

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Irene Mertz

INTERVIEWER: Beth Ann Koelsch

DATE: May 9, 2011

[Begin Interview]

BAK: Today is May 9th, 2011, and I'm at the home of Irene Mertz in—well, is it Greensboro or Jamestown?

IM: James—well, it's Jamestown, but—

BAK: Jamestown.

IM: —you know, it's so close. [chuckles]

BAK: Right. Jamestown, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. So Irene, please, we've gone over some of these questions before, but just for the recording, please state your name how you would want it in the collection.

IM: Oh, it's Irene, initial A, Mertz. Maiden name is Gepfert.

BAK: Okay, so we'll probably do Irene A. Gepfert Mertz.

IM: Oh, okay.

BAK: Okay? So, where and when were you born?

IM: I was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, on October the 13th, 1919.

BAK: And did you grow up in Fort Wayne also?

IM: Until I was twenty-two, yes.

BAK: Twenty-two, okay. So, little question about your home and family life. What did your parents do?

IM: My father was a boil—boilermaker. I come from a family of seven children, and my mother was a homemaker. We lived in this big house for years [telephone rings] that my father had built.

BAK: Okay, let me just—we'll probably have to get that again, just for the phone.

IM: I don't know what that is.

BAK: Okay, so you had said that you're one of seven children and you grew up—you were talking about the house?

IM: Yes. My father built this house, and I have a picture of it here now, because it's still there and in very good condition. I went back to visit it a year ago last October for a reunion that we had. And my children were—my children were with me, and they went with me to see the house. And so it was very enjoyable.

BAK: That's great. So—wow, so a seven kids reunion—where were you in the birth order?

IM: Oh, I was the second to the last.

BAK: Okay.

IM: I had a brother that was much older, he's sixteen—fifteen years older than me.

BAK: Wow.

IM: And then my oldest sister is six years older, then I have a sister that was four years older, twin brothers that were two years older, and a younger sister that was two years younger.

BAK: Got it. How did you like school, did you have a favorite subject?

IM: Well—you mean when I was in the lower classes?

BAK: Lower, all through high school. What—did you have different—

IM: Well, it's sort of faint. [laughs]

BAK: Right, right.

IM: I remember my high school years, but my grade school years are just memories, you know, because—

BAK: And so what about high school, did you—

IM: I went to Central High School in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and graduated there in 1937. I—my father died when I was three, my mother died when I was ten.

BAK: Oh my.

IM: And there were six of us left at home. And my mother had made us wards of the county. So when my mother died—or before my mother died, we were taken to this children's home that was right outside the city limits. My two older sisters left shortly after they got there, because they were old enough to leave. My youngest sister was adopted, but I knew where she was.

BAK: Okay.

IM: So that left myself and my twin brothers. We were out there for a few years, and my one twin brother was taken by a family that raised dogs, and Charles went to Central High School, where I was. He was given an appointment to West Point—not West Point, but the army—yeah, West Point.

BAK: Wow.

IM: But he couldn't pass the chemistry test because he hadn't taken enough.

BAK: Oh.

IM: But my youngest, my second twin joined the navy, I think in 1937. And he was in the navy for four years. [Sound of ambulance going by outside] My—my brother Charles and I were the only high school graduates of this family.

BAK: Oh, wow.

IM: And I had decided that—when I was at this children's home, I admired the nurse they had. And I decided I'd like to be a nurse. I didn't know how I was going to get there, but I wanted to be a nurse. So when I left the children's home, my—I went to live with my oldest sister, so when I graduated from high school, the family got together and I told them what I wanted to do. We were members of a Lutheran church, and I went to meet the minister. And so he told me that they could help me get through nurses' training.

So he said "Where do you want to go?"

And I said "Well, I want to go to Saint Joe Hospital." Because that was—[laughs] the best—they had the best training school.

And he looked at me and he said "Oh, we can't help you." I mean—

BAK: Because it was Catholic?

IM: I wasn't Catholic, but I was at a Catholic—I was a Lutheran. And so, anyway, when I told my sisters about this, they said—and my brothers, they said "Well, we'll help you."

BAK: Now, why didn't the pastor say—

IM: Well, because it was a Catholic hospital, and this was a Lutheran church.

BAK: Catholic, okay, got it.

Margaret McMion [Irene's daughter]: Look at these, Mother.

IM: Oh yeah, those—that's my brother, Bill, yeah.

MM: So here's a picture of her nursing school class.

BAK: Wonderful.

IM: And so anyway, my—they got together, and my brother Bill, who was in the navy, said "I'll pay your tuition." Which was fifty dollars a year, and twenty-five dollars for the next two years.

BAK: Okay.

IM: And then my oldest sister said "I'll give you fifty cents a week to spend." [chuckles]
And my next sister said "I'll buy your shoes."

BAK: Wow.

IM: And then my brother Charles was dating this girl who worked at a hosiery factory. And she said, "I'll give you—we'll give you your hose that you need." So, I waited two years and saved my money, and so I could buy everything I needed for the next three years.

BAK: Ah, did you work during the—

IM: Yes, I stayed home and took care of a nephew.

BAK: Okay.

IM: And my sister paid me three dollars a week to take care of my nephew and I saved that money, so I'd have some money when I went into nurses' training. I went into nurses' training in '39, and did very well.

BAK: That's great.

IM: And so then when I came out of nurses'—and it was due to the fact that my two older sisters, my twin brothers, we were all very close. Now, my younger sister was adopted

out, so see, she wasn't with us. And so, we just all clung together. We lived together until we got older, and they went their way and I went mine.

BAK: Now, did you live at home during the—while you were in nursing school?

IM: No, I lived—I lived at the hospital. We had a nurse—a dormitory. And—but I would go home, because I could walk, and my roommates, we'd go home and have a dinner, that kind of stuff. [chuckling] Because you'd get hungry for home cooking.

BAK: Sure, sure.

IM: And so then I decided I'd join the navy when I got out of—

BAK: Now, in nursing, did you have a certain specialty that you liked?

IM: I loved pediatrics.

BAK: Pediatrics.

IM: I had planned to—when I got out of nursing school, I had planned to go to Chicago to the Michael Reese Hospital, pediatric hospital. But then the war came along.

BAK: Okay, so you graduated in, what year, 1941?

IM: Forty-two.

BAK: Forty-two, okay. So you had plans to go to Chicago, then the war broke out.

IM: And I decided to join the navy.

BAK: Now, why the navy?

IM: Well, my brothers were in, and also my two brother-in-laws were in, and I just felt it was the thing to do. Yeah.

BAK: Okay. Well, I just didn't know, versus army, or.

IM: Well, I loved the navy.

BAK: Navy—okay, so you're a navy family.

IM: Yes, and so that's—and so in '39—or, I graduated in '39, I went into the navy in '43.

BAK: Okay, what'd you do between the two? Were you in Chicago?

IM: Oh, between—no, I worked at—I worked at the Saint Joe Hospital until the navy sent me my orders.

BAK: Okay, so—

IM: That was only a few months.

BAK: Few months, okay, got it.

