WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Claudia Geniton

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: March 26, 2011

[Begin Interview]

TS: This is Therese Strohmer, today is March 26th, I'm in Durham, North Carolina, with Claudia Geniton. And this is an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Project at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Claudia, how would you like your name to read on your collection?

CG: It should read Claudia Butler Geniton.

TS: Okay, excellent. Well, Claudia, thank you very much for letting me come in and talk with you today.

CG: You're welcome.

TS: Why don't we start out by having you talk about when and where you were born?

CG: I was born in Atlanta, Georgia, November 10th, 1953.

TS: And what—what kind of family did you grow up in? Large family, small family?

CG: Large family, I'm the oldest of six. There were three girls and then three boys. My parents decided they weren't going to stop until they got a boy, and then kept on going.

TS: So the three oldest are girls and the three youngest are boys?

CG: Yes.

TS: Interesting dynamic in that family, huh?

CG: Oh, it was. Six kids in just under seven years.

TS: Yeah, excellent.

CG: So it was very interesting.

TS: So what did your father do for a living?

CG: He was a salesman with Corgite[?], who was later bought out by Mobil Chemical, and we moved around quite a bit when I was young.

TS: Is that right?

CG: Yes.

TS: Because of the sales position.

CG: I guess the sales position. And my mom was a stay at home mom.

TS: Excellent. And in Atlanta, did you grow up in the city of Atlanta? Well, you moved around, you said.

CG: Yeah, we were in Decatur for a while, and then I think they moved to Americus, then we ended up in Florida for six or seven years, moved back to East Point, which is a suburb of Atlanta. I think I was eight or nine when we did that, maybe nine or ten. And stayed in Atlanta until I was fifteen. My dad transferred again, went to Greensboro, North Carolina, and they stayed there for a long, long time. I didn't particularly care for it, so I left and went back to Atlanta.

TS: What, like for high school or after?

CG: I was fifteen, almost sixteen, and I kind of ran away from home.

TS: Oh, did you really?

CG: I did, I never went back.

TS: Okay.

CG: It was an interesting time.

TS: And so, when you were growing up in Georgia and a little bit in Florida, what was that like for you, then, to like move around—did you, like, have to make new friends in school all the time, or?

CG: Well, when you have six kids in the family, you kind of take your friends with you. You know, it didn't matter where we went, we were the biggest pack around. And we tended to gravitate towards families that had a lot of kids. And I remember one place that we

lived in Brandon, there was a family across the street that had six—no, five kids, and there was a family down the street that had eight kids. So between the three families, we kind of ran the neighborhood. There was never a loss for anybody to play with or fight with or, you know, do anything with. There were a lot of kids with just the three families, and that's who we hung around with.

TS: So what kind of things did you do, what did you play, what kind of games, or?

CG: Oh, gosh, it was so long ago. Just—you know, just the kind of things that kids—you know, just run around and making things up and, you know, we had—down there, we had lots of grapefruit trees, so we were always climbing in the trees and swinging around like little monkeys and I remember we roller skated a lot. Just mostly ran around and made a lot of noise.

TS: Did you play any sports or anything?

CG: No, no sports.

TS: Nothing like that?

CG: No.

TS: And so then, how was it in school for you?

CG: You know, I don't have a lot of memories of school back then, except that the schools were really crowded, because Florida was really growing a lot at that time, and I remember being on split sessions. Half the kids would go in the morning and half the kids would go in the afternoon, and I just remember it seemed really rushed. And I remember—I think she was probably my third grade teacher, Mrs. Stanberry[?], I remember her being very nice. And that's about all I remember from school down there, I just don't have a lot of memories from that.

TS: From that.

CG: Yeah.

TS: Well, was it segregated, the schools, were they segregated at that time?

CG: Definitely.

TS: Yeah.

CG: Definitely.

TS: Was that something that you were aware of at the time, or just—

CG: No.

TS: I mean, that's just the way it was, that you—

CG: It's just the way it was. Wasn't really talked about, there. Don't have a whole lot of memories of that until I got—until we moved back to Georgia, probably sixth grade, fifth grade, you know, that was when that was becoming more of an issue and talked about more, and I don't know if that's because we were in a bigger city then or just the timing of things. But in Florida, you know, the only black person I ever saw was the lady who helped my mom with some ironing once in a while, and that was it, you know. It was not anything that was even in our awareness.

TS: Well, then, when you were, you know, not even a teenager yet, we had John F. Kennedy assassinated. Is that something you remember as a young girl?

CG: I do, I remember exactly where I was. I was—we were back in Atlanta, in the Atlanta area, East Point, and that was—it's funny, because I just finished reading a book by his secret service detail, by his protection detail. So that was in 1963, I was ten years old, and I was walking home from school, and the little girl that lived behind us said that she had heard that President Kennedy had been shot. And I told her she was lying. And she said no, she wasn't. I got really mad at her, and I punched her. And ran home—we walked to school, it was about a mile, and I ran home and my mom told me no, it was true, and she made me apologize to the girl for hitting her. [laughter] But I remember that very clearly, and like a lot of people my age, the memories are pretty fuzzy, because I was pretty young then, but I just remember what a terrible, terrible time it was and that everybody was really upset. Everybody was really upset, and I remember actually seeing on TV when Jack Ruby shot—

TS: Lee Harvey Oswald?

CG: Yeah, Lee Harvey Oswald. That's all—you know, it's one of those things. Where were you when?

TS: Right.

CG: I'll never forget that. You know, walking home from school, and punching Cindy Iddens[?] in the nose. [laughter]

TS: Cindy Endens?

CG: Iddens, yeah.

TS: You punched her in the nose?

CG: I did, I turned around and punched her in the nose. And I wasn't a particularly violent kid, but she made me mad. How could anybody do that to the president? It couldn't possibly be true.

TS: Yeah. Did you like the president?

CG: I did, I did.

TS: And there was other things happening at that time, like there was the concern about, you know, nuclear war with the—well, if you were in Florida, too, with the Cuban Missile Crisis.

CG: Cuban Missile Crisis. Yes, I remember—that is one memory I do have of being in school. And the drills that you would have, just in case the missiles were launched, the duck and cover drills, you know. And they'd set off the alarms at the school, and you got under your desk and you covered your head up with your arms, and I remember that being a really scary time. I had—until you just said something, I had forgotten about that, but yeah. Very definitely a concern, when we lived in Florida.

TS: Right.

CG: So.

TS: And you still would have been really young with the crisis itself. And—but would you have been in Florida at the time?

CG: Yeah, no, we were in Florida, because the Cuban Missile Crisis happened—I think in '62, that was, so we were still there then. And then Georgia when Kennedy was assassinated, so. But yeah. The Cuban Missile Crisis and all the stuff that had gone on around that went on for quite some time.

TS: Right. And did you have—when you were going to school, you say you don't remember much about it, but did you have like a favorite subject that you enjoyed or even maybe one that you really didn't enjoy?

CG: Not when I was young.

TS: No?

CG: Like I said, I don't have a whole lot of memories about school itself. I remember it was a happy time, but I don't—I really don't remember much about it.

TS: So, tell me a little bit about high school and that period.

CG: High school was very different. That was a very tumultuous time for the country. You know, late ‘60s—well, mid to late ‘60s, early ‘70s, you know, the Vietnam war, civil rights, all the political mess that was going on back then. Desegregation, it was just—and plus, all the usual teenage angst and hormones and all the stuff you usually go through. That was very difficult, and that was a very tumultuous time. And then, as I said earlier, I ran away from home when I was fifteen, so that says something about my relationship with my parents at the time. So that was a very difficult time, a very challenging time, I’m sure for my parents as well. It couldn’t have been an easy thing for them.

TS: When it was tumultuous—when you say it was tumultuous, what was your, like—like you said, all the things you mentioned. How did you have—what was your connection to some of those things? Like maybe the counterculture, or even—there’s so many things that, you know, you could have gotten involved in. What—was there something that, like, resonated with you at that time?

CG: [pause] I think it was just—just the whole feeling. There was just this huge feeling of unrest and upheaval. And you were just kind of hit with it every day, you’d turn on the news and it was something else. There were kids at school, older siblings and older brothers in particular, being drafted and going off to Vietnam at the time. Then there was the dope culture, you know, and the San Francisco thing going on and just—music was huge, you know, and if you go back and you listen to the music from then, some of it was really silly and some of it was really serious. And as many young people do, I think we tended to take ourselves very seriously. You know, nobody had ever dealt with such important issues before, nevermind that we’d just, not too many years previous, finished the Korean War, World War II here—no. This was serious, and we were the only ones to ever have to deal with this. I think you tend to be very egocentric when you’re that age. So everything seemed probably more than what it was. But I think we were more open about talking about it than previous generations had been. And I think the feelings were more out there for people to see, and a lot of that spilled over.

TS: Yes. Did—what did you think about the Vietnam War?

CG: [sighs] It was hard to watch, you know, because that’s the first time you’d ever gotten—I mean, you’re sitting there eating dinner and there it is on the nightly news, you know, so it was very brutal, and I thought, like a lot of people, we need to get out of this, this is terrible, we shouldn’t be there. And so, it was really—which is interesting, considering where I ended up. [chuckles]

TS: Right, it’s true. That’s true, but you’re not—it’s not a unique feeling.

CG: No, no.

TS: A lot of people that went in the military, I think, had that kind of feeling. Did you have any, like, heroes at that time? Was there anybody that you looked up to?

CG: No, not really.

TS: Or even admired, just admired?

CG: No. Just JFK. They'd killed him, you know, he was dead. And that was probably—probably the only one. I really didn't—no teachers, nobody like that.

TS: No? Not like Martin Luther King, Jr.? He had—in '68—so what year did you actually, when you finished—when you ran away, I'm not sure how your high school went, then.

CG: [laughter]

TS: But did you graduate?

CG: Eventually, yeah, not in the normal way, but yeah. [chuckling]

TS: So you're—when—yeah, you're a teenager in '68, I'm trying to—yeah, you're like sixteen years old or something, right?

CG: Yeah, let's see. No, fifteen.

TS: Yeah, fifteen, yeah. So, that year of '68, you're experiencing a whole lot of—what year did you run away?

CG: Well, we were in Greensboro, my parents had moved to Greensboro, probably later that year.

TS: Was it '68, '69, something like that?

CG: Oh, it had to have been '69, had to have been '69, early '69. So we were still in Atlanta, you know, and of course MLK, civil rights, and that was all—that was in some ways probably harder to watch than what was going on in Vietnam, because that was right there, you know, and that was going on in the city that I lived in and other similar cities all over the South. That was very hard to watch, it was very brutal, very inhumane, to watch what was going on.

TS: Were you in Greensboro when the sit-in happened? In 1960, would have been.

CG: No, no, we didn't go to Greensboro until—

TS: Until later.

CG: Like '69.

TS: I see.

CG: Yeah, we were in Atlanta. And of course, there was a lot going on there, too.

TS: Yes.

CG: And you know, that's when my school was integrated. I remember feeling very sorry for the kids that ended up going to my school. And—just because of the sense of isolation that they must have felt. There were five black kids in my whole school. I have no idea how they were treated, wasn't in classes with any of them, but that had to be a terribly frightening thing. They were just kids, you know, how do you handle that? They had to have more poise than I did, you know. Just to be able to get up and do that, day in and day out. Had to be very difficult.

TS: Well, tell me your thought process, then. How did you—at the time, so you're fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old. And like you said, all this is going on, and you're rebelling in some way against your parents.

CG: In a pretty big way.

TS: Okay, a big way. [laughter] And do you want to talk about that rebellion at all?

CG: Oh, doesn't matter. I mean, you know, I would just—my parents and I did not get along, mostly my dad. He was a very tough guy. And looking back on it, you know, not so tough. But needless to say, we didn't get along, and I had just been uprooted, and pulled away from my friends, from the school that I enjoyed going to, from everything I knew. You know, we'd traveled all around when I was a little kid, so we were in Atlanta longer than we'd been anyplace, and it was nice for me to be able to stay there. And I'm sure I was probably very angry at, you know, here I am, I'm a junior in high school now, and you're telling me that I've got to pack up and move and leave everything—no! And I had a boyfriend, and—you know, so I stayed in Greensboro for, I think, less than six months. And things deteriorated even further, and you know, I was smoking dope and hanging around with a bunch of kids who did the same kind of thing, and I wasn't a bad kid, but I wasn't an easy kid either. And my sisters were doing the same kind of stuff that I was, and all of our friends were. And it all came to a head one day, my parents—I went home higher than a kite and of course my parents knew it, you know, and thought that they were going to ground me for the rest of my life or something. And I said, that's it, I'm out of here. And I packed up and went back to Atlanta, I hitchhiked back to Atlanta from Greensboro and, fortunately, my best friend's parents took me in, and I lived with them for the next year. I did manage to get myself through school, although they wouldn't let me back in high school in Atlanta.

TS: No?

CG: No, because my parents weren't paying taxes, and you can't go to school if your parents aren't taxpayers, I mean, who's going to, you know [pay for it?], so.

TS: Interesting.

CG: Yeah, so, the folks I was staying with went to what was then called Atlanta Area Technical School, I think it's Atlanta Technical College or something now. And worked out a deal—they had a program there for seniors in high school. If you'd taken most of your requirements, you could go and do any one of their programs, take whatever you needed, electives, at the local high school, and graduate with both your high school degree and the degree from there. So I did a program in medical office assisting, and then some high school, although I don't remember which one, I did—I needed a couple of electives, so I did an art class. Which I was terrible at. I can't draw a straight line, I can't draw a crooked like.

