. You knew then you were going to have to retire?

KG: Yeah, but I always knew I was going to retire. I put in for my retirement when I was at Parris Island. Joe and I always knew we were going to get out and retire.

TS: It was like the timing was just a circumstance happened.

KG: Yeah.

TS: So you retired.

KG: I retired. And that's it. And that IG investigation's still going on; chugging along. But now, I tell you, with the administration change, I don't have any hope. It was different before when—with [Barrack Hussein] Obama [44th President of the United States and 1st African American President] in office and the current administration in SECDEF [Secretary of Defense]. I had a much more realistic view that they were going to find reprisal, and they were going to find that the Marine Corps had acted inappropriately. But now, with [Donald John] Trump [45th President of the United States] coming into office, all that's going to change. There's no way—Unless it's done before January, there's no way that—

TS: Well, with you gone, though—

KG: No.

TS: You don't think that there's—

KG: No.

TS: No?

KG: Because the Marine Corps doesn't want to look bad. They'll never acknowledge fault. The closest I got to an acknowledgment of fault was—Because I've written so many articles, and every time I write them the Marine Corps gets so mad. But the closest thing I got to any acknowledgement that what happened was wrong, was I ended up going to a Sunset Parade at the Iwo Jima statue for the Marine Corps on behalf of SWAN [Service Women's Action Network]; I was representing SWAN. It was actually a Secretary of the Navy event. And the commandant actually went out of his way to come up to me at that event and talk to me about what was happening in boot camp. I know they know, but they're never going to have to publicly acknowledge it, because you're getting a president that thinks gender bias is a joke.

TS: It's going to be interesting.

KG: And that's the end.

TS: It's not the end yet. That's the end of that. But I have a couple big questions, which you've actually answered going along.

KG: Sure.

TS: Let's see. There's this one question here: How were you treated when you left the service?

KG: [laughs] I walked into my office at the Clemency and Parole Board one day and I found two folders waiting on my desk—two big, red folders—and they were my retirement certificates and my certificate that comes with the flag, and there was a handwritten post-it note from the gunny in the admin section who said, "Ma'am, I was hoping you'd be here when I dropped this off, but you weren't, and so here you go." And that was it. That's how I was treated.

TS: Yeah. How did your husband feel?

KG: Oh, man. Joe's been devastated about this whole thing. He's been—He's crushed. Crushed. But we've been very vocal. We've pushed back, and I feel like if I were truly evil, and I was truly a bad leader, and I was abusive, then why would I constantly push back? Why would I constantly write? Why would I subject myself to the horrible comments that I get to the articles that I write? I'm not saying I'm perfect. I've screwed up a lot of things in my lifetime, but those aren't them.

TS: Right.

KG: Joe is a trooper.

TS: Well, good for him. Well, I think that—What about the question of, would you recommend the service to young women today?

KG: I would recommend service, but I'd be hard pressed to recommend the Marine Corps, and that breaks my heart, because I know that I got a lot out of serving in the marines.

TS: What'd you get out of it?

KG: Independence, self-reliance, discipline. I was able to operate with confidence in any environment. I learned how to navigate in a minority population. I learned how to be successful until the end, just by being competent at my job, and trying to be the best at what I could be.

TS: How do you think your life is different because you joined the Marine Corps than it would have been otherwise?

KG: I think about this every day. I mean, I certainly would not have a role in fighting for gender equality, that's for sure. And I don't think that's a negative. Would I have been, personally, happier not dealing with the trauma of the last year? Probably. But I get a lot of satisfaction over knowing that I'm doing something that's moving the needle for women in the military, and so that's—I think that's probably the best positive.

TS: When you think about other things beside this traumatic event that really shaped your service, how, in other ways, did being in the Marine Corps, or the military, shape the person that you are today? You've talked about a lot, but I'm just asking you directly.

KG: I think one of the biggest things is that it really taught me a lot about humanity. What I found was that during times of crisis, good people do good things. One of my favorite things in my experiences in the marines was doing humanitarian missions. It's like all of the squabbles, all of the religious bias, all of the issues with being in an unfriendly, historically unreceptive country, all of that goes by the wayside when there's a crisis. And when you see people doing things for the humanity of it, I think that's a lasting impact on me.