IM: That wasn't very long.

BAK: Okay. And you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor?

IM: Oh, yes. Oh yes.

BAK: Where were you?

IM: I was in—I happened to be on duty, and then I had made friends with a lovely couple that, when she had her third baby, I became—they became my friends and I went over to their house a lot because it was near the hospital. And that's when we talked about—I guess my—at that point, I said "I want to join the service." And I didn't know which branch I wanted then. But I—somehow the navy was more romantic or something. [chuckles] Maybe the uniforms.

BAK: So you already knew—you didn't talk to all the recruiters, you just sort of walked in?

IM: No, I went through the Red Cross, and they talked to me and got all my papers and everything, and then shortly after I talked to them, they sent me to Peru, Indiana to have a physical for the navy. And then shortly thereafter, I got my orders to go to San Diego, California.

BAK: Okay.

IM: And I was there for six months when I got the orders to go overseas.

BAK: Okay. Now, do you remember the date that you entered the service, exactly?

IM: It was June the—I can't remember, it was in June, I can't remember when I left home.

BAK: June, 1943.

IM: Yeah.

BAK: And do you remember the actual date you were discharged, by any chance?

IM: It was in May of—

BAK: Forty-six.

IM: Forty-six.

BAK: So, your brothers and sisters were supportive of—

IM: Oh yes! Because we all lived together, and I used—I always told my children, if one had a nickel, we all had a nickel. Now, we all had chores to do when, you know, my sister and I had to do all the grocery shopping, and we did the cooking, because my oldest sister worked. And my brother-in-law was a dear, I mean here he took in three more people to live with them. Or four more. And so they—we—they rented a house that had only two bedrooms. And they—my sister and brother-in-law took the smaller bedroom, and they gave the larger bedroom to my sister and my twin brothers, and we slept in there. Because we'd always slept in the same room growing up.

BAK: Sure.

IM: And so we lived together and they worked when they could, and we all contributed to the household. And we did that for, I'd say, maybe two years. And then we began to scatter, you know.

BAK: Do you remember the trip to San Diego?

IM: Oh yes! [laughs] I left Fort Wayne and went to Chicago, I think it was four days on the train.

BAK: Now, did you go by—I mean, did you go by yourself, or with other people?

IM: Yes, I was the only recruit leaving, I guess. And so I just remember, I had a Pullman, and one morning I got dressed to go have breakfast, and I left my billfold under my pillow. And I was scared to death, because I had a lot of money in there. But I went back and my billfold was still there. But it was a long trip. And in those days, on these trips, they had these restaurants called Harvey Houses. And the trains would stop there, and you'd get off maybe for an hour and go in to eat, and then come back and get on the train. But we took the southern route, so we went through New Mexico and Arizona to get to San Diego.

BAK: Now, is this your first time away from home in terms of—

IM: Yes, it was, for any length of time.

BAK: Right. How do—do you remember how you felt?

IM: Well, I was homesick. [laughs] It was horrible, it really—I was homesick probably for about a month or more. And then the first Christmas was awful, you know, because I wanted to see my sisters—now, my brothers were both stationed in Europe.

BAK: Oh, so, okay, so Charles and—

IM: Bill, William. Yes.

BAK: The twins were both—

IM: The twins, yeah, they were both—

BAK: In the navy.

IM: One was in England and one was with Patton's army. And I would correspond with them, but not very often, because we just couldn't. And—but I loved my navy service.

BAK: Okay, so when you enlisted, what rank were you?

IM: I was an ensign.

BAK: Ensign, okay. So you get off the train, and do you remember your—how did you get to the base?

IM: Oh, I think I took a cab.

BAK: Took a cab?

IM: Yes, because—and went and reported in to the hospital there in San Diego.

BAK: What hospital?

IM: It was San Diego Naval Hospital.

BAK: San Diego Naval Hospital.

IM: Yes.

BAK: Do you remember anything about your first day?

IM: Well, it's a little hazy, you know. I just remember they [sic, them] giving me all these orders, where I was to stay and that, you know, so it took up the whole day.

BAK: Sure.

IM: And then—then I was given a seven hundred [?] dollar check to buy my uniforms. So that was—before I went on duty, I went into a tailor in San Diego and they made all the uniforms I needed.

BAK: Okay, wow. So they—it wasn't alterations, it was from—

IM: No, no, they were brand new uniforms.

BAK: That's great.

IM: We were issued a set of dress whites, dress blues, and then we had our own uniforms. We kept our own nurse's uniforms. They didn't—you just kept—and you wore the same hat from the school you graduated from. And so, it was just the basic things that they, you know, the uniforms that they issued to us. But they were all tailor-made to your fit.

BAK: Nice.

IM: Yes!

BAK: So, what ward did you start out in?

IM: It was an orthopedic ward.

BAK: Orthopedic ward. And what was a typical day there for you? These were soldiers coming back from the Pacific?

IM: Yes, most of them were—that weren't terribly hurt at this stage. And they were—this was more or less a convalescence part of the hospital. So I took care of them, did what—you know, I had corpsmen to help me. But I did, you know, I gave out all the medicines and things like that. And so I was in that ward until I went overseas, for six months.

BAK: Oh. So how long were you—three months? How long were you in San Diego?

IM: Six months.

BAK: Six months, okay.

IM: From June until January.

BAK: Okay.

IM: And then I got the orders to go overseas and we went to San Francisco, and spent three weeks in San Francisco until we got the orders the ship was in.

BAK: Now, did you put in to go to Hawaii, or you just—

IM: Oh, no. What they did, you just got the orders saying that you were on—there was a list made, and your name was on that list, and you knew you were going to go overseas.

BAK: So everyone was going to go overseas in that area, or just?

IM: Oh, I think there must have been maybe fifty nurses from San Diego [who] went. And then when we got to Hawaii, and got off—

BAK: So you took a boat, I guess, from San Francisco.

IM: Oh yes, it was a fruit—it was a ship that was owned by the fruit line. A fruit line—it was a beautiful ship. And it wasn't just your normal troop ships, it was a lovely ship. And there were three of us in a cabin.

BAK: Now, what did—I guess that was the first time you were on a boat?

IM: Yes, that was the first time, and I was so seasick I don't think I ate for two days. And then I had a roommate who was terribly seasick, and every time she vomited, her jaw went out.

BAK: Oh. Wow. [both chuckle]

IM: But we had doctors aboard, too, the ship, that were going over. And we didn't know where we were going to land, I had no idea.

BAK: You didn't know you were going to Hawaii?

IM: No, I had no idea. I thought we were going to go further down, maybe to Guam or some of the islands that we had secured.

BAK: Now, how did you feel about leaving San Diego and going overseas?

IM: Oh, I was excited. Yes. Because I wanted to go someplace else, I didn't want to spend my whole time at this hospital. And when we got to Honolulu, then, and got off the ship, we—there was a board that we went to look at, and I was sent to this new hospital up in the mountains or the hills of Hawaii. I didn't know where I was going, I didn't know if I'd stay in Pearl Harbor or go to another—this big hospital, and that's where I went. I really wanted to go on a hospital ship, because some of them got to go on hospital ships, but I wasn't—

BAK: Even though you were seasick the whole time on your way over?