TS: [laughs] Me neither.

CG: But I did that and I got through school when I was seventeen, I finished this program.

TS: I see.

CG: So I had a high school thing, I had the office assisting thing, but I was seventeen and nobody would hire me. How can you work in a doctor's office if you're seventeen years old? And I thought, well, how can you not?

TS: Right.

CG: But nobody wanted to hear that, you know, so. But that's what got me started thinking about the military, one of the things that I did through that program is, we did clinical assignments, and mine was at Fort McPherson in Atlanta. And I went and worked in the pediatric clinic there, another clinic, I don't remember what it was, and then the emergency room. And I was there, working with people who were already soldiers. And they were my trainers. And that was my first real, up-close experience with the military. And it was pretty cool, you know, I liked what I did, I liked what they were doing, I liked the things that they were saying, and so a few months later, when I tried to figure out what the heck am I going to do, because I can't go back home, that bridge was burned. And I thought, you know, okay, well, I could join the military. But I needed my parents' permission to join.

TS: I was going to say, if you're seventeen, you can't. You had to be twenty-one.

CG: Well, at that time, even if you were eighteen and a girl.

TS: And a girl, right.

CG: If you were eighteen and a boy, you were good, because they needed cannon fodder for Vietnam. But they weren't going to send me to Vietnam, so they had to have my parents' permission. So I thought, okay, here we go. [laughs]

TS: Yeah, I'm curious to see how this turns out.

CG: Yeah. Well, around that same time, my grandmother, my dad's mom, had had a series of strokes and somebody needed to stay with her full-time, somebody who could do a few things medically for her. Take her blood pressure, you know, this that and the other thing. And my grandmother and I had always gotten along well, so I said, okay, I'll do it. I don't have a job, I don't have any money, and I need a place to stay, so I moved in with my grandmother for a few months.

TS: Where did she live?

CG: In Elberton, Georgia. Just a little bitty town in North Georgia. So I stayed with her until she was stabilized, and that was—that was a nice time, we got really close. Had always been close to her, but you know, that was good. And she—my job was to kind of prod her every day to get up and get moving and her job was to, you know, snap at me and, you know, why don't you leave me alone? [laughing]

TS: Resist anything that you tried to have her do.

CG: Yeah, but it all worked out in the long run and she got better, you know, so after that was—you know, after I was released from that, I went to visit my parents, even though my dad wasn't speaking to me at that point. My mom was, my mom and I had stayed close. And while I was there, I went downtown to pick her up for lunch one day, and the bank where she worked at that point was next to the recruiting office. So I went in and talked to them, and I wish I could remember that man's name. It was Joe somebody-or-other.

And I said, "You know what, let's do it."

And he said "Okay, how old are you?"

And I still wasn't eighteen at that point. And he said "Well, let's talk to your parents." So we set it up for shortly after my eighteenth birthday, and things were still pretty frosty with my dad, and this recruiter came over to the house, and I had already told my mom about it. And they were talking and talking and talking, and my dad was not very receptive to the idea. And at one point, I remember—and my mom and dad had a really strong relationship. But she very rarely would call him out in front of anybody.

But at one point, I remember she said "Let's go upstairs and talk." And she took my dad upstairs, because he was refusing to sign the papers.

To this day, I don't know what she said to him, but he came back down and said "Give me the damn papers, I'll sign them." And he did, and two weeks after my eighteenth birthday, I was in basic training. Just like that, I was gone. And it was probably the best thing I ever did.

TS: How about that.

CG: Yeah, yeah. So.

TS: Well, now, you had—before we started the tape, you said a little bit about—you're the only one, you're the first one in your family that went into the army.

CG: Yeah. My dad was Marine, my uncle was Marine, my grandfather was Marine. Everybody in the family, to that point, that had been in the military, had been in the Marine Corps. My dad's dad was a warrant officer, have great pictures of him when he was stationed in China. And letters that he had written of the things that he saw and did. You know, it was fascinating. So I'm sure at some point, that probably stuck in the back of my brain, too. I remember him writing a letter, and in the letter he said that he was sitting in his office looking out over the steps of a square, wherever he was stationed in China, and they were executing people who had offended whatever law.

TS: The emperor?

CG: Yeah. Whatever. And they were beheading them. And he's telling this story of these heads rolling down steps and I'm thinking, oh my god, I can't believe he's there. You know. But.

TS: Wow.

CG: So yeah, they were all Marines. My dad never talked about his service. He was in during the Korean War, and he'd never talk about it, but I've got—or had, don't have now—

TS: Did he go to Korea, was he in—

CG: I don't know, he would never, I mean, it was just—

TS: Oh, you just don't know?

CG: Just didn't talk about it.

TS: Interesting.

CG: Just did not talk about it. I believe he was overseas, but I don't know that for a fact. He was in for a couple of years, then he got out and came back and went to school at Emory University, which is how we ended up in Decatur at that point. But yeah, when I told my grandmother—the same grandmother that I'd taken care of—

TS: Right.

CG: —That I was joining the army, she was furious. You know, how could I do that, you know, our family's a Marine Corps family, blah blah blah.

TS: So she would have been okay if you went in the Marines?

CG: Yeah.

TS: She was just mad that you were going into the army, then.

CG: Yeah. She finally came around, though. She realized it was for the best.

TS: Yeah. Yeah.

CG: Yeah, so.

TS: Now, was there a reason that you picked the army?

CG: I think probably because that's where I had trained in Atlanta and I was familiar with it.

TS: Oh, I see, yeah. And did you ever even consider the other ones?

CG: Never.

TS: It just was—that was—

CG: It just—I walked in, that was the recruiting office I walked into, that's who I talked to first, and you know, I needed to make some decisions. I needed a job, a paycheck, a place to stay, and I didn't have time to mess around. They said yes, and I took it.

TS: And what did your friends and your other—your siblings think about your decision?

CG: I don't know what my youngest brothers and sisters thought about it. The sister that's just a year younger than me thought it was great, she was excited for me. I had friends, at that time, that never spoke to me again.

TS: Is this because of the war?

CG: Yeah, Vietnam was a very divisive topic. In many people's eyes, mostly my generation's, at that point it was black and white. You were either for it or against it, and there was no grey area, you know, and if you joined, you obviously were for it and you were a warmonger and, you know, blah blah blah. And that was it. They were very angry.

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

CG: At the time?

TS: Your treatment by your friends.

CG: I just said the hell with you.

TS: Really?

CG: Yeah.

TS: It didn't—I mean, not that it didn't bother you, but you just thought—

CG: No, it didn't, though. That's just it, you know. It's my life, I have to make the decisions that are best for me. I needed the job, it was a job that I wanted to do, I felt then—and I didn't think about it as much then as I did later, but everybody deserves to have someone take care of them when they're ill or they're injured. You know. In my time at Fort McPherson, I had seen that with soldiers. And then, honestly, it was probably mostly soldiers' families, I don't think we saw that many active duty people, but it was soldiers caring for military. You know. So I thought that was a pretty cool thing, and obviously, I had picked up some of that in the civilian program that I had gone to, and just the idea that I liked helping people, I liked doing that sort of thing, liked doing that sort of thing with soldiers. They had a job, I needed a job. They had a paycheck, God knows I didn't have any money. You know, it all kind of worked out, and the people that didn't like it, didn't appreciate it and didn't, you know, want to speak to me anymore because of it—I didn't see them lining up to offer me a job or to help me out. And I had always been pretty independent. Didn't really need them, you know. If that's the way you're going to be, okay. That's fine. So off I went, and I made new friends.

TS: [chuckles] Well, did you—[pause] Totally forgot what I was going to say there. Or ask you.

CG: [chuckles]

TS: But—oh, I know, when you talked to the recruiter, at the time you were talking to the army recruiter, did you have a job in mind that you wanted to do? Did you sign up for a specific job?

CG: I knew I would do something medical. I knew I'd do something medical.

TS: And that's because of—

CG: Because of what I had done, yeah, I thought that was cool. My mom was a nurse, before she and my dad got married. I don't know, maybe it's in the genes, I don't know. But yeah, I had signed up to do something medical. And actually, I think I had signed up to be an OR [operating room] tech, and for some reason, that didn't work out. So I was

trained as a medic and trained as a psychiatric technician, is what my first training actually was.

TS: So, where did you go to basic training?

CG: Fort McClellan, Alabama.

TS: Tell me about that experience.

CG: Boy, that was—it was a real eye-opener for me. I knew I was in for a lot of different kind of things. I had never been on a plane before, so I flew from Greensboro to Alabama, and it was the worst flight of my entire life. We were flying in really bad weather, so the plane was up and down all over the place, and I remember thinking "If this is what flying's like, I'm never doing it again." I was so sick, I was just green when I got off the plane. But I got there, and there was somebody there to meet us, and there were a lot of other scared kids just like me, I mean, we were away from home, most of them were older than me, I don't know if they were any more experienced than me or not, but you know, I was—even though I thought I knew everything at that point in my life, I realized pretty quickly that I didn't, and the best thing to do was keep my mouth shut and just follow the crowd.

TS: Is that right?

CG: Yeah. [chuckles] And as it turned out, I think I was the youngest one in my training platoon.

TS: You were barely eighteen, right?

CG: Just barely eighteen. But again, I thought I knew everything, you know. But I got there, and I just remember feeling like I fit in very well, and I—you know, it was a tough experience, even though basic training then, for women, is nothing like what it is now, or even what it became just a few years after that. It was still—

TS: So this is '70—

CG: Oh, I joined in 1971.

TS: Seventy-one, right.

CG: Yeah. So before Thanksgiving of that year, I was in basic training. But it was good, you know, the system was in place to kind of break you down and build you back up, and I felt a sense of belonging. I liked it, I really enjoyed it. It was hard, they pushed me, they challenged me.

TS: What do you mean about that sense of belonging? How—can you explain that more, about what it was that you liked about that?

CG: Just the idea that I'm there with a group of people going through the same thing for a common goal. You know, we're all in it together, you know, just that camaraderie that you build up.

TS: Was that something that you had experienced before, or was this maybe the first time you'd experienced something at this level, or?

CG: Well—at that level, yeah. You know, when we were kids, I said, there were three families, you know.

TS: Sure.

CG: And it was the kind of thing, we'd fight with each other and you know, do all that kind of stuff, but don't let anybody else come in and pick on us, you know. Because, you know, you'd kind of band together. Maybe to some degree it was that same kind of thing. And of course, you know, this platoon is, you know, trying to do better than that platoon, and this company is trying to better than that company, so there was some of that. And obviously, on the military's part, that's very deliberate, that's what they want, you know. That's how you inspire each other to do better and to go further and to push harder. You know, that's how you build those teams.

TS: Was there anything that was particularly hard for you in basic training?

CG: No, there wasn't. I mean, I thrived on all of it. You know, they made it hard, I mean, physically, it's not as demanding—it wasn't as demanding then as it is now, but it was more demanding than anything I'd ever done, you know.

TS: Right. What did you have to do, physically?

CG: Oh, just the PT and the runs and, you know, but again—

TS: Did you have to carry packs or anything?

CG: Oh, gosh no.

TS: No, just running.

CG: Just the running. You know, ladies didn't wear combat boots back then.

TS: What did you wear?

CG: We didn't wear fatigues, we had these—I don't know if I—

TS: Oh, you did find a few pictures.

CG: Yeah, I found a few. You can't really tell too much about that, but what that is, is a short-sleeved light blue chambray shirt that's starched incredibly stiff. And we had a skirt that went with it, it was an A-line button-up skirt, and the way that they could tell if your skirt was starched stiff enough, if you could button that thing up and set it on the ground and have it stay like a teepee with no crinkles. That's how the skirt was starched stiff enough, and that's no lie.

TS: Oh my gosh, okay.

CG: And then for PT, there were a pair of blue chambray shorts that you could put on with that same blue shirt.

TS: This blue shirt here.

CG: And we wore these lovely little black oxford shoes with black socks. And you wore those shoes and socks whether you wore the skirt or the shorts. And then that sweater was an OD[?] green cardigan sweater, and that lovely hat. And that's what we wore in basic training. Except on the few rare days where we got to wear our dress uniform, that didn't happen often. Mostly we wore that godawful training uniform with that skirt that was—and you never wanted to sit down in it.

TS: [laughs] Because that would wrinkle—

CG: It would crinkle. God, it's a wonder it didn't break, you know. [chuckling] But yeah, they were pretty awful. But yeah, we didn't wear fatigues, we were never issued fatigues in basic training, because ladies didn't—it was still the Women's Army Corps, then.

TS: That's right.

CG: You know, we were separate from the guys, even though there were guys doing a lot of training there, that was the—Fort McClellan was the home of the military police at that point. So there were a lot of guys doing various training there, but we rarely saw them. We were told that men were trees, and you don't talk to trees. Okay. [chuckling]

TS: Well, what was it like for you to put on that uniform?

CG: It was great. I loved it.

TS: I mean, you came from a military background.

CG: I loved it, I loved it. I was proud of it, I was very proud of it. Made me feel good.

TS: Yeah.

CG: Always did.

TS: Well, what was your first duty assignment, then, after—or did you go to a training?

CG: Went to Fort Sam Houston for training.

TS: Okay. And what was this training for?