TS: Were you involved in any of that?

KG: Yeah.

TS: What kind of things did you do?

KG: When we were on ship, we had a major mudslide in Leyte—which is, ironically, where [General Douglas] MacArthur came ashore in the Philippines—and it wiped out an entire village. And so, the MEU was responsible for providing not only medical support and CASEVAC [casualty evacuation] support, but we were responsible for actually going in and having marines clearing mud—feet of mud—over a school that we knew was full of kids. It was not successful. We were able to excavate the school but we didn't find any children who were still alive. But it's the humanity of it. It's like providing disaster relief after an earthquake; providing marines to go in and evacuate an embassy. All of those

things that you practice for, when you see them play out, that really—I think it's the lasting impact.

TS: Well, I don't think I have to ask you what your least memorable part of the Marine Corps was.

KG: [chuckles]

TS: But can you tell me what the best was for you, personally?

KG: I'm still living the best. On Saturday of last week, I flew down to Spartanburg, South Carolina, and I promoted one of my old drill instructors. I had a marine sergeant on the Navy Yard send me an email out of the blue one morning, saying, "Hey, I read your article on 'When Did It Become an Insult to Train like a Girl?' and I have to tell you, I was not a great marine, and I didn't push myself hard, but I'm up to doing eight pull-ups." And then I got to reenlist her at the Navy Yard two months ago. I had one of my favorite staff sergeants from MCICOM—I promoted him last month, so I don't think those days are behind me. I think they're still coming.

TS: That's a great answer. I really like that.

KG: It's amazing. It's a great time to be alive.

TS: That's pretty good. I don't have to ask a lot of these questions because you answered them, but there's a couple of cultural issues I wanted to ask you about.

KG: Sure.

TS: You were in in '96, so you became commissioned after the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy was implemented.

["Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was 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 person from military service. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was repealed 20 September 2011.]

KG: Yes.

TS: And you were in when it was repealed.

KG: And I was the legal officer who had to admin SEP [administrative separation] a lot of those marines.

TS: Yeah?

KG: Yeah.

TS: Why don't you tell me about your thoughts on the policy, and its repeal, and what happened in between?

KG: Sure. The policy was completely untenable. They put out the policy and then didn't come up with any questions or investigative process or anything. So it's like we get the policy, and I'm at a school with—I think we had six thousand students there.

TS: Now, are you talking about implementing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"?

KG: Yes. We implement the policy, and I'm at a school where we have all these kids coming out of boot camp and their first taste of Marine Corps is living in the barracks, and there's bad stuff going on in the barracks, but there are also kids that just don't want to be marines anymore. What happened was they found that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was a way to get out of the Marine Corps. So that was wrong, and I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't do anything about it. Because there were—After a period of, like, eight months, we got a list of very prescribed questions that we could ask, and you couldn't ask anything else. But if you asked a kid, "Are you engaged in a homosexual relationship?" and they said, "Yes," that was it. That's all you needed. And so, I didn't like the fact that I was kicking out kids just so they could get out of their obligation. So that was on.

But the second part was, when kids developed romantic relationships in the barracks with partners who they had affection for, and they got caught, it was automatic. And so, dealing with knowing that these are human beings—the Marine Corps just was not a—It's probably still not a good culture for gay people. It really isn't. Parris Island was the only place that I can remember where being gay was accepted and it was normal. I mean, there were so many drill instructors who were gay, it's normal. But knowing that I was part of kicking out kids who just want to get out of their obligation—

TS: Not necessarily because they were homosexual—

KG: Right.

TS: —because they just could say they were.

KG: Right. That was a problem for me.

TS: That's interesting.

KG: And the other one was when they were good kids who were getting kicked out because they're gay; because they have relationships that everybody else in the world has. It just so happens that they're having a relationship with someone of the same sex. It's like what would you do if Trump gave you an order that was ethically wrong? Well, you know what? I was responsible for that, so yeah.

TS: Yeah. Then this other issue that we've kind of touched on about—I used to ask this question—Is there anything that you think women shouldn't do in the military? Are there any roles that they can't play?