IM: No, only for two days.

BAK: For two days.

IM: And it took us, I think, four days.

BAK: Okay, so you got your sea legs.

IM: Yes, that's right. [chuckles] But—and when we got to this new hospital, they didn't have our quarters finished.

BAK: Uh-oh.

IM: So we lived in a barracks for about a month or more. And then they finished our quarters, so then we went to our quarters, which was right near the main building of the hospital.

BAK: Now, were all these the women from San Diego that you were with?

IM: Oh, no, there were other nurses there.

BAK: About how many?

IM: Oh, I'd say there must have been a hundred or a hundred and twenty.

BAK: Oh. And so were your barracks, I guess, pretty heavily guarded?

IM: Well, I don't think so. I just remember—our barracks was in a cane patch.

BAK: Okay.

IM: They had all these carrot—barracks, and the sailors were in some, and then they had Japanese prisoners there, too, because I used to have to walk by them up the hill to go to the hospital.

BAK: What was that like?

IM: It was scary. [chuckles] It really was.

BAK: Did they—I mean, could you see them?

IM: Oh, sure! They were at the windows grinning at you through the bars, you know.

BAK: Right.

IM: And it was just an eerie feeling, you know.

BAK: Sure.

IM: And then when I got there, and got settled there, then I went into an orthopedic ward.

BAK: Okay.

IM: And then while I was on this orthopedic ward—oh, first I was at a ward where dental patients, patients that had face fractures and things like that.

BAK: So are these very seriously wounded men?

IM: Not those that were down in the barracks, no, they kept the worst patients up in the main part of the hospital. But there were thirty barracks in this cane patch.

BAK: Okay, so the barracks, they were sort of—that was kind of a recuperative area?

IM: Yes, yes, and then on each ward, we had a lanai [Hawaiian for patio or balcony] that had like twenty-eight beds on it, and as the patients got better from the big room, then we would move them out on the lanai until they were sent back to duty.

BAK: And how many patients were you responsible for?

IM: Oh, a hundred and twenty, on each ward.

BAK: By yourself?

IM: Yes, and then I had corpsmen that—I'd have three or four corpsmen to help me.

BAK: What kind of shifts did you work?

IM: We worked from seven to two and two to ten, and night duty was ten hours. And we didn't really get many days off. Now, you did—when you came off a night duty, you would have two days off, but all the time I was there, I only had five days vacation.

BAK: Wow.

IM: And what we would do if we had a free day, Admiral Nimitz had given our hospital his beach home. And so a group of us would all get together, and there was a priest that handled everything, and we'd call the galley [kitchen] and they'd fix a picnic dinner, and then we'd get in a bus and we'd go over to Ewa—which was on the leeward side of the island, and we'd go over the Pelé and go to Admiral Nimitz's beach house. And it was a lovely beach, beautiful. And we'd play volleyball, and we'd be out there until maybe six o' clock, and then we'd have to come back to our quarters.

BAK: Could you walk, or did they drive you?

IM: Oh, no, we took a bus.

BAK: Took a bus, okay.

IM: Because we were up in the hills.

BAK: Okay.

IM: And we had to be in our quarters at ten o' clock, it was all—you know, it was black. And while I was there, President Roosevelt came over to visit twice. And of course, then it was all—you know it was quite—lot of guards.

BAK: Right. Did you get to meet him?

IM: Oh yes! I'll tell you—I specialed [solely assigned to] this major, who was from Virginia. His name was Major Broome. And I had taken care of him one day, because the nurse that had been taking care of him was sick. So they sent me up there to take care of him. So I took care of him this one day, and then I went back to my regular duty. And then I got a call from the head nurse, telling me to go back to Major Broome, that he requested that I be his nurse. So I specialed[?] him for six weeks until he was able to go back to the States.

BAK: So was that—was he your only responsibility?

IM: Yeah, that—he was my responsibility. And evidently, he had so much influence, he had his own room, he had his own lamp, he got whatever the captains were having for dinner, or a meal, that's what he ate. And if the food came up, I had to keep it warm until he could eat.

BAK: How'd you do that?

IM: Well, I would sort of put it in an oven for—just to keep it warm for him. But anyway, I said to—so I made—he was a young lawyer, was married and had a little boy, and then after he entered the service, his wife had a little girl. And he had broken his—he had a broken arm, so he couldn't write. So I would write letters to his wife for him. And so I got to know her, because she would write back. And so then it came time for him to come back to the States, because I knew he wasn't going to live.

BAK: Oh!

MM: But, so he had injuries other than the broken arm.

IM: Oh, yes, he lost a leg.

BAK: Now, was he over—I guess, how did he get injured?

IM: Oh, he was a Marine.

BAK: He was a Marine, and what—

IM: Yes, he got hit on Iwo Jima.

BAK: Okay. Was he shot, or shrapnel, or?

IM: Well, no, he was shot. I mean, I would—many of his sergeants would come to see him, and they'd stand outside his door and cry. Because they knew he wasn't going to make it.

BAK: So he lost—what was it?

IM: The left leg, and then he developed gas gangrene.

BAK: Oh.

IM: And so—

BAK: And what is gas gangrene? [unclear]

IM: Well, I don't know, it's a bad—

BAK: Right, I know what gangrene is, I just didn't know what gas gangrene—

MM: It's the same thing. [Gas gangrene is a form of gangrene where bacteria produce gas within the tissue along with the damage of gangrene.]

BAK: It is? Okay.

IM: Yeah, yeah. And so then, he—he said to me “I want you to go back to the States with me.”

And I said “Major Broome, I don't want to go back to the States.”

And he said “Well, I'm going to request that you go back to the States,” because they were sending him to Bethesda.

And I said “But Major Broome, I don't want to go back. I want to stay here.” And I said, “Please don't request that I go with you.” So I didn't go.

BAK: So did he not request you, or?

IM: Well, I just was adamant, I just said I—you know, his pull wasn't that great, so.
[chuckles]

BAK: Did you have to go above his head, or just, he—he just—

IM: Well, I just said I wasn't going.

BAK: Okay. [chuckles]

IM: I just said, please—

MM: So he lived long enough to go back to the States.

IM: Oh yeah, he went back to the States, and about six weeks later, I got a letter from his wife. And he had died. And she said to me in the letter, she said "He told me that if you had come back with him, he would have gotten better." Well, he wasn't going to get better, and I knew that.

BAK: Wow. Wow, that's pretty heavy to lay on you, though.

IM: Yeah. And I would write to her. I wrote to her a few times after that. And I presumed she got married again, you know, because they were young. But that was one of the highlights of my service in Hawaii.

BAK: So, through Major Broome, you got to meet the president?

IM: Oh, yes! So, I told Major Broome, one day I said "The president is coming," and I said "Now, you've got to be nice to him," because he hated him. [all laugh]

BAK: It was because he was a long-time Republican or why did he hate him?