CG: I was trained as a medic. So, and I think that was maybe eight weeks of combat medic training. And then I went to advanced training after that, still at Fort Sam Houston, to learn to be a tech on a psychiatric ward. That was—thinking maybe, twelve weeks, maybe? So, good bit of time at Fort Sam.

TS: Right.

CG: And that was fun. That was a lot of fun, because there were a lot more people there than there was in basic. There were guys there, we were young, it was like—and we had a lot more freedom than we did in basic.

TS: Yeah, I was going to say, you weren't as restricted.

CG: In basic, I mean, I think we got one pass into town for a few hours on a Sunday. I mean, we were really restricted in basic, you know, and everything we did was regimented. But Fort Sam Houston, well first off, when we got off the plane—I had never been to Texas, that was very exotic to me. I'm in the only uniform I had, which was a wool uniform. I think we got there in February, but it can be hot in Texas in February. And they opened the doors to the plane, and it's hot, it's humid, the sun's shining, I thought "Oh my gosh, this is going to be all right!" [laughter] Then we got there, and our barracks were just a couple of blocks from the club, you know, where we were free to go every night if we wanted to. So we had a ball down there in training. It was an absolute blast. I'm sure that our cadre, our first sergeant, I know, thought we were a handful. He had a rule—I don't remember how many women were in this barracks building, but it was an enormous building, it was just huge. Three stories, top two levels were all open-bay barracks. Only a few people had private rooms, those were the ones that were supposed to be trying to control us. Didn't work very well. There were like forty women to an open bay. And our first sergeant's only rule was, if you go to the club at night, you better be able to get back to the barracks on time and make it up the stairs under your own power. If you couldn't make it up the stairs under your own power because you'd had too much to drink, not only were you in trouble, but so was anybody that helped you up the stairs. So I managed to avoid that pitfall. I always got back upstairs by myself. But it was one big party, just the whole time we were down there. I think for the women, because we're out of training and it was great, and we were definitely in the minority, so—

TS: Minority as in—

CG: Well, there were a lot more men than women.

TS: I see.

CG: So we're having a great time down there. And the guys, I think—I don't think, I know, because we talked about it. They're worried about going to Vietnam, you know, so this was like their last chance to really have a good time, because once this assignment was over, they were going to their next duty assignment, and for a lot of them, it would be Vietnam. So, it felt like a really carefree time but there was still that undercurrent of being a little scared, nervous, you know, what's going to happen, will I ever see these people again. But we were having fun. We had a good time down there. Texas was great.

TS: Well, did—did these men ever talk about what their feelings were about going to Vietnam?

CG: Every once in a while. It wasn't something that [they] talked a lot about. Because, to talk about it was to acknowledge that you were afraid, you know. And nobody wants to admit that.

TS: Right.

CG: Especially if you might end up over there, because you've got to keep that in.

TS: Yeah. Now, you had—you were talking about your first sergeant. Because you were in the WAC at that time, it was all—the hierarchy was all women, wasn't it?

CG: Not when I got to Fort Sam. Our first sergeant was a guy.

TS: Okay, was he? Okay.

CG: Oh yeah. Yeah, actually, I think most of our cadre at Fort Sam—but in basic, it was women.

TS: I see.

CG: My platoon sergeant was Sergeant First Class Laura Goodgame. She was—she was a tough lady, she was a tough lady. And I think she was probably more unusual—she was a black lady, you know. Now here she was, she was a sergeant first class, so she had been in for a good while. I don't know how long she'd been in, but you know, for enlisted, you got a stripe for every three years, you know, a little hash stripe on the sleeve of your uniform. And I remember she was hashed from wrist to elbow. So she'd been in a long time, and she was one tough lady. And she was good. But then, Fort Sam Houston, the cadre was all men. It was very different.

TS: So, what else—did you do anything else at Fort Sam Houston? On your off time?

CG: No, pretty much just—

TS: Did you go tour anywhere or see anything?

CG: Yeah, you know, we did all the—you know, let's go to the Alamo. It's downtown next to Woolworth's, you know. [laughter]

TS: Okay.

CG: Transportation was always the issue, you know, nobody had cars. So you could only go when and where the busses would take you. I met my first husband down there, we were classmates, and married after we left there. Something else that my parents weren't real crazy about. [chuckles] But no, I mean, you could hang around on post, you could go to the park that was near post, which was beautiful at the time, I don't know what it's like today, but Breckenridge Park was absolutely wonderful. And you could get the bus downtown and go see the Alamo. And that's about all there was. There was—we had to work hard to study, though, we were expected to perform. And then there's always the usual military stuff, if you've got this duty you've got to do or that duty. You know.

TS: Like [guard?] duty or something.

CG: Fire guard. You know, somebody's got to sit there and guard the barracks. What if the building burns down, I'm going to stop it? No, I'm going to go pull the fire alarm if I see fire, you know, but you still had to be there.

TS: Right.

CG: So there was always something to keep you in line on the weekend, you know.

TS: Right. So where was your first real duty station, after your training?

CG: I went to Walter Reed [Army Medical Center, Washington D.C.]. And I was stationed at an annex there, it was called Forest Glen. And that was where all the psych facilities were. And also, all the drug rehab facilities, and I think that's where I got my first real dose of what was really going on. Back then, I worked in the drug and alcohol rehab program. Now remember, I was eighteen years old and at this point, I'm realizing that I don't know much about anything. Because I'm working with guys who are coming back from all over the place, but a lot of them from Vietnam, with some pretty serious drug and alcohol problems and some pretty seriously messed up heads. You know, these guys are in a psych service for a reason. And I was beginning to figure out that there was some nasty stuff going on out there. So that was—that was where I really started learning what it was like to take care of soldiers. And what that means.

TS: What kind of things did you have to do?

CG: Oh, you know, group therapy sessions, activities, things to kind of take their minds off their troubles. Because we were at Walter Reed, we were kind of a showcase, and there was a lot of money being thrown at that, so, you know, every weekend we were taking these guys out to activities around town, if there was a concert, if there was a play, if there was a ballgame. I mean, somebody was throwing money at these programs. Just to get these guys taken care of, but it was all very quiet, you know, because nobody wanted—at that point, Vietnam was very unpopular, nobody wanted to be seen trying to make it nice, you know. But still, somebody somewhere realized that we had to take care of these guys. So—

TS: When you went out, did you go out in uniform?

CG: No, no. Always civilian clothes.

TS: Was there a reason for that?

CG: There were probably two reasons. The stated reason was, none of us wanted to be in uniform when we went out, because you were treated poorly by the—I mean, you know, you think about the stories from back then, and people coming back from Vietnam and, you know, it was true, walking through airports and people saying nasty things and doing nasty things. Nobody wanted to, you know, be out and have that happen. Even in a military town like Washington [D.C.], things like that happened. And it's probably why we were allowed to do it, you know, the powers that be didn't want to have to deal with it, so it was allowed to happen. So we went out in our civilian clothes. So. But that was—that was hard, saw a lot of guys come back really messed up. Hopefully, we helped them a little bit.

TS: Yeah.

CG: We tried. We tried. I worked with some great guys there.

TS: So, in your—was it—how many people did you work with, not the patients, but the staff, how was that?

CG: Staff? We were—we were a pretty small group, we had a couple of psychiatrists and a couple of nurses. There were probably a dozen techs, dozen techs, it was a very small—very close-knit. We were a twenty-four hour operation, too, because this was a residential facility for these guys. So, we were—we got to be a pretty tight group. I was the only girl there, which was kind of weird, because all of our patients were guys, too. So I really—and one of the nurses was female, the other one was male. So I was kind of like the little sister of the crowd. I think it made it easier to talk to me, though, you know.

Because I was really nonthreatening. And I'm sure that they must have seen me as just some dumb little kid, because I'm still just eighteen years old, you know.

TS: Right.

CG: God, I look back at the pictures, even I realize what a kid I was, you know. But I felt like I did some good.

TS: And how did you feel you were treated by everybody on the staff?

CG: I was treated really well. I was treated really well, never had any problems. Ever.

TS: Yeah.

CG: So I stayed there for six months doing that.

TS: Okay.

CG: And then—

TS: How did you like the D.C. area?

CG: Loved it. Absolutely loved it.

TS: What'd you love about it?

CG: Museums. I liked getting out and going and doing things and seeing things. And it wasn't too far from Greensboro, I could get home to see my family.

TS: Were you getting on better terms with your dad, or?

CG: Until I got married.

TS: Oh. [both chuckle]

CG: When I was—while I was there. Married my first husband, and that really didn't go over very well. Then he got orders to go to Okinawa, so he left, and then I left a couple months later and went to Okinawa. So I spent just six months at Walter Reed. And then went to Okinawa.

TS: What was your housing like at Walter Reed, was it the same with the open bays, or?

CG: No, I had—I shared a room, out in Forest Glen, we had a barracks building, I think our building was just for women. I know there was another one out there somewhere for the guys that worked out there. And actually, I think all women in the hospital were housed

at Forest Glen, and even though Walter Reed proper was several miles away, they had a shuttle bus that ran for the women. But I shared a room with a girl that I had gone through basic and training with. Her name was Sybil Grys[?], and I remember she was from Louisiana. And Sybil was a young black girl with no more experience in the world than me, and we kind of found each other and, you know, we palled around for the whole time that we were in training and that first assignment. We were buddies, we were buddies. But we shared a room out there at Forest Glen.

TS: Where did she work at?

CG: She was in the main hospital. She didn't work in the program that I was in, I think she was in the main hospital. We didn't see a lot of each other, just because we were both doing shift work.

TS: Right.

CG: You know, so, but you'd know that the other one had been there, because the—you know, the room—you know, you just know if somebody's been around.

TS: Right.

CG: You know, so. Yeah.

TS: And—you hadn't—we didn't talk at all about when you went through basic or your training, about the food. Do you remember anything about the food in particular?

CG: I remember having to help fix it sometimes, when we were on KP [kitchen patrol]. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah?

CG: And it's true, you really do peel potatoes on KP. I remember there was a lot of it. And I've never been a particularly picky eater, and at that point, Sergeant Goodgame—I was skinny back then, boy, was I skinny. And you had to meet weight requirements, both upper and lower weight requirements, and we got weighed in once a week, and all the girls that were kind of pushing the upper limits, couple of days before weigh-in, she'd have them on, you know, water and lettuce or whatever it was she was doing to them. And those of us that were pretty skinny and weren't weighing quite enough, man, she'd make us stuff ourselves. Bananas and water, because, you know, lot of volume there. But I couldn't keep the weight on.

You know, we were working hard and I was eating like a pig, but I was just a skinny little kid with a real high metabolism, I had trouble keeping the weight on, and she kept saying to me, "If you don't get some weight on, we're going to have to kick you out, you can't be this skinny," you know, so. Obviously, it worked. [chuckles] But yeah, the food—

TS: I hear a lot about, actually, bananas being pushed for weight, that—I actually have heard that even from some World War II veterans and stuff that—

CG: Well, Sergeant Goodgame did, she always had them around for us. [laughs]

TS: Interesting, so. So then, you got married.

CG: Yes.

TS: And was it—and your husband went to Okinawa and then you were going to go after him?

CG: Right.

TS: How many months—how long after, did you say?

CG: Oh, I think it was two months, maybe. Maybe three.

TS: Was it difficult to get an assignment with him, at that time?

CG: No, we didn't really have a lot of trouble doing that.

TS: What kind of field was he in?

CG: He was medical.

TS: Okay.

CG: He was medical, he was an OR tech.

TS: Oh, that's right, you said you went to training—

CG: Yeah, yeah. So, I think we must have been the same medic class, but then he went and did his other training and I did mine. And then he went to Okinawa, I followed a few months later. And that part was easy, getting that assignment together was not difficult, and I'm not sure why, looking back on things. Because there were other times where assignments were very difficult, and I don't know if it was just a matter of being in the right place at the right time, but it worked out.

TS: Well, tell me about Okinawa.

CG: That was the most interesting thing. To somebody who had never traveled, never been anywhere, never done anything, I found it absolutely fascinating, and I loved my time there. Had a great time. Worked with a lot of the same people that I had trained with,

ended up there. I was—I worked on the psychiatric ward, so a lot of the folks that I was in training with ended up there. So I had kind of a ready-made group of friends. It was a neat place to be, it was warm and sunny when we got there. You know, small island, very busy place. There was a big Marine training base up at the north end of the island, that, you know, was kind of mysterious. We didn't know what went on up there. We went up for training a couple of times, up there. There was a big air force base, Kadena, was there, and at the time—boy, and I can't remember what it was, it was the F-14s? They were doing a lot of training with those, and the way the hospital was constructed, it was kind of two towers connected by glass enclosed ramps. And it was glass everywhere, you could see everything, both sides of the island, out over the China Sea, over the oceans. And we'd see these F-14s coming, and they'd just be practicing touch-and-gos all day. [An F-14 first flew in 1970, but they were not introduced into the U.S. Navy until 1974, so the planes under discussion may not have been F-14s unless these were test flights.] It was the neatest thing to just watch those planes coming and going. And then down at the south end of the island was a big navy presence, and there was a big port down there. So there was a lot of hustle and bustle. The island had just been turned back over to the Japanese. I want to say that happened in '70, maybe? But I got there in '72. [Okinawa was returned to Japanese administration in 1972.] So there was—actually, I think it was probably my first day on the island, my husband and I—my new husband and I were going to go out to dinner, and we were going down to—Kyoto? I don't remember the name of the little town. But we were—a cab had dropped us off and we'd gone to dinner and we were walking around after dinner, and we turned a corner and we walked right into this big demonstration. There were a lot of people who weren't real happy with the military being there, and since the island had been turned over to the Japanese, they wanted everybody out. They wanted to be truly a Japanese island. Well, kind of hard to do with this huge military presence there. We turned around and ran. [laughs]

TS: Oh, did you?