KG: I used to think that women shouldn't go into the infantry, and my perspective changed because of the marines that I served with and the competencies that I saw that they had. I don't think that there are jobs that shouldn't be done by women. I think there are ways that women should not *act* in the military that are problematic. And it's because they're not being held accountable for doing the right things. I think Parris Island is a great example of this: being passive aggressive, being overly emotional to appeal to someone who you know is sort of a benevolent sexist and will—that will appeal to them by pulling at their heartstrings. I think those things are wrong, but those things are really hard to articulate to the greater Marine Corps.

TS: [chuckles] Right. You have to use more than three words to—

KG: Yeah. And Parris Island is such a different place that if I—Women there act differently there because they're allowed to because it's segregated. It's the two extremes.

TS: Is there anything that you think can be done differently to change attitudes and behavior?

KG: The only thing that I think would fix it would be integration, because you would see the women who would rise above, set the tone, and set the bar for everyone else. And then the other women would have to trickle up or not make it. But unfortunately, until there is—until women are allowed the opportunity to compete with their male counterparts in an integrated environment, the great ones are never going to trickle up to the top so that the other ones follow their footsteps. It's always going to be a marginal—

TS: Right. Role models and things. Well, it's interesting, because I was looking at the percentages of women in the Marine Corps compared to the Air Force, and it's almost three times the percentage in the Air Force than it is in the Marine Corps. And I mean, you're such a small force already.

KG: Yeah. Do you know how they limit women? You hit it on the head. They limit the number of women in the marines because they say, "It's a throughput [the amount of material or items passing through a system or process] issue. Fourth Battalion can only accommodate thirty-two hundred graduates a year, so we're limited to women being 9% of the Marine Corps."

TS: You mean where they can be trained?

KG: Because of the squad bays, right? If 4th Battalion is segregated and the squad bays can only fit X number of women, we are limited to creating X number of marines per year because of all the limitations on rack spaces. The male squad bays are much bigger, and the male recruiting mission is much bigger, because we have artificially constrained how many women will come into the Marine Corps.

TS: So the actual infrastructure—

KG: Yeah. They've created something that won't allow growth, and they like it that way.

TS: That's a way to keep the numbers down.

KG: Yeah. As opposed to creating a female series within a male company in an integrated battalion where you could have more females in a bigger squad bay, but that's how the Marine Corps has justified it for years; "Oh, we have limited berthing spaces."

TS: What did you like best about being a marine?

KG: Man, that's such a hard question. I think I liked seeing marines succeed. I think the mission accomplishment aspect of it—whether it was on recruiting, whether it was on the MEU—I think seeing marines succeed, and seeing them exceed their preconceived expectations, is incredibly fulfilling. And I missed that most, getting out.

TS: Yeah. I want to get to the issue of sexual trauma, but I don't want end with it, so I'll ask it now, and if you want to talk about the connection to the work you're doing now.

KG: Sure.

TS: A lot of the articles that we see about women in the military, not just the Marine Corps, are this tension with combat, and this tension with sexual violence, and so is there a way for us to reconcile those issues?

KG: Yeah. They are connected. Clearly, without gender bias at the start of the continuum of harm, you wouldn't have sexual assault, because very few sexual assaults are the rapist behind the bush stalking people. Seventy-five percent of all of our sexual assaults in the Marine Corps involved copious binge drinking, they involve life in the barracks not being supervised properly. Ultimately, though, what it comes down to, is a lack of respect across the board. I think the two are intertwined. You can absolutely interrupt that cycle, but it involves—it would involve the hardest thing, and the hardest thing is getting the Marine Corps to acknowledge that the way it's been doing things, isn't necessarily the right way. When have you ever heard a marine say, "I made a mistake. This was a bad thing." Right? Because we have that institutionalized mindset that we never acknowledge mistakes, we're never going to change that, because it starts with integrating recruit training.

If 90% of the Marine Corps is enlisted, then 90% of the Marine Corps is coming through boot camp, so at the most foundational level of training, if you classify a slow male recruit as a "p" [pussy] word, and if you call male recruits who get emotional "girls," then there is automatically the connotation set that women are the other and that they're less than. It starts by fixing integrated training.

TS: At the very beginning.

KG: And then it also ends with accountability. Unless we hold people accountable at all echelons of the command, at all ranks, for doing the right things, saying the right things, treating people the right way, we're never going to fix it.