IM: I don't know, he didn't like President Roosevelt.

BAK: Okay.

IM: So I said "You must be nice to him." So, I had him all cleaned up, you know, and the president came in in the wheelchair, and he spoke to Major Broome. Major Broome never looked at him, just kept his head down. Absolutely never looked at him.

BAK: Did he answer his—I mean, the President was the Commander in Chief, I mean, did he answer any direct questions?

IM: I don't know. I really don't know.

BAK: You weren't there?

IM: Well, I was there, yes, but I don't remember, because I was in the background, you know, and he—the aides were there, and—but I just had to laugh, because the president—or, Major Broome was not going to look at him. And he didn't. Now, what he said to him, I

don't know. And what Major Broome—he probably mumbled. You know, the answers. But it tickled me, you know, and he just was adamant about it, you know.

BAK: It sounds like he was adamant about a lot.

IM: Oh, he was. He was.

BAK: Did you like Major Broome?

IM: Oh, yes. He was a great guy, yes. He was really a wonderful young man, you know.

BAK: Were you surprised to see FDR in a wheelchair?

IM: Oh, no, I knew he'd had polio.

BAK: Okay, so would you say that people—was that common knowledge? I didn't get—I don't have the sense that it was common knowledge, but maybe—

IM: Well, I think—I think a lot of people knew, you know, that he was in a wheelchair. You saw him on crutches.

BAK: Right, okay. And when was this about, '44, '45?

IM: This was '44, I guess. Let's see, '43, '44—this was '44.

BAK: And how was he looking then?

IM: Old.

BAK: Old.

IM: And drawn.

BAK: And drawn.

IM: Yeah.

BAK: So, did you get to shake hands or anything?

IM: No, because—nobody did, you know, he was there to see Major Broome.

BAK: Okay. So, how long—I'm sorry, remind me again when you got to Oha—

IM: Oahu?

BAK: Oahu, there we go.

IM: In March of '44.

BAK: Okay, and how long were you there for?

IM: And I was there until September of '45. I was there nineteen months.

BAK: Now, what else did you—do you remember anything else besides—that you did, any stories from—

IM: Well, one time, a group of us—we had a five-day leave, so we caught a—we had an army plane, or—I guess it was an army plane—that took us to the big island of Hawaii. So we were on that island for five days, and we saw that whole island. And that was delightful, because we'd never had five days leave, you know.

BAK: Right, wow. So, what were your housing accommodations like?

IM: Oh, our nurses' quarters was very nice, it was just a big building, and I had a roommate, and it was just—and our—we were served by—we'd go to the dining room, and we had people, I guess they were Filipinos, that were our waiters. And we had a choice of food that we wanted, and while I was there, I met my husband.

BAK: Oh!

IM: And so, during this time, we met these two army captains.

BAK: So this is in the mess hall, I mean—

IM: Well, we just met them one night at a dance, because we had an officers' club.

BAK: Right.

IM: And so, Dick—my husband, Dick, met this—he wasn't my husband then, but we went over to the club, and we met these two—or, we met these two army captains. And the three fellows got along, and they liked it up at our hospital, because our food was so good.

BAK: Oh, they were allowed to eat at your mess, huh?

IM: Yeah, so Dick would invite them up to our mess, and in exchange, they would always have a Jeep for us to use to run around on the island, because there were other clubs we could go to, we could go to Schofield Barracks, we could go down into Pearl Harbor, to Ford Island, which was the navy base, or we could go over to Ewa, which was a Marine base on the leeward side of the island.

BAK: But you still had to be back by ten.

IM: Oh, you had to be back by ten.

BAK: So, did you—who—did you have people to drive you, or—

IM: No, the fellas drove.

BAK: Drove, okay.

IM: They drove the Jeep, yeah.

BAK: So you met these three army guys—or, who did you meet first, the army guys or your future husband?

IM: Oh, I met my husband, because he met the army guys.

BAK: Okay, so you met him at the officers' club?

IM: Yes.

BAK: Okay. Do you remember that, how y'all met?

IM: No, I don't remember exactly. Their names were—I can't remember their names now.

BAK: But what about your husband, do you remember the—exactly meeting him?

IM: Oh, he came down—he came to Hawaii, he was part of the—he was in the [U.S.] Navy, but he was with a Marine contingent, and so he was with the Marines at Pendleton, then he got sent to—he got sent overseas, and they needed dentists up at our hospital, so he was—once they got to Hawaii, they sent him up—they discharged him from his Marine unit and sent him up to the hospital.

BAK: So, he was a dentist?

IM: He was a dentist, yes. And I was on a dental ward down in the cane patch, and I had a patient that had osteomyelitis of the jaw, and so, I called up there and requested a dentist come down and see this patient, because I didn't quite know how to treat him.

BAK: Okay. What is osteomyelitis?

IM: Well, it's an inflammation of the bone. And so he came down, and that's when I met him.

BAK: Okay.

IM: And we just, you know—[chuckles] We just started seeing each other, you know.

MM: So tell her about the rations that you would get periodically, like—

IM: Oh, we would—at our mess—I mean, at our officers' club, we would—you were allowed five fifths of whiskey a month.

BAK: Wow. That's not too bad.

IM: And then once a month—and I didn't drink.

BAK: Okay.

IM: But once a month, they would have a free night. And we had dances over there, and they would invite—the admirals would come up and different officers from Pearl Harbor, they'd come up to our dances.

BAK: And so, any branch of the military could go to these dances?

IM: Oh yeah, you could go to any other officers' club. But there would be a poster in our entryway into our nurses' home that there was going to be a big dance.

BAK: Okay.

IM: And you were requested to be there.

BAK: Okay, so you just showed up, and—

IM: [laughing] You just showed up, yeah.

BAK: And were you in your dress whites?

IM: Oh, yeah, you had to be dressed, oh yeah. Oh yeah. And there was a tennis court behind our nurses' quarters, and I used to laugh, because the drill sergeants, or the drill sailors, would be out there trying to teach us how to march. And it would be hilarious, because when they'd tell you to turn or whatever it is they use, you know, you'd see them going every which way, because my window overlooked the tennis courts where they had the drills.

BAK: So this is the new recruits or the nurses, or?

IM: These were the nurses!

BAK: Okay. So, but you learned all that in San Diego?

IM: No, no, in Hawaii.

BAK: In Hawaii. So you were out there, too.

IM: Yeah.

BAK: Were you a good marcher?

IM: [laughs] Oh, I can't remember. I guess that—I don't know, somehow we learned it.

BAK: How come you didn't have that in basic?

IM: We didn't have that, what we had in basic was more or less learning how to use your gas mask, and that kind of stuff. And then, in San Diego, we learned that—they would take us into this room, and then they'd put in tear gas, and we had to learn how to use our gas masks doing that.

BAK: Right.

IM: But I didn't learn any of the drilling, I don't think we had—we didn't have drilling in San Diego, it was only when I went out to Hawaii.

BAK: So did you have parades, were you in parades?

IM: No.

BAK: No, just drill to [for?] drill's sake.