CG: We were so scared! Oh my god, what have I gotten myself into. But for the most part, it was really great. The people, the Japanese people, were friendly, they were welcoming. I lived off-base, I had a Japanese landlord who had been trained in the States and his kids were going to college in the States. So he taught me a lot about the island and about island life, and if I ever had questions, I could go to him. So it was really pretty cool, I kind of had the best of both worlds. I had this great job at the hospital with people that I knew, and then I had this great place, you know, with a landlord who would help me with all things local. So it was pretty good. It was a good time.

TS: For someone who's never been to Japan, how would you describe their culture being different from ours? And, you know, just sort of daily living sort of things.

CG: I think you have to make a distinction between Japan and Okinawa.

TS: Okinawa [unclear].

CG: Okinawa is very different from mainland Japan in a lot of ways, because of the military occupation, you know. We did not occupy mainland Japan for nearly so long as we occupied Okinawa. They were very poor people, for the most part, it was a very tough existence, because it's a very small island, there was not—there's not industry, you know, they were fishers. They worked for the military, they had shops. That was it, you know. Agriculture, maybe a little plot here and there. It was very difficult for them, it was very hard for them. But they're very warm, they were very friendly, hard-working people. And it made it easy for the military, when I got there, I'm sure my perception is very different from someone who had been there four, five years earlier, but, you know, seemed like everybody spoke English. And you could still spend dollars, although they were moving back to using yen as the main currency. You could still spend dollars in many, many places. It was very easy to be an American there if you were just nice to people, you know. They would treat you really, really well.

TS: Did you learn any Japanese?

CG: Just a few words, you know. And mostly what I learned, I've forgotten, but every place I've ever been stationed or visited, even just traveling, I've always tried to learn how to say just the basics. You know, hello, how are you, thank you, where's the bathroom, where's the restaurant? [chuckles] Those—and just, you know, good morning, good afternoon. Just the pleasantries. That gets you a long way, anyplace. That's one thing the military did teach me, and the people that I was associated with in the military. Whether you were stationed in Germany, in Japan, in Vietnam. If you make the effort to just learn how to say hello, how are you, just the simple things, people will meet you more than halfway. So that's an important lesson for a kid from Georgia to learn.

TS: There you go, that's right.

CG: It was good. It was good. So I did learn a few words.

TS: Yeah. What did you enjoy most about being in Okinawa?

CG: Hm. The job. I had a great job. I worked with good people.

TS: Tell me about that a little more, then.

CG: I worked on the psych ward, it was a locked psychiatric ward.

TS: What do you mean by locked, what does that mean?

CG: The only people that had the keys were the people in uniform. The people wearing the pajamas didn't get the keys.

TS: So they couldn't leave.

CG: They couldn't leave. So it was—and we had a couple wards there, one was a locked ward, one was not. But I worked on the locked ward. Most of the people that were there were coming back from Vietnam. And, again, with some pretty serious drug and alcohol problems, or some pretty serious psych problems. Some of them would go back, most of them were going home. And that was kind of what we did, was evaluate whether or not they were going to need further treatment when they got back home, or were they just going to be released from service to go back to civilian life. But because of the staff that I worked with, we had great docs and great nurses, and we had a lot of fun with it, you know. The patients, once they got there and they started getting a little better, they were pretty receptive to what we were doing. And it was a great job. I mean, I got paid to shoot pool, play cards, go swimming, play basketball, go bowling, and do all kinds of activities, because, you know, what are you going to do for twenty-four hours on a locked ward? You can't, so you take—in small groups, you take people out and you do things and you kind of get them re-socialized and accustomed to being around people again, and kind of what passes for a normal life in the military, you know. Not that you get to go bowling and swimming and all that stuff every day, but that's what we did, that's what we got paid for. And you'd throw in the group therapy and the individual therapy and all that in the meantime. That was a real learning experience. My first day at work there, I remember clearly walking in and there were what seemed to me, three really old guys sitting at a card table. They're a lot younger than I am now, but they were sitting around and just kind of looking around, and I walked in, you know, probably got the deer in the headlights look.

And they said "Hey, you!"
And I'm going "Who, me?"
"Yeah, you. Do you know how to play pinochle?"
"No."
They said "Sit down, you're going to learn."

TS: [laughs]

CG: That was my first day at work. And they taught me how to play pinochle.

TS: Now, were these the patients?

CG: These were patients!

TS: Okay. [laughs]

CG: And they outranked me. I mean, everybody still had their military rank, you know, and you knew what everybody's rank was, you know. But yeah, these old sergeants, you know. Sit down, learn how to play pinochle. Got it.

TS: Do you still know how to play pinochle?

CG: I haven't played it in twenty years. [laughs]

TS: [laughs] There you go.

CG: But I played a lot of it then.

TS: Well, let me ask you a question I'm curious about, with—when you've talked a couple times about the drug and alcohol problems coming from Vietnam.

CG: Yes.

TS: Can you give me, like, more detail about what kind of drugs, or you know, what kind of different levels that people were at, when—you know, what would cause them to be in a psychiatric ward because of these problems?

CG: I think that—and I was, I mean, I'm not—wasn't then and I'm not now, you know, a doc or a nurse, but I was a medic.

TS: Right, right.

CG: But I would hear the docs and the nurses talking, and people who knew a lot more than I did. And it seemed that the general feeling was, the people who had the big problems, you know, the drug and alcohol problems with psychiatric problems as a result of being in Vietnam, are probably—maybe not all, but probably the same people who'd be prone to that sort of thing in the civilian world. But being under the kind of pressure and being under that circumstance in Vietnam would tend to make it either worse or pop out a little sooner, if at all. I can't imagine going through that experience and not being a little messed up in the head. And then, if you're dumping, you know, a lot of booze or a lot of drugs on top of it, that—I mean, we know that those kinds of things can make psychological problems worse. You know, it can bring out the worst in any of us, and certainly in someone who had been in that situation, and seen and done what those guys were seeing and doing. It was tough, it was tough. So, you know, everything from pot to hallucinogens to, you know, heroin, whatever anybody happened to be into. Because it was all available. I mean, it was available in Okinawa, it was available in Vietnam, it was probably available in any place that the military was. You know.

TS: Right.

CG: So, those people likely would have had problems anywhere they were, whether—where there were big stressors in their lives. So whether it was marital difficulties at home or problems with being halfway around the world in Vietnam. You know. A lot of people were pretty messed up.

TS: Was there any particular—do you—and I know that you weren't a nurse or the psychiatrist or at that level, but still, I mean, you worked with these guys.

CG: Yeah.

TS: Right, on a daily basis. Was there any particular, like, drug that seemed to be worse than another, or did it just depend on the individual cases?

CG: It just—it was a very individual thing.

TS: Yeah.

CG: We all have our own poisons.

TS: Yeah. So, were they, like—do you think that they were, like—what's the term we use now, self-medicating to cope with the kind of things that they felt—

CG: Yeah, absolutely.

TS: —that happened to them, or what they saw?

CG: Absolutely, I don't think we used those terms back then, but yeah, that's exactly what it was.

TS: Yeah.

CG: Exactly what it was.

TS: Interesting.

CG: And then you have to remember, too, there was this big drug culture back in the States, you know, what we called "back in the real world". So, it was probably more recreational back in the real world, but you get over in Vietnam and it was more survival, maybe, you know.

TS: Well, you had mentioned that before you went in, you had done some drugs and things like that, before.

CG: Yeah.

TS: Did you do any when you were in the service, too? I mean, because you said it was—

CG: I wouldn't have admitted to it then. [both laugh] But yeah, I did, I did. Not when I was in training, because we got tested.

TS: Right.

CG: A lot. But in Okinawa, yeah. And we still got tested, but not so much. Not so much so.

TS: Right. But it was something—because of that culture that you're talking about, it just—and I have talked to other women who say, you know, it was—that was the culture that we were in, and.

CG: That was the culture, that was the culture, so sure.

TS: It was in every party you went to, it was in—things like that.

CG: Well, yeah, and I think that, you know—I worked mostly second shift, so when we got off, and again, these are people that I worked with—or trained with back in Fort Sam Houston, a lot of them, so I'd known them for a while at that point, and I had the only apartment off-base, and my husband was into that scene too, so we would get together over at my place, you know, because who can go home and go to sleep at eleven or twelve o' clock at night after—because it was pretty intense, what we were doing, we were dealing with people's emotions, it wasn't all—you know, let's go bowling today, or let's go shoot pool today. You know, there was a lot of tension there, and you know, it could get a little scary sometimes, too. So you'd get off and you just need to decompress and unwind, so, you know, go get high, go out to eat, you know, play some cards, sit around and shoot the breeze, listen to some music, whatever. And three or four o' clock in the morning, then we'd all disperse, everyone would go get some sleep, and then go back the next day and do it all over again. So that was kind of the culture.

TS: Right.

CG: As long as you didn't get caught, you know. It was a lot easier to not get caught, being off-base.

TS: Oh, I see. So like in the barracks, when they had those health and welfare checks, sort of thing, and pee in this cup, and.

CG: Right, right. But that didn't happen off-base.

TS: Right, they're not coming to your apartment.

CG: Right, because I was married, I could live off-base, you know. So, ours was a popular place.

TS: So it was like a safe zone for people to go to.

CG: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you could still get tested.

TS: Right. At work.

CG: Somehow, we seemed to always know when those things were coming, because we never got caught.

TS: Really?

CG: Never got caught.

TS: Interesting.

CG: Knock on wood.

TS: [chuckles] Well, is there anything about your experience in Okinawa that you, you know, didn't like so much?

CG: No, I enjoyed it. You know, there were some family things that happened, and my mom had a heart attack while I was there, and you know, back home on emergency leave and that sort of thing. But as far as just the job and the military, no. It was a great experience, a lot of growth, personally and professionally, from there. It was difficult, personally, my marriage was not a good one, and it was really not good there. I don't know that it was ever good, but that's not because of the military, it's because I was young and stupid, and too stupid to realize how stupid I was. So, personally, there were some challenges for me, but professionally, as far as the military went, I enjoyed it, I learned a lot, I worked with people who were willing to teach me. You know, I took on additional responsibility, I was getting promoted. I enjoyed what I did, I really enjoyed it. And I felt comfortable with where I was at, you know, and the people that I was working with. It was good, it was really good.

TS: The people that you're working with, did you have any particular mentors that you looked up to, that you felt, you know, were kind of helping you—like you said, you're this young girl, kind of green, and—

CG: There was a civilian nurse that was there, she was a contract nurse, and boy, don't remember her name, but I can see her. She just had this flaming red hair, and these emerald green eyes and these freckles. And all the docs and all the male nurses wanted to date her. And she wasn't having anything to do with any of them, she was just there to have a good time, you know, she didn't want to get serious with anybody. So she was really, really, good, and then the wardmaster on the ward, the NCO in charge of that ward, was, at that point in my life, a really strong mentor for me. He shows up again later in my career, and he wasn't so good.

TS: Oh. [laughs]

CG: But there, he was really good. With four or five of us, he really taught us a lot, he was very good at what he did, and really had a knack for working with patients and kind of getting things done with them. So, yeah, he was Dave Shade.

TS: Dave Shade.

CG: Dave Shade, he was good.

TS: Now, you've been in for a couple years now. And how long did you stay at Okinawa?

CG: Two years.

TS: Two years, so that would have been almost—going on three—

CG: Let's see, I went to Okinawa in '72, really early '72, and left in really late '74. So almost two full years, now.

TS: Okay, and how long did you enlist for, originally?

CG: Three years.

TS: So you're coming up on your—did you re-enlist?

CG: I re-enlisted when I was in Okinawa, for six years. I knew I liked it.

TS: That was my question, was, like, what are you thinking now about the military and your future with the military?

CG: Oh, I knew I liked it, so I took the six years.

TS: Yeah.

CG: Got the big bonus.

TS: How much was your bonus then, do you remember?

CG: Ten thousand dollars. That was a lot of money back then, was a lot of money. But you know what? I'd have done it for nothing. I'd have done it for nothing. I had a job, I had responsibility, I had friends, I had a paycheck, I had a great life, felt like I was doing good things for people. They didn't have to pay me a dime. Didn't have to pay me a dime.

TS: You would have re-enlisted for however long?

CG: I would have, I would have. Because I knew then that I wanted to make it a career. I think I probably knew that as soon as I got out of basic training.

TS: Really?

CG: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Because you had mentioned, back when we started this conversation, that you felt like you fit in.

CG: Yeah.

TS: Was this like the first place you really felt like you fit in?

CG: No, no, but I knew—I knew that that was the kind of feeling I wanted in my life. Because of how I grew up, you know, and having that little—large clique of kids in the neighborhood.

TS: Right. Oh, that's true, right.

CG: And that's important to me, you know, and I—I just knew that I needed that, and I wanted that. So I like it. So I knew I was going to stay. I knew I was going to stay. So, yeah, the bonus was nice. Not necessary. I remember the day I went to pick it up, though.

TS: Yeah.