TS: You, having been a commander, and in command of different places, the one argument that's out there about fixing the problem is to take—

KG: Military justice system.

TS: Well, yeah, to take that responsibility out of the commander's hands and put it into a professional [civil] legal system, and there's a great resistance because of all the authority that commanders have in the military, throughout every field, in every branch, no matter what job you're in. Where do you fall on that? Or do you fall somewhere else?

KG: I wrestle with this because SWAN's perspective is that the military justice reform needs to happen. My perspective, having had command, is if you're doing things the right way as a commander, then your numbers should show you're doing things the right way, and it shouldn't be an issue. But because the numbers are not moving in the right direction, and more retaliation cases happen than not, and more women and men who make allegations of sexual assault are drummed out of the military with other than honorable discharges, because of those things, you know it's not being done the right way. So then what do you do? I think that if you look at how we are responsible for felony cases—There were certain things as a major and a lieutenant colonel that I couldn't send to court martial. I had to refer those to my boss. I think there's a similar sort of approach—

TS: [unclear] something between these two—

KG: Yeah, yeah. I'm not saying you need to necessarily have a civilian structure. That's been one of the topics of conversation. But I definitely think that, one, there has to be accountability at the command level, but, two, maybe those things don't belong in the hands of a lieutenant colonel, or maybe they don't belong in the hands of someone who doesn't have the legal experience that military staff judge advocates do. I don't know. But I can tell you, the way we're doing it is not—

TS: It's not working.

KG: No. If you look at the retaliation, the numbers for retaliation are staggering. The number of men and women who are told that they have psychological disorders and are drummed out of the military, it's astonishing.

TS: This is historical that no commander wants to see any bumps in his or her command, right?

KG: But they're going to happen. That's life.

TS: Sure. But if you have a person in leadership who won't acknowledge that these problems are happening, so they won't show up on your record—

KG: Bingo. That's right.

TS: I think someone told me once that when you're in command, something that can happen—

KG: A complete accident.

TS: Like Stark.

[The USS Stark was a navy frigate ship that was deployed to the Middle East Force in 1984 and 1987. The ship was struck on 17 May 1987 by two anti-ship missiles during the Iran–Iraq War fired from an Iraqi Dassault Mirage F1 aircraft. The Reagan administration however attributed the blame to Iran for its alleged belligerence in the underlying conflict.]

KG: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Things can happen and you just lose your command. You lost it for a similar thing.

KG: I have a friend who was the CO of the unit that went to do the gun shoot in the [Lake] Tahoe training area—Bridgeport, in California—and there was an accident and several marines died, and he was devastated. He was fired.

TS: Because when things go wrong—

KG: You're responsible for everything your unit does or doesn't do. That's the burden of command. But the burden of command shouldn't be that you place that burden on the shoulders of your subordinates to bear because you just don't want to deal with it. That's the travesty in the whole thing, in the way this situation is played out. One, there's been no accountability, either for the alleged perpetrators or for the commanders who brushed stuff under the rug. That boggles my mind. To me, accountability is everything. It's everything.

TS: Let's see, you started out in '96. Yeah, twenty years ago. You said it was August, I think, when you went in.

KG: I went in in June, actually—June 9th—and then I got commissioned in August.

TS: Okay. Do you want to talk about the work that you're doing with SWAN at all?

KG: Yeah. I'm now the Chief Operating Officer for the Service Women's Action Network, which is really the only organization in the United States—out of forty-thousand nonprofit veteran support organizations, it's the only one that advocates for and supports service women *and* women veterans. Really, my title—That's stupid because I'm really—I'm the admin clerk. I'm the "thank you letter" writer. I'm the email requests for assistance router.

TS: How do you think that you can affect change?

KG: One is by continuing to write. I've written a lot over the past year, on a variety of subjects, but all related to—mainly related to military women. And so, I think writing and having a national audience is important because you're shaping perception. And sometimes what the military does comes from what happens in society first, and sometimes it's the other way around, but unfortunately, I think the way we're moving in the military is going to require outside pushing in.

TS: External forces, not just internal.

KG: Yes. So I think writing is important, but I also think advocating for these women on the Hill [Capitol Hill], advocating for these women in the Pentagon, meeting with senior officials and telling them, "Hey, here's what service women are saying they need. And here's why it's important. And here's how it affects operational success." Changing the perception of what people think of when they think of veteran, because they're not thinking of us! Trying to change that public perception will improve the perception of those women; that they mattered and what they did counts.