IM: Drill just—I don't know why they drilled us, but it was funny.

MM: So what did you do with your liquor?

IM: Oh! So getting back to the liquor, I didn't drink, so I had these corporals, and I always sort of felt sorry for the enlisted men. So I had these cute young corporals on my ward, and they'd say to me something about they didn't have a club. And so they'd say something to me about—

BAK: Wow, they didn't have a club at all, that's sad.

IM: No, up there they didn't have a club. Yeah.

So I—the corporals, I'd say to them—or they'd say to me, "Could you get us some whiskey?" Or liquor, or whatever it was.

And I'd say "Yeah, sure. When my quota comes in, let me know if you want something." So I would—

BAK: Wouldn't they always want some? [laughs]

IM: Well. [laughs]

BAK: I would imagine they would never go "No thanks, we're good!"

IM: But these were just special corpsmen, they really were, they were just like brothers. They were part of the family, because you kept the same corpsmen.

BAK: Oh, you got those—oh, wow, for the whole time.

IM: So you really got to know the corpsmen, yeah.

BAK: I can imagine.

IM: And so I'd say—and this was strictly against regulation, but I'd say "Okay, I'll bring you a bottle of liquor." And I'd put it in a shoebox, and take it up to one of them. And in exchange, they'd give me—they gave me Marine boots, and different things. Because I wouldn't take any money for it, you know.

BAK: Did you wear—did you find the Marine boots useful?

IM: Oh yeah, I wore them over there! I brought them back from overseas, yeah.

BAK: So what—instead of—you were issued pumps, or nurse's shoes, or what were you—

IM: Oh no, you had to buy all your own.

BAK: You had to buy, okay, so.

IM: Yeah, you had to buy your own shoes. You were—every year, you got another allotment for your uniforms, because they came out with some other uniforms that you had to have.

BAK: Did the allotment cover it all?

IM: Oh, yes, because it was adequate, then. That seven hundred took care of all the things—my cape, everything I needed.

BAK: Yes. Okay. So did you enjoy your work?

IM: Oh yes, I loved it. I hated to leave there, I just cried and cried, I didn't want to leave Hawaii. Because I loved it.

BAK: I can imagine, I mean, it's Hawaii, right?

IM: Well, and I loved the atmosphere over there, you know.

BAK: Was it more easygoing, do you think, than stateside?

IM: What?

BAK: Was it more easygoing, discipline-wise, than stateside, or?

IM: Well, when you were on duty, you worked hard, you know. And so you looked sort of forward to the evenings, you know, that you could relax, and—because all we had was a tennis court, there was no swimming pool or anything like that, you know.

BAK: The Red Cross wasn't—didn't have things set up, or?

IM: What?

BAK: The Red Cross didn't have—

IM: Oh, no, no, no, no. No. As a matter of fact, I don't think I saw any Red Cross people out there. Now, on—if we had an afternoon off, we would go down to Honolulu and play around on Waikiki Beach. And I met some cute corpsmen, and we'd meet down there because you weren't allowed to—

BAK: That's what I was going to ask, like, well then.

IM: [chuckling] But we did, we—they were just nice young kids, you know. And we'd go down and there were little stores along the way and we'd buy food and take it to the beach to eat, and the fellas would buy beer and bury it in the sand to keep it cool. Yeah, it was a beautiful—

MM: Because you weren't allowed to date a corpsman, you mean.

IM: Oh, no. No, no.

MM: Socialize with a corpsman.

IM: No, no.

BAK: So, but did you do any of that anyway?

IM: We did anyway.

BAK: Okay.

IM: Well, yeah, you know, we were just playing—now, when we went over to Admiral Nimitz's beach home, it was only officers. And there again, you had Filipino waiters that were—that fixed the lunch and all that.

BAK: Right, so it was just for the day.

IM: Yeah, it was just for the day, yeah. We did get a day off once in a while. And there was a Catholic priest, Father Robinson was his name, and he was so nice, and he would get up all these beach parties for us. And if you wanted to go, you just signed your name, and the bus was there, and—but he was sort of the leader of this group that would go over to this beach house.

BAK: Okay. And so, were you getting serious with your husband at that—

IM: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah.

BAK: So, was he—when you got your orders to go back to the States—

IM: I didn't want to go back, but I had to, you know.

BAK: So he stayed in Hawaii?

IM: Oh yeah, he was there until November.

BAK: Okay, and you went back—

IM: And then we got married when—I got separated from the service on the first of December, and we got married on the third.

BAK: Okay—wow—okay, so you went back to Indiana when, again?

IM: In '45.

BAK: In '45, okay, so you were—and how long were you in service in Indiana?

IM: In Indiana? Oh, only a couple months when I came back from overseas. And it was sort of hard to go back from being so busy, you know, over there at this big hospital, to go back to a little dispensary, so I really didn't like that at all.

BAK: So was it just that things were winding down, or—

IM: Yes, they were—that's right.

BAK: All right.

IM: And see, you had to—you couldn't get out of the service until you had so many points. And you needed something like thirty-three points or something like that.

BAK: Sure.

IM: So, you stayed in until you got those thirty-three points, although the war was over, you still had to stay in until you earned those points.

BAK: Okay. So you said you worked at, pretty much just a dispensary?

IM: Yes, it was just a clinic, like. And they brought in families who were stationed around there, and you took care of those people, and Marines and sailors, if they were coming back and needed a little time in a hospital.

BAK: Okay. So, when did your husband—your husband-to-be come back?

IM: Oh, he came back—let me see. He came back in the middle of November, I think.

BAK: And where was he assigned?

IM: He was assigned to Great Lakes.

BAK: Michigan?

IM: No, Illinois.

BAK: Illinois, okay. And I guess you all were just writing back and forth?

IM: Oh yes, I corresponded, and then he was from Indianapolis, so I went and met his parents. And—while he was still overseas. Because he wanted me to meet his parents.

BAK: Just by yourself.

IM: Yes.

MM: That was a scary time.

IM: Yeah. [chuckles]

BAK: So you just—did they know who you were?

IM: Oh yeah, well, they had another home up in northern Wisconsin, and so I took—went to—so he said “You’ve got to go meet my folks, when—” because I was on leave, from the time I came back until I went to my new station, I had a month’s leave. So he said “You’ve got to go meet my parents, when are you going to go meet my parents?” And so

I finally wrote to him and told him, and I contacted—or wrote a letter to his mother, because they were going to be at this other home for the month. So I contacted them and so, I took the train to Chicago, and switched trains, and we headed up to Land O’ Lakes, Wisconsin. That’s where their home was. I had no idea what they looked like, I only knew his father was a urologist. Now, his mother did all these paintings, see those?

BAK: Oh, wow!

IM: His mother, that was her avocation, she—

BAK: These are bird paintings, just for the—

IM: Yeah, and then these two, she did those for me too. And I have one in the kitchen, she did. But anyway, I had no idea how I would recognize them.

So I said “Dick, how will I know your mother?”