CG: I mean, I went by myself, and I remember I also had my husband's paycheck to cash. Even back then, I got that part right. So between his paycheck and my bonus—and I just took my purse with me, this big purse that I had. And I had all these—I mean, they paid it out in cash. I could not believe they were giving me this much money in cash. So I was scared, I mean, walking from the finance office over to the bank with this purse bulging with all these hundred dollar bills. And I was like, oh my god, what am I going to do if somebody stops me? [laughs]

TS: Was your pace very quick? [chuckles]

CG: Very quick! Very quick, yeah.

TS: Get to the bank, and—

CG: It was so funny, though. But yeah, that was—that was an interesting day. [both laugh]

TS: So, where'd you go next, after Okinawa?

CG: Back to Fort Sam Houston.

TS: Now, did you put in to go there, or did you have like a dream sheet sort of thing, or?

CG: Actually, Dave Shade had been an instructor at Fort Sam in the same program that I graduated from, it was the 91F program, the psych tech program. And they had asked him to come back and be the NCO in charge of that school. So before he left, he left Okinawa before I did—before he left, he asked me if I would be interested in coming and teaching.

And I said "Gosh, I don't know, I've never done anything like that." And in spite of—I was a little shy, and I don't, to this day, don't like speaking in front of people, but I do like teaching. So I said "Let me think about it."

And he said "All right, you think about it, and when you," we already knew I was coming to Fort Sam, already had orders at the time that Dave left. He said "When you get there, if you decide that you want to do the teaching thing instead of just going and working at the hospital, you get in touch with me and let me know, and I'll make it happen."

So I thought about it, I said "Oh, what the heck." So I got in touch with him, and he made it happen. So I never went to the hospital and went straight to the school, and divorced my first husband, went and learned how to be a teacher. And met my—who would become my second husband. [laughs] On very short period of time. And spent—gosh, I don't remember, two years, three years, teaching. And I don't know that I was the best teacher that there ever was, I enjoyed it, but I never got over being nervous. But it was good, it was really good just teaching and having some influence over what people were learning, and you know, I thought it was important to take care of soldiers, and just being able to impart that to other people, there would be even more people that could get taken care of. The Vietnam [War] was all but over, at that point. But yeah, so I went back and I taught at the academy.

TS: Which academy?

CG: It's the Academy of Health Sciences at Fort Sam Houston.

TS: At Fort Sam Houston. And what kind of classes did you teach?

CG: Anything anybody needed to know about working on a psych ward, you know, everything from how do you write a nursing note to how do you talk to somebody who's absolutely crazy out of their mind to how do you talk to somebody who's suicidal to the drug and alcohol abuse component to, you know, how do you work on a locked ward, just—anything anybody needed to know. We wrote the lesson plans, we taught the classes. It was—let's see, how many people were there? We had our officer in charge, Colonel Chip Youngman, he was really cool. And then Captain David Anna, who remains a good friend to this day. We've known David and his wife for longer—Dan and I have, for longer than we've been married. And David was our immediate supervisor, and there was Dave Shade, who was the NCO in charge, two other NCOs, and then me and Dan, guy named Gil Hankie, and Rob Meyers, and Richard Glitch[?]. And we taught—I said, that group was together for several years there. We taught a lot of kids coming through how to do what we did.

TS: And how old were you at this time?

CG: At that point, I was early twenties.

TS: Seems like—

CG: Twenty-three, twenty-four. Something like that.

TS: Do you look back on that now and—that level of responsibility that you had as a twenty-three year old, probably about twenty-two, twenty-three maybe, do you think about that? Like, level of responsibility that the military gave you at that age.

CG: I didn't at the time, because it just seemed natural, you know. They gave me the responsibility, but they gave me everything you needed to have in order to meet those responsibilities. They gave me the training, they gave me the support, and again, I worked with great people who really knew what they were doing, and if I didn't know how to do something, somebody else did, and they could either teach me or they could do it and I could stand back and learn. You know, as a group, we just clicked. And I don't think we ever really thought about failing, because we knew we weren't going to, you know. It never bothered me, I never was nervous about the responsibility. I was just nervous that I, you know—

TS: Just speaking in front of people?

CG: Yeah, that part of it.

TS: So actually doing the job wasn't the nervous part, it was just actually—

CG: Yeah.

TS: The situation of it, who you're talking to.

CG: Right, right. Yeah.

[Audio file 1 ends, audio file 2 begins]

TS: Now, did you—you're working with a lot of men, here, right?

CG: Yes.

TS: And we hear a lot of stories about, you know, the treatment of women in the military, by men.

CG: Yeah.

TS: Has not always gotten a very good reputation.

CG: Yeah.

TS: What was your experience?

CG: The guys that I worked with treated me with respect. I never had any problems. Never harassed, never any unwanted attention, none of those terrible things that you hear about. Now, was there some of that that went on as I went through my career? Absolutely, there was. There was when I was in the reserves, there was with units that I might be working with or—but the people that I actually worked with, you know, my peers, my coworkers, never. And I never had too much of an issue with anybody, because I never had a problem calling somebody out and getting right in their face about it. So, never happened more than once with the same person. Maybe I just got lucky, you know, because I know that's not always the case for other women. But I know that there can be some very difficult circumstances, and I can see how that could happen. But I never had any problem, and my coworkers always treated me with a great deal of respect. So, I just worked with great guys, I was very lucky. And I did work—it was pretty much all guys up until—really, until I joined the reserves. I worked with very few women the first ten or eleven years that I was in the military.

TS: And you're in the medical field, too, which is more like the traditional field for women.

CG: Right.

TS: Do you think that might have had anything to do with your experience?

CG: Absolutely, I think that had I been in a field unit, my experience would have been very different, just from talking with other women over the years. I'm sure it would have been.

TS: And you also indicated a couple of times that you'd been promoted.

CG: Yes.

TS: And so, in your evaluations, were your ratings and things like that—

CG: I always got really good ratings. I only got one really bad rating, in my entire career, and that was from Dave Shade.

TS: Oh, so this is the later period that you're talking about?

CG: Yes. He was—Dan and I worked in the same office with Dave, and I had divorced my first husband, and Dave was actually the guy who—he knew our history in Okinawa, my

first husband had been running around on me, and I don't really want to get into a lot of this—

TS: No problem.

CG: —but Dave came to me after we got back to the States, and said "Don't know how to tell you this, but it's happening again."

And I said "That's it." And I went home and I confronted him, and I said "You're out of here." And then moved on with the rest of my life. So I did, you know, just—I'm not doing that. So after a period of time, Dan and I started dating, and we kept it very low-key, didn't want anybody to know, and then we decided to get married. So we did. And we went and told Dave. And Dave got very angry, and I'm not sure why, but he did.

TS: Was he married?

CG: Yeah, yeah. Married, kids, you know, and Dave had never, I mean—I think he kind of thought of himself as a father figure, but anyways, he wasn't, he was my—he was my NCOIC [non-commissioned officer in charge], but that was that. But he got really unhappy and he wrote us both really terrible—it was called NCOERs, for our evaluation reports. Wrote really terrible ones, and mine was particularly bad, much worse than Dan's. Fortunately, it didn't have too much of an impact on my career. But that was the only bad rating I ever got, was from Dave Shade. All the others were—so, it really—

TS: It was like a fluke-y sort of thing, with—

CG: Yeah, it looked like a blip on the radar, you know. Excellent, excellent, excellent, awful, excellent, excellent. [both chuckles] So you know, it's like, who is this guy?

TS: Did you—could you write, like, a rebuttal or anything to his?

CG: You can always appeal that kind of stuff, but at that point, forget it. Because I knew already that I was going to be leaving there and working down at the hospital, and he would be out of my chain of command, and I just didn't want to—that's kind of how I go, is it important in the long run? No, okay, let's just move on then.

TS: I see.

CG: And that's what I did. So I went over and worked in the hospital [unclear].

TS: And this is still in Fort Sam Houston?

CG: [coughs] Yes, still Fort Sam. We stayed at Fort Sam for a long time.

TS: How long were you there?

CG: There about eight years.

TS: Well, now, you're—okay, so, a couple contextual things, I guess. You talked about the Vietnam War winding down.

CG: Yes.

TS: Did you see changes with the Vietnam War winding down, within the army, and specifically where, you know, in your job?

CG: Yeah, because you know, with the war winding down, you need a lot fewer people, so classes got smaller, staffs got smaller. Patient loads at the hospital, to some degree, got smaller. So yeah, there were some changes. And then focuses, you know, the military focus changed, and there were a lot of RIFs, reduction of force, so a lot of people who wanted to stay weren't allowed to stay. A lot of people who had, you know, fifteen, sixteen years in, seventeen years in, you know, we all knew people who got RIFed right out just before retirement. It was like, thank you very much for giving us the best you had, now you're out of here and we don't know you anymore.

TS: And no retirement.

CG: Yeah, and no retirement, you know, nothing. So there was a lot of anger in—I mean, people were really scared, you know, what's going to happen to me, what's going to happen to my family now that all this is going on?

TS: When they depended on the military for, like, their career.

CG: Right, and then, you know, promotions, of course, got tight. Where at one point, you could move from, you know, private to sergeant very, very quickly, it could take a long time now to get promoted. So that was a frustration for people, too.

TS: And what was your rank about now?

CG: Let's see. I was a staff sergeant. I got promoted while I was teaching, so I was a staff sergeant at that point.

TS: Did you receive any memorable awards or recognition that—

CG: I got a couple of awards, just army commendation medals, which aren't a real high level, you know, it's just kind of "Thank you for doing a good job". I kind of saw that paycheck as my thanks for doing a good job. [both laugh]

TS: Yeah.

CG: But I did, I got—I don't remember what else I got, I got a few things, and I'll show you my uniform, I've still got it set up in there.

TS: Oh, do you? Great, okay.

CG: Yeah. And I think I got a meritorious service medal at one point, maybe. It was never the big thing for me. It was nice, and I appreciated people, you know, thinking that I'd done a good enough job that, you know, they wanted to write me up for it. And it was kind of expected of commanders and OICs[?], you know, if you leave a place, you know, you thank your staff, and one of the ways you thank your staff is if, you know, you can get a medal for them, you do that. You know, well, that was all really well and good, but I just liked doing the job and, you know, I was okay with that. It would have been okay if I hadn't gotten anything at all. But I got a few and I felt like I probably got more than my fair share, so I was okay with that.

TS: Well, when did you leave Fort Sam Houston, approximately?

CG: I think the last time we left there, because Dan and I were married at this point, and he went to school. I think we probably left there in '79, '80, something like that.

TS: So you witnessed the WAC ending and the integration into the regular army, with the women?

CG: Oh yeah.

TS: Tell me about that. Did you see any changes?

CG: Yes, we did. We all got fatigues, we all got combat boots, and we all had to go learn how to fire an M16. And I thought that was the coolest thing. [laughs] I loved it. I loved it, yeah. Other than that, no, not a lot. And we had to change our brass that we wore on our uniforms, and I was disappointed—I liked the brass that we wore, because nobody wore it but us, we were special. And then we couldn't wear it anymore, and we weren't special. You know, but we did know how to fire an M16 and we did get to wear the same uniforms as the guys, we got rid of those godawful light blue PT uniforms.

TS: [laughs]

CG: And we had our real—

TS: It took that long to get rid of them?

CG: Oh my god. Well, the WAC—we changed over, I want to say it was '75, maybe? '74, '75? Probably '75, kind of time frame. Because I was at Fort Sam Houston when that happened.

TS: Seventy-eight, I think was the year that it actually, officially—

CG: Maybe officially, but we had started changing over the uniforms, and—

TS: Oh, I see, before that, really? Okay.

CG: Yeah, and having to qualify on the range and do a lot of other things, we had had to do that. Because I remember doing that at Fort Sam Houston, when we went out to Camp Bullis and they loaded up all the women. I'm sure those guys that were the range officers that day were a little nervous, but no problems.

TS: [laughs] How'd you do?

CG: No problems. I did fine, I'm a good shot.

TS: Are you?

CG: Yeah, I was—

TS: Were you a marksman?

CG: Let's see, I'm trying to remember what the levels were. There was marksman, expert, and sharpshooter. And the first time I qualified, whatever the middle one was, that's what I got.

TS: That's what you got?

CG: And then every time after that, whatever the top one was, that's what I got.

TS: Oh, good shot, then.

CG: I was a good shot, I was a good shot, yeah. And I enjoyed it, I enjoyed doing it, so. I like that kind of thing, and I liked—you know, much to my surprise, I enjoyed field duty. And I think that's what I liked so much about being in the reserve. I was in a field hospital, and all of our training, just about, was done in the field. We didn't see the inside of a hospital very much. I think I would have enjoyed the field, had I been on active duty.

TS: Really?

CG: Yeah, I do.

TS: Oh, that's neat.

CG: I liked it.

TS: I'm going to pause for a minute here.

CG: Okay.

TS: Let's see. [Can we talk about it a little?], let's see. [recording paused] We took a short little break and Claudia's come back with a cute little box, and it's got some patches, and—we were talking about how you wish you'd had your uniform the way that all the—

CG: Yeah, I thought I had it set up, but I don't know that I even remember how to set it up. Probably I could figure it out. But yeah, there's my medals—

TS: Oh, yeah!

CG: And you know, that one's probably for not getting caught doing things I shouldn't have been doing in the first place, and that was because somebody thought I did a good job and they made that same mistake three times, because that's how many times they gave that one to me. [both laugh]

TS: Lots of oak leaf clusters on there, huh?

CG: Hat brass, you know.