SWAN's a really important organization, and with the political changes that are nigh upon us, it's going to be, really, a critical organization, because we don't want to see the roll back of all of the progress that we've made over the past year.

TS: Right. You talk about perception. What do you think is one of the biggest misperceptions that someone in the civilian may not know or understand about being a marine?

KG: Sure. I think, first and foremost, for all services, not just the marines, the first thing that the outside person thinks of when they think of a woman in the military is that she's a victim, and that's largely because the media only reports on the sexual assault and military sexual trauma issue. So changing that perception, first and foremost. We have had bad stuff happen. The bottom line is bad stuff happens to everybody, and sexual trauma is a terrible thing, but sexual trauma doesn't need to define your life as a service woman, or man, for that matter, since 50% of sexual assaults involve male on male. I think that, first and foremost, changing that perception so that people on the outside really understand that women are accomplishing incredible things, I think that that's the challenge of the day.

TS: What does patriotism mean to you, on this Veteran's Day, and every day?

KG: Oh my gosh, I think patriotism is being willing to serve when it's not comfortable and it's not convenient. America's the land of comfort, man. We're the land of plenty, and we like our stuff, but the reality is that the people who serve do it even though a lot of times it's uncomfortable, physically, mentally, emotionally. I think that that's—It's being willing to take on that burden.

TS: Would you do it all over again?

KG: Yes, without a doubt. Absolutely. Even the bad stuff. Absolutely. I think the bad stuff is really what defines you as a human being, so yeah.

TS: Yeah. Go through the storm—

KG: Absolutely. I feel like I'm a better person for it, and I feel like my relationship with my husband is stronger for it. I feel like I'm a better advocate for men and women. I'm a better teacher. Yeah. Absolutely.

TS: A lot of times—As an enlisted person for myself, and a lot of the women that have answered about things that were important to them in the military, was that they were challenged to do things that they never thought they could do.

KG: That's right.

TS: And yet, there was this team, and usually a person—a supervisor or whatever—having confidence in them beyond what their own expectations were.

KG: Absolutely. Yeah. That was Colonel Miller for me. My first experience with someone who would give me a job to do—I didn't know anything about logistics, and here I am, trying to plan out the logistical maneuvers of going from a combat zone to Kuwait, to the port, and loading everybody safely on ship. So yeah, absolutely. And that is the essence of what is wrong with how we make marines. We have lower expectations for women, and they achieve lower performance because of it. Absolutely. Well said.

TS: I don't have any more formal questions, but is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to mention, or do you have any final words that you'd like to say about your service?

KG: Gosh, I'm still living my service.

TS: I know I didn't ask you how you responded to the civilian world because it's so raw right now. You don't really—

KG: But it's great, the amount of freedom that I have, but I'm never not going to be part of the Marine Corps, whether they like it or not.

TS: [chuckles]

KG: I have such close ties with marines that I've served with who I love and respect, that I'll never be done with it, whether they like it or not.

TS: Well, is there anything that you didn't get out of the military that you were hoping to get?

KG: That's a tough question. I don't think so. I think I got way more out of it than I ever thought I would, good and bad, and because of that I think I'm a stronger person. So no, I think I got way, way more than I ever thought the day that I signed my contract and said, "Okay, I'm going to do four years and that's it." I met some of the most incredibly talented, accomplished people from all walks of life, all religions, all ethnicities, all backgrounds, constantly defying stereotypes. I have been blessed to just be surrounded by incredible people. There's the 1% that you have to deal with all the time, but I couldn't ask for more. I worked for some jerks, but I worked, on the whole, with way more amazing, accomplished people than the jerks.

TS: Yeah, you talked about a lot of mentors.

KG: Yeah, I've been super lucky, and I still keep in touch with those people today.

TS: Well, if you don't have anything else you'd like to say, we can end it, if you'd like.

KG: I really appreciate it. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity, because when you have conversations like this, you realize really how much you do get out of joining, so I appreciate it.

TS: I'm really glad that we got to talk today.

KG: Thank you.

TS: I'll shut you down here.

[End of Interview]