And he said “Well, if you see a lady with a red suit and a pink hat, that’s my mother.” [chuckles] And so, by the time we got to Land O’ Lakes, which was like two hundred and fifty miles from Chicago, it was a twelve hour trip. And they kept losing cars, you know. And so by the time we got up to Land O’ Lakes, there was just the car—the engine, and our car. That’s all that was left on the train.

BAK: Wow, so you went up by yourself?

IM: Oh, yes.

BAK: Okay.

IM: And I took some books with me, thinking, oh, I’m going to be with older people, I’ll need some books.

BAK: Sure.

IM: Then on the way up there, this conductor would come through our car all the time, and I was in uniform because I had to be in uniform. And so he asked me where—and I thought, well, I’ll just sleep on the train. And so—but he kept coming back, talking to me, so I never really did sleep. And so, he wanted to know where I’d been and all this and that, because he had some sons in the service. And so by the time I got to Land O’ Lakes, it was like seven o’ clock in the morning. And so I got off the train, and I think I was the only one that got off the train. And there I saw this couple standing, and it was Dick’s folks!

MM: Did she have on a red suit?

IM: Yeah, she had on a red suit.

BAK: And a pink hat?

IM: And a pink hat, yeah!

BAK: That's an odd color combination.

IM: Yeah. And so I thought "Well, I'm going to be with these older people, I'll have a lot of time to read." We were busy every day—I was there for, I think, five days. And we were busy all the time, because there were a lot of friends that had places around them, and they all entertained, and we went—my father-in-law had a guy take us fishing up on the lakes, so it was just a different—you know, and it was fall, so the leaves—and I'd send Dick back leaves from, in the letters, you know.

BAK: Aww.

IM: To show him that the season had changed.

BAK: So did you get along with his parents?

IM: Oh yeah, we got along fine. They—I had to laugh, because I wore a cross that a nun had given me when I—and little medals that the nun had given me when I was in nurses' training. So of course they saw that and the medals, the little things that she gave me? And they thought I was Catholic. And I didn't think any—you know.

BAK: And I'm guessing—were they Catholic?

IM: No.

BAK: They were not.

IM: Presbyterian. [laughing]

BAK: I wasn't sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing.

IM: Well, I never knew until one day, Mother Mertz, while we were up there, she looked at me and I don't know how she brought up religion or how it came up, you know.
And so she finally looked at me, and she said "What religion are you?"
And I said "Well, I was raised a Lutheran." And with that, I saw her give this big sigh.

BAK: Of relief?

IM: I guess—well, I think she—that maybe, during her lifetime, she had seen the troubles that might have been caused by different faiths intermarrying, you know.

BAK: Okay.

IM: And evidently, maybe she had a friend's daughter—

MM: You said that when your mother's sister married a Catholic, that created a lot of—

IM: Oh yeah, there was a lot of prejudice.

BAK: Yes.

IM: Between Catholic and Lutherans.

MM: Or Protestant and Catholic.

IM: Protestant and Catholics, I mean. Yeah.

BAK: I just realized, for the transcriber, the other person is Margaret—what's your last name?

MM: McMinn.

BAK: Irene's daughter, just so we know, who is that other voice? Okay.

IM: [laughs] So when I got out of the service and I got married and I decided I wanted to go back to school. But I was married and had Margaret, and we lived near Butler University in Indianapolis, so I went back, because I wanted to get a B.S. degree in nursing.

BAK: Okay.

IM: So I went to night school at Butler.

BAK: So who took care of—did your—

IM: Well, I had a neighbor who had a little girl, and she would take care of Margaret, because some days I had to be at school at three. And then Dick would get home at five or six, and then he'd take over and take care of Margaret for me.

BAK: Okay, so how long were you in night school, then?

IM: Oh, about a year and a half.

BAK: A year and a half.

IM: And I went under the GI Bill, and in those days, the GI Bill, if you were single, they paid ninety dollars a month. And paid all your tuition to whatever school you were going to, I didn't pay a cent. And this was a private college.

BAK: But you said, if you were single.

IM: If you were single, you got ninety a month. If you were married, you got fifteen dollars more, if you had a child.

BAK: Oh, you got more?

IM: Yeah.

BAK: Okay.

IM: So I got a hundred—no, I guess it was a hundred and fifteen, so it was twenty-five more if you had a child.

BAK: Lucrative!

IM: Yeah! [laughs] Yeah.

BAK: Okay. So you got your B.S., so just back to your service, just some questions. What was the hardest thing that you had to do, physically and/or emotionally, in the service?

IM: Oh, seeing some of the sailors and the Marines that were terribly hurt.

MM: [very quietly] I have to go.

IM: Okay, honey.

BAK: All right, thank you.

MM: Be in touch with me and I'll call you.

IM: Okay, honey, all right. I'll see you later.

BAK: Sure. Bye-bye.

IM: I think—well, they either—you got attached to some of them, they were like brothers to you, you know. These could have been my brothers.

BAK: And so were they in your wards a long time, or did they get transferred out?

IM: Well, some were there a month or more, and I remember, we had a little Marine and a little sailor that were only like seventeen years old. One, the little sailor had lost his arm going through a hatch, on a submarine, I guess. And then we had this little Marine, that—I can't remember if he—I think he lost a leg. And they were just like seventeen

years old, just like kids. And so when we'd—we'd take care of them in the morning, and then we'd want to change their beds, we'd put them in one bed, and we gave them games to play, or cards to play, you know. And, but it—I could pick them up, because they were so little. You know, they had lost so much weight.

BAK: Wow.

IM: And that sort of tugged at your heartstrings, you know, because you saw—you know—but you couldn't let it bother you. You know, you just had to sort of forget it once you left the ward. And—but I saw a lot of sad things.

BAK: Right. Lot of—I've got—these soldiers had lost limbs, too?

IM: Oh, yes. We had a lot of that.

BAK: Did you have to—feel like you had to do counseling, also?

IM: Oh, no. You know, I don't think they had time for that. I don't know if we—I never heard of a counselor.

BAK: Well, I just meant you personally having to—

IM: Oh, no. We didn't have any follow-up. If you had any troubles, you probably went—because we had some nurses that got sent back, maybe because of mental problems.

BAK: Just the stress of handling too much?

IM: Yeah.

BAK: And you were able to detach a little bit?

IM: Well, you sort of could, you know, during your down time, you could sort of relax and read or do what you wanted to do, you know. And you did—when you had time, you could go down to the beach, you know, and that was a lark, because we'd go down there and surf, and play around.

BAK: Oh, you surfed?

IM: Yeah, oh yeah, we'd rent surfboards and go out, you know, and wait and ride the waves back in.

BAK: Wow, impressive.

IM: Yeah, it was fun. It was fun.

BAK: So just on the ward, though, you were able to mentally detach?

IM: Yeah, because you sort of got acquainted with them, and you wanted to know where they were from, and you'd socialize with them, you know. And they loved it when you came on duty, because you were nice, bright, and clean, and you smelled good, you know.
[laughs]

BAK: Right. Were they all respectful, or?

IM: Oh yes, there was nothing, ever. Oh, no. They wouldn't—I didn't have any, any patient ever treat me disrespectfully. No way.