TS: What's the—do you know what this one here is, this one?

CG: Um—

TS: Because it looks like it's got barbed wire on the top.

CG: Well, those are—those are the three—that was awarded three times, that's three different awards.

TS: So they're right next to each other there? Okay.

CG: Actually, you can buy those little pieces, all put together like that.

TS: Oh, just like these.

CG: Just like the oak leaf clusters.

TS: Oh, I see, okay.

CG: And I've got—I was going through some papers the other day, I've got an oak leaf cluster in there that goes with something, that I never even put on. But I really don't remember—that might just be an army commendation medal, that might be what that one's for, and I think that's the Vietnam campaign ribbon.

TS: Yeah, I think that's the Vietnam, yes.

CG: And this one's a good conduct—that's the one for not getting caught doing the things you shouldn't have been doing in the first place.

TS: So this one's probably like in the basic training, like—

CG: No, that one came from the academy for something—

TS: Okay.

CG: No, that's a unit citation that I got from something in the reserves. That one, I have no idea.

TS: It's got a three in the middle there, so.

CG: I have no idea what that's for.

TS: Well, maybe I'll take a picture of that before we—before I go.

CG: Yeah.

TS: Oh, now, which—

CG: The hat brass, you know.

TS: Okay.

CG: That's what we wore on our hats. [pause, jingling noises] The ever-important restraint key. No psych tech would be without their restraint key. If you had somebody really get wild on you, and you had to put them in restraints, sooner or later, you needed to let them out, and this was the magic key to get the restraints off of your patients.

TS: Looks like a little mini sword. [both laugh]

CG: It does, kind of. And our caduceus, our medical brass.

TS: Right.

CG: Insignia of rank. This was one of the units—

TS: Oh, that's beautiful.

CG: Yeah. One of the medical units that I was in, that was the brass, and this was another one of the units that I was in, their brass. Lots of different things. That was my unit in Colorado, the double diamonds.

TS: It's another unit patch?

CG: Yeah. Lots of unit patches.

TS: Now, what you said—this unit patch, you said, has been around—

CG: That's been around since World War II.

TS: And what—

CG: That was the 382nd Field Hospital, and at one point in time they were called the Combat Support Hospital, 382nd Combat Support Hospital.

TS: What's the insignia?

CG: It's just a black cat.

TS: I was going to say, it looks like a kitty.

CG: It's a black cat.

TS: The ears are kind of funny on it, but it has really long legs. [laughs]

CG: Yeah, and a short tail. Bob tail.

TS: Guess they did it for what fit in there. So you've got your WAC one in there?

CG: No, I don't that's the one that's missing.

TS: Oh, I see.

CG: I have no idea what happened to that over the years. No idea.

TS: Oh, there's your dog tags.

CG: Dog tags, I'd forgotten where those were. And—

TS: It's not a P38, but— [P38 can refer to a small can opener issued by the U.S. military from 1942 to some time in the 1980s.]

CG: Not a P38, but it's close. [laughter] Little can opener. Oh, that's Dan's.

TS: It looks like he might have outranked you.

CG: He did. Well—he got out and went back to school, went to nursing school. But the whole time that we were enlisted, I outranked him.

TS: Oh, is that right, okay. So when you were—you said you were keeping it quiet, it wasn't because of a rank issue, it was—

CG: No, no.

TS: Okay. Not—

CG: No. And then when he came back in, everybody knew that he was married to an NCO, and they let him back in anyways. And I still teased him, because he was a second lieutenant. Well, everybody knows that everybody else outranks a second lieutenant. [laughter]

TS: That's right.

CG: So I still teased him for a while that I outranked him.

TS: Maybe not a private.

CG: Eh, maybe not a private, but everybody—so that was the insignia for the Academy of Health Sciences, was the book for the learning and the building itself and the medical business there.

TS: Those are really neat.

CG: Yeah. So.

TS: So these are one, two, three, four units.

CG: At least four.

TS: There's another one here, I think. Yeah.

CG: Is that the same—

TS: No, that's a little different.

CG: That's a little different, yup. So there were a bunch of different ones.

TS: [unclear] you have a lot that look like a little red cross.

CG: Yeah, they all have—

TS: I like the red cross with the sword right in the middle of it, that's—

CG: Yup. Well, you're a soldier first.

TS: That's right. Comfort, heal, relief—

CG: Take care of soldiers, and then—

TS: Well, these are really neat, Claudia.

CG: The mountains in the background, like I said, that was the Colorado unit. So, lot of different ones.

TS: Well, we were talking about—no, all of those are really neat. We were talking about, you know, changes, and the early changes you said you saw for women were that you got to shoot an M16.

CG: Yeah.

TS: Did you see any resistance with some of the maybe more senior NCOs, or—that were women that had been in the WAC for like, you know—what's the name of the one sergeant you said?

CG: Sergeant Goodgame.

TS: I mean, you weren't around her anymore, but women like that had been around, that maybe were—did not want to integrate into the army culture.

CG: I did talk to a few women back then who really didn't want to do that. They liked being in the Women's Army Corps. But most of the women wanted to be one army.

TS: Why do you think that was?

CG: Most of the ones that I knew, it was for the job opportunities. They felt like it would open up more fields, because there were a lot of things that were closed, at that point, to women. And they didn't like it, they wanted to be able to do more, nobody wanted to be limited to finance, personnel or medical. They wanted to do some other things, and pretty much, when I joined, that's what it was, was finance, personnel, or medical. You didn't do much else outside of that. Didn't take a lot longer for women to get into other fields, though. So.

TS: Did you see any difference, now, because in '73, then the draft ended.

CG: Yes.

TS: And so then more women started to come in.

CG: Right.

TS: So did you see any changes within the army institutionally, as far as dealing with more women within their ranks, even—because they're also being integrated, too, then.

CG: Just on a day-to-day level, no, life didn't change a whole lot. Things, you know—you got up, you went to work, you did your job. You know, you had to do all the other things that you always had to do, except that now you had to qualify with a weapon periodically. And the uniforms changed a little bit. There was always a lot of talk, and because of where I was stationed, I was at Fort Sam at the time, you know, they were changing the uniforms around, and we tried out some horrendous uniforms. I've got a picture somewhere—we looked like stewardesses, I remember going out to Wilford Hall with a group of students one time, and I was in this lime green kind of double-knit—

TS: I remember that uniform, yeah.

CG: Yeah, oh, yeah. And I had people—air force personnel ask me—United States Air Force personnel—stop and ask me whose army was I in, what country was I from. I'm like, oh my god. So there were a lot of things, just to try and, you know, change the uniforms, you know, what are we going to do with these women. Long and short of it was nothing changed very much. And they're still wearing basically the same uniform that we wore way back then, so. I think more the focus was on—and as the discussions came about, you know, are we going to allow women in combat, are we going to allow women in combat support roles, those kinds of things were where the changes were really taking place. And I think those were some pretty hot contests that went on there, between the ones who wanted it and the ones who didn't and, you know. Most of us just kind of said "Just tell us what you want us to do, you know, and we'll go do it." But day to day, no, not much changed. It was still a job.

TS: And so the women that you saw coming in, the young women that you saw coming in, no change to that?

CG: Not really, not really. Because again, I was in the medical field, and so not a lot changed there. There was in other parts of the military, where you saw the biggest changes. Because our role really didn't change. I don't think there was really a significant change in our role until the Gulf War, you know. That was probably the first time—particularly for enlisted women, you know, for the officers, for the nurses during Vietnam, certainly there were a number of them who were in harm's way and who never came back, or who came back very different people than what they left. But for enlisted women, I don't think that was the case until the first Gulf War, that was probably the first time that

enlisted women were in those situations. So—and that hasn't been all that long ago, when you really think about it.

TS: Right, that's true. So did you—were you stationed somewhere else after Fort Sam Houston?

CG: Fort Gordon.

TS: Fort Gordon.

CG: In Augusta, Georgia. Yeah. It was home of the signal corps, and our Eisenhower Army Hospital there. And I was doing the same thing, I worked on a psychiatric ward, except there, I was the first female wardmaster that they'd ever had. I was the NCO in charge of that ward. First time they'd ever had a woman in that position, so that was very different for a lot of people. Because at that point, I was getting some seniority, and they, instead of calling me the wardmaster, they called me the ward madam. Which didn't go over real well with the powers that be, but you know, I took it in the way that they intended it—it was good fun. You know, again, I was really privileged to work with a great group of people who respected me and respected what I did and what I brought to the job. So I didn't mind it either, I took it in the way that they intended. [chuckles]

TS: So, I mean, I know that you did teaching and you had a different kind of relationship with the people that you taught, but is this like your first real supervisory type role?

CG: No, because I had been a shift supervisor when I was working at the hospital back in Fort Sam after I left the academy. I had been a shift supervisor there, I also was the NCO in change of the OBGYN clinic for a while. Now, how in the world I ended up in that position, I have no idea. But that's what I did. I think I did that for about nine or ten months, until they got somebody else with more appropriate background for it, but I did that and supervised the enlisted staff there and was kind of the liaison for the enlisted staff and the medical professional staff, and had a good time, and had good working relationships with all the docs and the nurses down there. So, supervised those folks, and then just knocked around on a few other positions before I ended up going to Eisenhower.

TS: So, I see, so you did—so yeah, you wouldn't have—actually, it would be silly for me to say "Oh, you just jumped in to this." [both laugh] In charge, yeah.

CG: No, no, didn't work that way.

TS: Well, you—because you said, the army has always prepared you for the role that they wanted to you to do.

CG: Yeah, they did.

TS: What kind of challenges did you face as a supervisor that were different from, you know, you just going in and doing your job?

CG: You know, there's always somebody that wants to push the limits. That's true in any job, and as a supervisor or manager in any position, it's true now, it was true then. You know, your job is to try and figure out what do you have to do to get maximum performance out of this person, how do you turn this person around who maybe is a troublemaker, doesn't want to do the job, whatever. How do you turn them around and get them to do the job you need for them to do? And if you can't do that, how do you get them out of there? I mean, it really does just come down to that. And I can honestly say I only had one person that I ever really needed to just get out of the position, and unfortunately, I was not successful then, and it was a civilian employee. That was my biggest challenge. We had civilian employees who were union, and dealing with a civilian union was the toughest challenge I ever faced in the military. I hated it, I hated it. My military employees, if you will, they understood the basics of the job. You've got to do it, if you don't do it, this is the result, what's it going to be? I never had anybody not come around and do what they needed to do.

TS: Wasn't, like, mission-oriented.

CG: Right, right. But with the civilians, it was very different. And it was a challenge, it was a very, very difficult time. [chuckles] I always say that ten percent of your people cause ninety percent of your problems. It's very true, especially when you're dealing with civilians in a military setting. Because they do have to be treated differently, they're not—

TS: You don't just give them a command and they have to jump.

CG: Yeah, yeah, you can't just give an order, you know. So—and I was young and learning, and I probably could have been a—and probably was a better supervisor for having been through that, but at the time, it was difficult, it was very difficult.

TS: Did you have any other issues with your military subordinates that came to you with, like, personal problems or things like that?

CG: There was always, you know, everybody's got problems. [both chuckle] We've all got problems. And it doesn't stop just because you're in the military.

TS: I'm just wondering if there was any—any particular memorable one that you remember.

CG: No, nothing really jumps out at me. I mean, it was just, you know. The day to day stuff, you know.

TS: Constant flow of people coming?

CG: Yeah, I mean, I remember one guy going through a pretty terrible divorce, and he was pretty torn up about it, but you know what? He dealt with it and he did his job and he moved on. It was a very hard thing for him, you know. One young lady who was pregnant and really didn't want to be and wasn't married and my god, what am I going to do? You know. And you support them and you get them to counseling and you do whatever you can to help them through that, but at the end of the day, they still have to do it and they still have a job to do in the meantime. As a supervisor, you know, a lot of times you can only show your support by making sure that they get to the agencies that they need to, and in the military, that's—you know, there's a lot of support there for that. It's a lot harder in the civilian world. Now, I have somebody come to me and say "I have this problem, what do I do?" I can't just refer them to the chaplain, to social services, to a counselor, you know. All I can do is say "You know, talk to your mom," or "You need to go talk to your preacher." But I can't just make that phone call and say "Hey, I've got a soldier I need to send over." So in a lot of ways, it's a lot easier in the military to deal with that than it is in the civilian world. That was probably one of the biggest adjustments I had to make.

TS: Really?

CG: In moving from the military into the civilian world.

TS: The support network is completely different.

CG: Yeah, yeah.

That and the fact that I can't just say to somebody now "This is what I need for you to do and I need you to do it." You know.

They push back and say "No, I not going to do that."

"What do you mean, you're not going to do that?" [both laugh] "Maybe I didn't make myself clear." It was a lot easier in the military.

TS: There's—the command structure really helps.

CG: I like that chain of command. I miss it.

TS: You can just point to your arm and—okay, move on! [chuckling]

CG: Yeah, yeah. That's been a big challenge.

TS: Well, talk about—you had indicated that you had wanted to maybe make the army a career.

CG: Yes.

TS: And you stayed in after you got out of active duty, but what made you get out—not made you, but what were the reasons that you got out of active duty?

CG: Dan was over at Fort Sam, Dan got reassigned to Fort Gordon, and I didn't. And we went to personnel, the retention people, re-enlistment people. All the people, and said, you know, how can we work this out, how can I get orders to go and join my husband?

TS: Where was Fort Gordon in relation to—

CG: Fort Gordon's in Augusta, Georgia.

TS: Okay.

CG: And we were in San Antonio—

TS: Texas.

CG: Texas. And a lot of people went to bat for me and, you know, my commanding officer, the guy who was in charge of our place where we work, a lot of people did. Wrote letters, made phone calls. Bottom line was, they weren't going to transfer me, couldn't tell me when they were going to transfer me. And really didn't even want to talk about it.

TS: And this was like in '83?

CG: This would have been—yeah, yeah.

TS: Eighty-three?

CG: So. We just said, you know, all I need is a goal here. Just tell me, in a year, we can do this. In two years, we can do this. Because I want to stay, I want to do what I'm doing, and certainly I've realized that the military's first priority isn't stationing me with my husband, necessarily, but come on, let's be reasonable here. I've got ten years in, and I only owed them three more months or something like that. They'd just finished putting him through anesthesia school. He had a three-year commitment, so if one of us was going to get out, we knew who it was going to be. And as part—as you get close to your ETS date, expiration of term of service date, one of the things that you have to do is go and see the retention NCO so they can try and talk you into reenlisting.

I went down and plopped down, and he said "So, how many you going to sign up for this time?"

I said "I'm not."

He said "What do you mean, you're not?"

I said "I'm going to get out."

And I told him my sad tale of woe, and he said "Oh. Well, you'll be back, you'll reenlist, you're not going to give up this much time."

I said "You don't understand, I'm going to. The next time you see me, if I don't have orders or have some idea of when I will have orders, I'm getting out."

So, couple months later, I went down with my papers to out-process off of active duty. He said "Oh, you came to sign up?"

I put the papers on his desk, said "No, I'm out of here."

"Oh, you are?"

So, it was disappointing. That was my one disappointment with the military. I felt like I still had a contribution to make, I hadn't done everything I wanted to do, and I was really disappointed that nobody would work with me a little more than what they did. Because I saw it happening with other people. At that point in time, there were regulations in place and the, you know, one year apart and then you'd be together, I couldn't get anything like that. So I got out. Because the only thing that I loved more than the military was my husband. You know. So, got out, went to the reserves, it was disappointing, but I'm not the kind of person that, you know, beats themselves up with regrets. It is what it is, we moved on, we made other decisions, things worked out. I think it was the military's loss.

TS: Well, you're—but you're still in the reserve.

CG: I was still in the reserve.

TS: You're still in the reserve.

CG: Still in the reserve, but—

TS: Tell me how that was different than the active duty.

CG: Oh my god, let me count the ways. [laughs] First off, it was part time, supposedly. But—and initially it was, because when I showed up at my reserve unit, they didn't know what to do with me. I was a staff sergeant, and I was a very senior staff sergeant at that point. And I'm still not sure how I ended up in that unit, I have no idea who assigned me to that unit, but they didn't have a position for me.

TS: What unit was it?

CG: This was the 382nd Combat Support Hospital in Augusta.

TS: Okay.

CG: They had no position for me. So I showed up for the first drill date and they said "Who are you?"

And I said "Here." And gave them my records.

And I remember very clearly, the guy who turned out to be my NCOIC looking at the company commander and saying "Now what do I do?" [both chuckle]

I said "Well, let me help. I'll do anything, I don't care."

So he said "Well, what have you done?"

So I started telling him.

He said "Well, we don't have any of that here."
Okay, fine. I said "What do you need?"
He said "I need a truck driver."
I said "Well, I'll go and drive a truck."
He said "You can't drive a truck."
I said "I can drive a truck."
He said "No, you're an NCO, we don't put NCOs in as truck drivers."
I said "Okay, then you figure it out."
"Okay, go drive a truck."

TS: [laughs]

CG: So, I went down to the motor pool and I was a truck driver for, I don't know, four, five, six months. And I learned a lot down in the motor pool, things that stood me well later on with that same unit. So I got in good with the guys at the motor pool, and I learned how to change tires on a big two and a half ton truck, and I learned how to pull a big generator on the back of a truck and do all kinds of things that I didn't get to do when I was on active duty, and after a while they figured, well, maybe we really better do something with her. So I think I became—maybe I was a platoon sergeant, or assistant platoon sergeant, for a couple months, and then I was a platoon sergeant. So I did that, and I had, I don't know, forty or fifty guys—mostly guys.

TS: Any women?

CG: A few, but mostly guys. That was pretty cool, and then I ended up as the training NCO, and that's when it became more than just a part-time job. I was over there every week for meetings or doing something or planning training or doing stuff at home. And at that point in time, I was also working, I had found a job, my first civilian job, I was working a little retail shop, and I was going to school full-time, so I was very busy.

TS: I guess you are.

CG: Very busy. But that unit is where I really learned how to be a field soldier, because almost all of our training was in the field. We went down to—what was the name of the place in Florida? Camp Bland or Blandonberger[?] [probably Camp Blanding near Starke, Florida] or something, I can't remember. Hotter than blazes down there, we're down there for several summers. And you know, we're in full packs and out in the field and no showers and the whole bit. And it was tough, it was a real challenge, you know, because it was not cool. You know, heat exhaustion was a big deal, and you know, running around making sure that everybody had water and this and that and planning things and learning how to protect your positions and, you know, fields of fire and this that and the other thing. It was good, it was—boy, I learned things I never thought I'd be learning.

TS: But you said earlier that you enjoyed this field work.

CG: I did, I enjoyed it. I mean, I enjoyed the learning, I enjoyed the people that I was with. It was a good group—it was a very good group. So, did that for a while. I was with a different—let's see, gosh, I don't even remember how many units I was there, but went to Colorado because of Dan's—he was still in the military, so transferred out there, and doing similar things with the unit out there.

TS: More field unit type work?

CG: More field unit, that may not have been Colorado, though. It was the 5502nd. And I don't know if they were a field hospital—I don't remember. It was 5502nd something or other [U.S. Army Hospital, but seems to have a significant field focus in some way]. Most of the unit trained in the hospital, but some of us were out in the field, because that's really, if we were ever deployed, that's where we would be. We would be in the field. And when we did our two weeks in training, we went up to Boise, Idaho, a couple of the years that we were there, and supported the Idaho National Guard. They were a tanker unit, had a tanker unit up there, training. So, you know, the big Abrams tanks and all kinds of tracked vehicles. So we were crawling around on all these vehicles, learning how to extricate patients from them, plus treating real soldiers with real injuries. They were getting fingers smashed and, you know, tank lids dropped on heads and, you know, the neck injuries and the cranial injuries from that, and just one of the big hazards for these guys, you know, there's a lot of sand and dirt blowing around. We treated more eye injuries than you can shake a stick at. We also had a Special Forces unit with us, doing jumps, and so we're up in the helicopters and, you know, we treated a few broken ankles and some injuries from the jumps. You know, just living out there in that environment with all these folks. And that was the first time that I ever really worked with a lot of women in the reserves. There were a lot of women in that unit.

TS: In Colorado?

CG: Yeah, yeah. So that was kind of neat, to just be with another group of like-minded women. That was fun. I loved being in those units, and again, I was moving up and getting more responsibility and, you know, still training NCO but for a much bigger group of people. And doing presentations, and still nervous about talking in front of people, but managed to do it. Then we transferred back to Fort Gordon and went back to the old unit again. And just stepped right back in [unclear, both talking] training NCO, and eventually first sergeant in that unit. And that's when first Gulf War, and they deployed half our unit, they mixed them with some other units to come up with what they needed to take to the first Gulf War. A lot of the folks that went came back, and within a year, had some really serious illnesses going on, some weird cancers that the individuals thought probably came about from having been over in that environment. Some people who had been really healthy, and I'm thinking of one guy who was my assistant platoon sergeant—I mean, he was just this big, healthy, robust guy, and two years later, he just looked like some sick old man. He was younger than me. It was just—

TS: Do you know what happened to them?

CG: No. No. I—he didn't know what happened to him.

TS: No, I mean, after—after, did he recover?

CG: No, he never did, he never did, and I had heard that he had passed away about ten years later. So. That was—

TS: So you think maybe something got picked up out in the desert, and—

[The largely unexplained multisymptom illness discussed here is often referred to as Gulf War syndrome (GWS) or Gulf War illness (GWI). Theories exist which connect these conditions with exposure to chemical weapons, nerve gas, nerve gas antidotes, pesticides or depleted uranium. No clear medical conclusion has been reached on the causality of these illnesses, but it would appear that the U.S. military recognizes and provides treatment related to this phenomenon.]

CG: That's what he thought. But that was—that was a very sobering experience, you know. First time in a long time the reserves had been mobilized like that. Lot of people—the unit in Colorado was a great example. I had stayed in touch with them, some of the folks out there, especially the physicians, you know, a lot of little towns—little mountain towns out there, they'd have one doctor in the whole town. Well, they got their education paid for by the military, so you got to pay the piper. But boy, those towns suffered. There was—a lot of things happened that most people don't think about with the military. And with reserves. So it just added another dimension, another perspective, to what I knew and felt and thought about being in the military. You know, on the one hand, yeah, you said you'd do it, you said you'd go—you've got to go, you've got to pay, you know, pay the time for this education that you got or whatever it was. But there's a lot more price to be paid than just that. People don't think about these things. Being in the military really is a special thing, and—special in a good way, and sometimes special in a very hard way.

TS: The sacrifices made.

CG: Absolutely. Absolutely. And—

TS: Now, you didn't have to go to—in the Gulf War.

CG: No, I didn't go, no. I didn't go. They took mostly the docs, the nurses, x-ray technicians, you know. The people who had very specific skills that they were going to need over there.

TS: Did your husband have to go?

CG: No, he did not go, he did not go. He actually backfilled in a position for other people that went, and he was teaching at the time, and they just told him to get ready, that he might have to just start really pushing students through very quickly. But that didn't happen, fortunately.

TS: Because the war ended a little quickly, more—

CG: Right, very, very quickly. Very quickly.

TS: Yeah. Well, did you notice from—you talked a little bit about the difference of being in the reserve and in the active duty. Was there any attitude difference?

CG: Yeah, there was. I mean, some people that were in the reserves, it was just a joke, and they didn't—didn't really want to be there. And others took it very seriously. It made it difficult when we had to interact with the regular army troops, because other people who didn't take it seriously, it's kind of hard to command respect, you've got people that are out there acting like clowns.

TS: Yes.

CG: And those people made it bad for the rest of us. And then part of it was just the system. We were not as well trained, the reserves and the National Guard, I don't think are as well trained as the regular army. It's a budgetary thing, and I don't know if that's true now, in light of the fact that there's a lot of reservists overseas right now, lot of reservists deploy. But when I was in, that wasn't the case, and we didn't have the budget, so we didn't have the equipment, we didn't have the training, we didn't have a lot of things that we needed. So our training was pretty questionable at times, unless you were—

TS: Duct tape and—

CG: [chuckles] Yeah. Well, unless you were talking about the professionals, you know, the docs, the nurses, the people who did this every day on their civilian jobs.

TS: Right.

CG: You know, certainly they were competent. But those of us who had other jobs, you know, you're a clerk, you're a store manager, you're a bus driver, you're, you know, a postal worker, and for two days out of the month, you're a medic or you're a medical records specialist or you're a lab technician? How proficient can you be, particularly if you don't have what you need to train with? But it was a very easy budget to cut, you know, so. And a lot of people didn't realize that they were cutting their own throat by cutting those budgets, too, because I think and I know that in that first Gulf War, there were a lot of people who had to play catch-up very quickly. And the people that really suffered for that were the soldiers. That's not a good thing.

TS: And then what—how long, so—how long after the Gulf War did you stay in?

CG: Let's see, Gulf War was—

TS: Ninety-one, '92.

CG: Got out in '94.

TS: Ninety-four?

CG: Ninety-four, yeah.

TS: So a couple years after.

CG: Yeah, yeah. And it was time for me to go, I mean, I had been in over twenty years at that point.

TS: Were you able to retire?

CG: Yeah, I retired. So, you know, it's—we're combining—our unit was combining with the one in Atlanta, everybody was going to have to travel to Atlanta, I didn't want to drive a hundred and fifty miles. And it was time to retire and step aside and let somebody else move up. So I did. Was good, but it was—I knew it was time to go.

TS: Yeah.

CG: I knew it was time to go.

TS: And what—did your husband, was he still then on active duty?

CG: He retired in '95, I think.

TS: Oh, close.

CG: Yeah.

TS: Pretty close together. Well, you—

CG: Ninety-five or '96.

TS: Yeah.

CG: Yeah, so.

TS: Do you have any—when you—you made me think, when you were talking about the reserves and you mentioned how a lot of the reserves and National Guard are, today, in the wars we have going on.

CG: Yes.

TS: And the experiences that they're having to—you know, like you say, from these small towns, taking a doctor from a town. So when you pick up the paper and you read about things like that, do you think about that, even today?

CG: I do. I do. I mean, it's just a part of what I went through, so I'm very aware of that. I just want all the soldiers and their families [unclear]—and I think it's discussed more today than it was back then, I think we're much more open about the impact that that has, and I think the military and the government in general probably are doing a little more to deal with that, to prepare people for it, than was done. I think that was a learning experience for us, we're in that learning curve.

TS: Yes.

CG: I think probably they're better equipped to handle that today.

TS: There's a couple events—go back to, like, some things that happened in the culture. And actually, one of the things that kind of happened close to the time that you went in, and that was Kent State.

CG: Yes.