BAK: And what about the doctors, did you get along with the doctors?

IM: Oh yes, oh yes. Of course, those doctors were all volunteers.

BAK: Okay, I guess I didn't realize that.

IM: Oh yes, most of them had volunteered for the service. I had one that was a surgeon, and he was the head surgeon at Massachusetts General, and I liked him. His name was Larry McCarthy, and I liked him. I liked them all, they were all nice, they were all gentlemen, you know.

BAK: I actually just realized, with the name, is—was Major Broome, was he—do you remember his first name?

IM: Roger G.B. Broome, was his name, Roger—he had two initials in the middle, and I think he came from the first families of Virginia, you know, there's that—

BAK: Okay, yeah. Now, does Broome have an E on the end, or no?

IM: I think so, yes.

BAK: All right, just for—okay. Were you—did you ever feel you were in any danger?

IM: No, I was never afraid.

BAK: No planes over?

IM: No, no. Now, we had black-out, of course, everything was black. We even had these special things that covered your windows somehow, so no light was reflected. If I was in my room and looked down over Pearl Harbor, I didn't see a light.

BAK: Wow, okay.

IM: I mean, it was total black-out. And even the cars, say, the ambulance and stuff, they had things on their front—on the lights, that shielded the light from reflecting, you know, it only showed the ground. But there were a lot of funny occurrences, you know, those corpsmen were just young kids and still full of vinegar. And I remember one—[laughing] one of the corpsmen, they were taking an ambulance down to Pearl Harbor, and they saw these two men walking up to the hospital, they were in shorts, and they had no idea they were so—the one said to the other “Let’s scare them.” So, they went at them with the ambulance, and the guys ran in the ditch, they happened to be two admirals that were coming—

BAK: No!

IM: Yeah, that were coming up to the hospital.

BAK: Oh, no.

IM: Of course, there was a great big thing then, in the paper and in the bulletin board, about the fact that you couldn’t drive the ambulance more than twenty miles an hour.

BAK: Oh, did the corpsmen get caught?

IM: Oh, sure!

BAK: Oh. How did—what did they—just, oh wow.

IM: Oh yeah, they were funny. Well, you know, they were just kids, and—

BAK: Right. Were they sent to the brig, or?

IM: Oh, no, no, no, they probably just got knocked down a rate or something like that.

BAK: Wow. Well, you don’t want to do that to admirals.

IM: No, there were two admirals. Oh, I met all the—I met Admiral Nimitz, I met all the admirals.

BAK: Really?

IM: Because we’d see them over at the country club, or our officers’ club! Yeah, they all came up there, and our two army friends, they loved to come up to the mess, because we had such good foods.

BAK: Yes. Why do you think the navy food was better?

IM: I don't know, they were sort of the cream of the crop, then.

BAK: Now, did you have any Hawaiian food on there, or just—

IM: Oh, yeah, that's where I learned to eat that fruit, you know.

BAK: Pineapple, or?

IM: No, no, no.

BAK: Papaya?

IM: Papaya, yeah. Put lemon juice on it, and it's great.

BAK: Yeah.

IM: Yeah. We really had our choice, like, now the one thing you miss, you miss fresh milk, and you miss fresh eggs, because see, all the eggs were powdered, you know.

BAK: Oh, yes.

IM: And I didn't like that. They didn't taste like eggs. But the food was good, because we had a lot of salads, and you could pick what you wanted off the menu, in our mess.

BAK: Nice.

IM: And the same way over at the officers' mess.

BAK: Okay. So you did a lot—for your social life, you went to dances in the officers' club?

IM: Oh, some of them were demanding, you know, and I resented that, I didn't see why I should have to go over and dance with these guys that probably were married.

BAK: So, you didn't have the choice to not go? Or [unclear] pressured?

IM: Oh, well, I guess they—I don't know what they would—it just—you just knew you had to go. [laughs]

BAK: Or else—what would happen?

IM: Well, I don't know.

BAK: Oh. So all the nurses had to go.

IM: Oh yeah. Whoever was off-duty, yeah. [chuckling]

BAK: Because I guess you were the only females on the island—

IM: Oh yeah, oh sure, we out—I mean, our hospital held—what was it, ten thousand patients? Yeah, we had, our hospital held ten thousand patients.

BAK: Wow.

IM: So see, we had a big—a lot of nurses, a lot of doctors, a lot of corpsmen. You know, special—your assistants and stuff like that, you know. Because it was a big hospital. It was the hospital—they were building it just as a—before the war started, and when the planes came in to bomb Pearl Harbor, they came over the spot where they were building this hospital.

BAK: Oh, wow. So they didn't hit it, though?

IM: No, no, no, they didn't want to hit that, because it was up in the mountains. If you call them mountains, you know, in Hawaii.

BAK: Wow.

IM: But we overlooked Pearl Harbor, I could look—at night, I could see, or if I looked out my window, because I was on the back part of the nurses' home. I could see Pearl Harbor down there.

BAK: Oh, wow. So did you ever go down to Pearl Harbor?

IM: Oh yeah, we went a lot. Oh yeah. Into Honolulu, we'd go to the department stores, and we'd trade a lot in Hawaii, in Honolulu.

BAK: What do you mean, you'd trade—you shopped, is that what—

IM: Yeah, oh yeah, we'd go down there. Or we'd go to a restaurant if we had the time. It all depended on our time.

BAK: Right.

IM: And when the busses picked you up.

BAK: And these are all military busses, I guess.

IM: Oh yeah, oh yeah, uh-huh. And as I say, you were dealing with such young people, I mean, these—

BAK: Well, how old were you, about, in your—

IM: I was twenty-three, I think.

BAK: Twenty-three. So you were much older, I guess.

IM: Yeah.

BAK: That's funny, with twenty-three.

IM: And we had a lot of famous people that came through, you know, that would come up to the hospital and—we had a baseball team, and a lot of the major baseball players belonged to a separate unit of the service, and I can't remember what they were called. But anyway, and all they did during the war was go and play baseball. And entertain the troops, you know. And there was—when I was in San Diego, Bob Hope was there all the time, he always came down to entertain the troops.

BAK: Yeah, I guess you'd get a lot of L.A. [Los Angeles] people.

IM: Oh, yeah, you did. Yeah.

BAK: Who were your favorites of that time?

IM: Oh, well, I loved Spencer Tracy, because there are some pictures there you'll see. I took care of this patient whose father was a producer of Fox News, that came on in the theaters.

BAK: Oh, the newsreels?

IM: Yeah, the newsreels. Well, Tommy's father was the producer of this, and—of this company. So anyway, he said to me—he was a patient of mine.

So, Tommy was a Marine, and so he said to me one day, he said "You know, my father's going to make some—a picture, of the war," and he said "And I want you to be in it."

BAK: Really?

IM: Yeah! [laughs] So, they got—there were about ten of us, I guess, and there are pictures in there where you'll see we're in front of a camera and stuff.

BAK: Wow.