TS: Do you remember that?

CG: Oh, I do.

TS: And also Jackson State, too.

CG: I don't remember Jackson State, but Kent State—there's a song that Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young made quite famous, about that. But yeah, I remember the Kent State shootings.

TS: What'd you think about it?

CG: I thought it was ridiculous to put troops in that position, and I thought it was ridiculous to put students in that position. That never should have happened. Never should have happened. Take a kid who probably had very poor training and put him in the middle of a mob with a weapon with live ammunition, what do you think's going to happen? That was so stupid, so irresponsible. Never should have happened. It's ridiculous.

TS: We had talked, before you went in the military, about your views, kind of, on Vietnam. And then, over the course of your service, you know, you're in during the war and the war ends. Did any of your views change at all, or? About how you felt?

CG: I separate the politics of the war from the war itself. And back then, not so much anymore, but back then, I really tried to stay away from the politics of it. I—you know—

TS: So, if somebody tried to engage you in a conversation about Westmoreland or Nixon or something like that?

CG: Nixon was a lot of things, but what he was first and foremost to me, at the point that I was in my life, he was my commander in chief. And like the politics or not, like what he did or not, and I don't care what you say about Westmoreland or any of it, they were my commanders, and I said that I would support them. I didn't have to like what they did, but I would support them, and I did. And I think—it's pretty simplistic, and I recognize that life's a lot more complicated than this, but I think that whether you are a soldier or an airman or sailor, and you're supporting the commander in chief, or whether you are working for IBM or Wal-Mart or the postal service, if you've signed on to do a job, then you need to do one of two things. You either need to do the job and take the paycheck and do the job as well as you can, or if you can't do that for whatever reason, philosophical differences or something else, you have to go on and do something else. Period. It's just that simple. I don't particularly care for Barack Obama. Didn't particularly care for Jimmy Carter's politics. But you know what? I'm still, in my heart, a soldier, and they are—were—and so many others, the commanders in chief. And I have to support that. I don't have to like the politics, don't have to approve of them, don't have to vote for them. But they're still a commander in chief. And they deserve and need the respect that goes along with that, because they can't do that job without it. And for me as a soldier, I think that's probably the most important job—other people will disagree, depending on your perspective, but to me, that's probably one of—that is the most important aspect of their job, because I think taking care of the country, taking care of our security, is paramount to everything else. Of course I would think that, you know, I was a soldier for twenty-plus years. But it's just the way I feel about it.

TS: What about the—you had mentioned this a little bit earlier, about when—the conversation that people were having about women in combat, and the different opportunities that women could have, and that in many cases, I guess that issue has been resolved, because women are in combat, not that they never were—you described in World War II and different places.

CG: Right.

TS: But I guess my question is, some people say, you know, there are certain jobs women should just not do. Like I think right now, submarines is the area that is controversial.

CG: Right.

TS: So what are your thoughts on that?

CG: Well, I have really mixed feelings about it. As a woman, I don't want to be denied anything just because I am a woman. And I would—and particularly if I were a young woman right now, you know. I'm, you know, past my sell-by date at this point, you know. [chuckles] [unclear]

TS: [laughing] Sell-by date?

CG: Yeah.

TS: Okay. I haven't heard that before, Claudia. Okay.

CG: But, you know. If I were a young woman, I wouldn't want anybody holding me back just because I'm female. On the other hand, as a commander, I wouldn't want anybody telling me I have to have someone in my unit that I felt was going to hamper my ability to carry out my mission, or that was going to heighten the level of danger that my unit, my troops, were going to be exposed to. And I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings because you're female, but I'd rather hurt your feelings than increase the likelihood of failure on my part. So, so there's that.

TS: Do you think, though—and I'm going to interrupt you on that, because—is it because they're female that they would be more likely to bring it down for whatever particular role they're playing, or?

CG: No, not necessarily. Some of it has to do with, how is that woman going to be accepted by her male counterparts? And again, maybe I'm being really naïve—

TS: No, it's a contemporary question that we're grappling with.

CG: Sure. I think—but here's where the naïve part comes in. I think that as combat has changed and the way we fight wars has changed, that shift—you know, in Vietnam, I think it was probably—there was less technology, I think there was probably a lot more face to face, physical, you know, can you keep up physically kind of thing. But certainly more of that in World War II, where there was even less technology. We've got a lot more technology, and we're fighting wars and battles with the help of a lot more advanced weaponry than what we ever did before. That maybe it doesn't require that physical strength, that ability to just go and go and go and go. Instead, you have to manage weapons systems. So maybe that's going to change some of that. Is there ever going to be a time where we don't have people right on the front line and that ability to keep up physically is important? I don't think so, I think we'll always require that to some degree or other, and I think that's where the questions are really going to lie for women in combat. Should we be in those positions? Again, if I'm a commander, I want to be able to have a say-so in that. But as we fight wars differently, I think women's roles

will continue to expand. I think there was a time when it was going to be exceedingly difficult for the mothers of America to see their daughters on the evening news talked about as casualties of war. I don't know that it's any more difficult to see your daughter talked about that way than it would be to see your son talked about that way. I think—I think it's going to be just as difficult to see that, I don't think you can use that argument. A lot of people did for a while, but I don't think you can use that argument. I'm not a parent, but I can't imagine that it would be any less painful for the parent of a daughter than the parent of a son to lose a child. So I don't know if that's a valid argument anymore. I think it has to come down to the commanders, and what's going to get the job done. I think it's a very goal-oriented position to have taken.

TS: Right, and you have said before, too, that, you know—you, in your own experience, have felt like you were trained and given all the tools necessary to complete that task along the way, and so if you get to the point where you have somebody in your unit, you're either—whether they're male or female or whatever—

CG: Right.

TS: —They're going to know—you're going to know before you have to roll out the tanks or whatever.

CG: Absolutely, absolutely. And part of it's just going to come down to the individual soldier. You know, just as some men are more qualified for certain positions, some women are going to be, and there are some women out there that can keep up with any soldier around. But again, I think that needs to be a commander's decision.

TS: And then the other controversial, I guess, policy that's in the middle of changing right now is that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," that is kind of in the middle of—it's been repealed, but it hasn't been implemented yet.

CG: Yeah.

TS: What are your thoughts on that?

CG: You know, I didn't care when I was in, and I don't care now. If you can do a job, I don't care. Doesn't matter to me. I can see where some guys might not—there's some real homophobic people out there, you know. I'm not one of them. And I don't care if a guy or a girl is homosexual. If you're doing the job and you're able to have good working relationships with the people around you, my personal feeling is it shouldn't matter. I understand why it does to some people, I don't like it, but they didn't ask me that. But if you can do a job and maintain professional working relationships, doesn't matter, you know. If you're a good soldier, you're a good soldier.

TS: So if you had someone—and are you still working?

CG: Yes, I still work.

TS: And so if you had somebody, "Hey, I heard, Claudia, that you were in the army and I'm thinking about joining," man or woman, you know, what would you say to them?

CG: It's not for everybody. I have a young man that works for me now, who is trying his best to get into the Marine Corps, and he's got a lot of obstacles. And he's asked me a number of times about my experiences in the military, you know. For me, it was a really great experience, I don't regret, not one single day of it. Wasn't all perfect every day, but it was the best thing I ever did. But it is not for everyone. One of my sisters joined, and as happy as I was, she was miserable. She hated it, and she only stayed two years.

TS: Was this the one that was excited for you to go?

CG: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Did she join the army?

CG: She did.

TS: What, did—what year did she join?

CG: I think she was in '72.

TS: So, shortly after you.

CG: Shortly after me.

TS: What kind of field did she get into?

CG: Medical.

TS: Oh, interesting.

CG: Medical. And she really didn't like it. It's not for everyone, it is not for everyone. And that's fine, you know. The world would be a pretty boring place if all we had was vanilla ice cream, you know. But anybody who is looking for a challenge, looking for a way to make a really important contribution, wants to be a part of something that's bigger than they are, it's not a bad way to go. And the excitement's pretty good, too.

TS: [chuckles]

CG: You know, you can go from extreme boredom to amazing, intense excitement very quickly. And you've got to be able to deal with those extremes.

TS: Yeah.

CG: But for me, it was a good life.

TS: Well, we talked about how—how you did use your veteran's—your GI Bill, you got your benefits.

CG: I sure did.

TS: Can you talk—since we did that off-tape, I was wondering if you could talk about that, what you used it for?

CG: I went to school, I got my bachelor's degree, graduated from Augusta College with a bachelor's in business. Probably couldn't have done it without the GI Bill, and that was a huge difference for me.

TS: That's when you were working, going to school—

CG: I was working, going to school, and in the reserves, yeah. I just had a few things on my plate at the time. [chuckles]

TS: Now, did you also—did you use the GI Bill for buying a house or anything like that?

CG: Actually, we did. We used it twice, we used mine and his. [laughs]

TS: His being your husband, right?

CG: Yes, yeah. The first house that we bought, I think we used mine. Down in San Antonio, Texas, sure did. I'd forgotten all about that. Yup, the GI Bill helped us a lot. It was a good thing for us.

TS: And I wanted to specifically ask you, because of the work that you did while you were in the military, well, much of the work.

CG: Yes.

TS: The issues of post-traumatic stress disorder, today, with a lot—especially with a lot of the—also the Vietnam veterans. But the veterans today from Afghanistan and Iraq. Is that something—and did you work at all with the VA hospital? Did you ever?

CG: No, no.

TS: Do you—so you may not be familiar with any kind of care that they may be getting today?

CG: No, I'm really—I'm really not. I know probably what everybody else, just what I see on the news.

TS: Read and things like that.

CG: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Well, is there anything in particular that you would want a civilian to know or understand about the military that maybe you don't think that they have a grasp of because, you know, they're outside that culture?

CG: It's so hard to—sometimes it's hard to explain to someone who has never been in the military why it's important, and Dan and I have these discussions, because he'll come home and he'll be talking about something that happened at work, and somebody'll say something about "Oh, you military people, you're all alike." Well, we're not all alike, you know, and our experiences are as different as any civilian community. I just—for me, for my husband, for most of the people that we know, I just think it's important that people who've never been in understand why most of us do what we do. And it's not for any special recognition, it's not—you know, we do it just because, as I said, we just want to be a part of something that is probably a little bigger than we are. You know. There's nothing really altruistic about it, just felt like the right thing to do. We don't owe[?] any special recognition or anything for it, I really had to think long and hard about even doing this. I feel pretty awkward just talking about myself, you know. I just did a job, you know.

TS: You didn't feel that you were like a trailblazer in any way?

CG: No.

TS: Not even in the time that you served? Because in '71, there weren't very many, you know, women in the military.

CG: No, but I was just—I was doing a job just like everybody else was, you know. They—most of them were guys, but you know, we were doing the same job. So I didn't—I never did, I never did. I just did it because I wanted somebody else to feel better, you know, I felt like—for my time, you know, it was an unpopular war, but an injured soldier is an injured soldier, and no matter what, they still deserve good care. That's all. It's just that simple.

TS: Well, here's another question for—what does patriotism mean to you?

CG: Wow, that's a tough one. There's so much that goes into—we were talking—Dan and I were talking this morning about, oh, freedom of speech. It was something that we had read in the paper recently. You know, and sometimes you can get really irritated with some of the drivel that you hear. But, you know, we've got the right to say those things.

You can criticize anybody that you want to here, you can talk about the president, you can talk about the military, you can say anything you want. And I may not like it, I may really hate it, but you know what? That's part of why we have a military, is so that you can do those things. We—you know, the founders believed that, it's in the Constitution, yeah, you can say anything you want, and that's part of what's so great about being here. Now, you can't always act on it, or act in any way you want, because that's also part of what's so great. We do have some rules in place and laws in place and things that—you know, some guidelines, if you will, that you have to live within. But, you know, that's part of patriotism. The idea that I can fly a flag outside my house if I want to.

TS: I spotted your house real quickly. [chuckles]

CG: You know, it's not hard. There's a couple of us that keep the flag flying down here. Yeah, I can do that, and nobody's going to, you know, target me because of it. It's—I mean, just all of the things that we take for granted every day, you know. And to know that that's protected, and that our government and our military will continue to protect those things. And it feels good to be a part of that, or to have been part of it. I don't know, I get a little soft on the subject, you know. I am a patriot. And I love this country. I don't know what else to say.

TS: Well, we've had a nice—nice discussion.

CG: Yeah.

TS: And—but is there anything that you would like to add that—that I haven't asked you, or that, you know, that you'd like to talk about?

CG: No, I think we've covered it. I mean, we've talked about a lot of things. We've been talking a long time. No, I think that covers it. Ah, got me— [laughs, sounds slightly emotional]

TS: I know, that patriotism, I know, that gets—

CG: [unclear] thing, oh my god, you know. I mean—

TS: That's why I save it for the end, usually.

CG: Yeah, I'm sitting here looking at the flag up there.

TS: Yeah, I see that. Where is that from? There's one in a case up here.

CG: That—my father-in-law, my father-in-law was in the military in World War II, and that's the flag that was over his coffin when he was buried. He died an old man, of things totally unrelated to the war, but that's the flag that draped his coffin at his funeral.

TS: Well, it's lovely up there.

CG: Yeah.

TS: Well, Claudia, thank you so much for letting me in your home and having this conversation with me today about your military service.

CG: Oh, you're welcome. I think it's great what you're doing, I like this, I like this.

TS: Well, good. Well, thank you.

[End of Interview]