IM: And it was because of Tommy Breen[?] and I often wondered what happened to Tommy, you know, because I lost track of him once he went back to the States.

BAK: Oh, so they took the newsreel when you were in San Diego, or Hawaii?

IM: No, this was in Hawaii.

BAK: Okay, so he came over, or, his father came over?

IM: No, Spencer Tracy came, and Tommy was on my ward. And so Spencer Tracy came up with—just to see Tommy.

BAK: Oh, wow, okay.

IM: And there were others, I can't remember the other actors who came. And some of them, just to see Tommy, because they knew his father, see.

BAK: Wow. Do you remember who his father was?

IM: I don't—I have no idea what his father's first name, but I just remember it was Tommy Breen[?] was my patient.

BAK: Breen?

IM: And Breen was his father.

BAK: That name sounds familiar, so I think Breen was pretty big. [This may refer to Joseph Breen, who was best known as a film censor.]

IM: Yeah, evidently, he was on those Fox[?] News that you could get on radio, or, in the movie. Remember?

BAK: Yeah. Did you get to see yourself, your newsreel?

IM: No, because they never really made it. They tried it—I don't know what happened, evidently, we were too busy.

BAK: Oh, so they didn't actually make it.

IM: You know, after—when they'd have these big battles, I would leave my ward one day of—it would be empty, I'd come back on duty the next morning, it was full.

BAK: Wow.

IM: Because of all these new patients. Because, see, we had Iwo Jima, we had all these big battles, and—so.

BAK: Wow. So they—I guess this wasn't their first stop, but these guys pretty much had just come off the battlefield.

IM: Oh yeah. We got them within twenty-four hours after they were hurt.

BAK: Were they flown in, or were they—

IM: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

BAK: Wow.

IM: See, Guam was really our first big base that we—after—when the war started. After the war started. So a lot of them were evacuated from Guam.

BAK: Wow. What was that like, to have these guys just right off the boat from—

IM: Oh, it was awful. It was awful. They were in shock. And all they came back with was what they called a little ditty bag, and that had a razor, a toothbrush, toothpaste, a comb. I mean, that's all they had in their possession, because everything else was lost back where they were stationed.

BAK: Wow, wow.

IM: Yeah. So they really had nothing when they came back.

BAK: Was there any particular ones you remember, any particular—

IM: No, I remember—there was one patient I took care of, that, I really remember him, and I don't know why. But he was on one of these ships that got bombed by a kamikaze, and they brought him up to our hospital. It—when he was hit—when the ship was hit, he was evidently on the thing going up, you know, the cargo thing? That he was climbing, to get up—

BAK: Oh.

IM: And he evidently, when that happened, he was thrown against the ship, and it ruptured his spleen. And I just remember, they brought him up to our hospital, and they removed his spleen, and how they knew his spleen was ruptured, I have no idea. But that stuck out to me, to think that once the spleen was ruptured, the artery had clamped down, and prevented any more bleeding, I guess. But they evidently diagnosed it right away, because they brought him up to our hospital.

BAK: Was he okay?

IM: Oh yeah, he probably went back to duty.

BAK: Wow. So you did—I mean, you had said you, you know, distributed the pills, but did you change dressings, did you do IVs—

IM: Oh yeah—well, the corpsmen did a lot of the scutwork, you know, but I mean, oh yeah, you had to do things like that. Oh, sure, it wasn't just looking, you know—it wasn't just roaming around, if a patient needed something, you went to that patient right away, you know.

BAK: So did you do IVs, did you—

IM: Oh yeah, everything. Yeah. Now, the corpsmen were very knowledgeable, you know, they knew how to do a lot of things.

BAK: So you were more supervising.

IM: Yeah, you just sort of—yeah, and then once a month, we'd have—oh, I can't think of the word I want to use. Uh, inspections. And so then, you had to have—your ward had to be absolutely perfect, and so what we do is, we'd make sure that all the beds were clean and everything was nice, and anything that was out, you stuck underneath the sheets. [laughs]

BAK: Oh, okay!

IM: So that everything was—looked real pretty, you know.

BAK: The empty beds, or the—actually ones with patients in them?

IM: Oh, the ones with patients in them!

BAK: Oh, you said—wow.

IM: You didn't want anything sitting out, you know, so you'd stick everything that was—that you thought wasn't necessary, you just stuck it under the sheets with the patient so that the beds would look so nice, and the patients would look so nice, and.

BAK: What kind of stuff would you be doing, like, can you give me an example of something that got stuck under the sheet?

IM: Oh, anything. Food, if they had some food or something, you didn't want it to be seen. Anything that you thought that they'd say something about, and you couldn't pass inspection, then you'd stick it under their sheets, see.

BAK: Got it.

IM: So everything looked clean and neat. Because the navy's very clean, anyway, and then they'd have to go in and inspect the heads, you know, the bathrooms, and you didn't go in there, but they did. So everything had to be kept immaculate.

BAK: What was your most memorable decoration or award, and [unclear]

IM: Well, I don't remember, we got different—you know, I have my ribbons someplace, but I don't remember when we received them, you know, but we had some things that we wore on our uniforms, you know.

BAK: Okay. And did you ever think of making the navy a career?

IM: No. No, I wanted to come back and go back to graduate school, is what I wanted to do. But then I met Dick and got married, so. But that—had I not gotten married, I would have come back and gone and gotten a master's degree in something, see.

BAK: Okay. In nursing, or another field?

IM: Well, probably—I loved pediatrics, so I probably would have done something in pediatrics, yeah.

BAK: So you never—well, you got a little, maybe a little bit in peds with—back in Indiana, or?

IM: The what?

BAK: Did you deal with children at all in Indiana, or?

IM: Well, when I was in nurses' training, we didn't have a supervisor for the pediatric floor, so I was a supervisor for months on this pediatric floor. And that's when I fell in love with the pediatric—I didn't like surgery, those wards, as well, but I loved the pediatric floor.

BAK: So how'd you get put in orthopedics?

IM: At the—well, I guess they just put you wherever they needed you, you know. Wherever they needed a nurse, that's the ward you went to, you know. And as I say, when we went over there, we picked out a cane patch, that was a new cane patch, and when that cane patch became ripe, that was time for you to go back to the States, because that was eighteen months.

BAK: Oh, wow.

IM: It takes a cane patch eighteen months to ripen and get ready to—

BAK: Oh, wow, that's interesting.

IM: Yeah. So I was there nineteen months, I went over nineteen months.

BAK: So, what did you think of the Roosevelts, both Eleanor and Franklin Delano?

IM: Oh! Well, I was sort of ambivalent, you know. I thought he was—did some good things, but then I thought a lot of things he did wasn't good, you know.

BAK: Like for example, what?

IM: Well, I don't think we should have gone to war. [chuckles]

BAK: Oh, okay.

IM: Yeah. I mean, I think—you know, I really think that something else should—could have been done, you know. Because, you know, it did so much harm to so many people, you know, I had cousins—

BAK: And then you saw that.

IM: Yes, and I saw it.

BAK: I'm sorry—

IM: And I worried about my brothers, and brother-in-laws that were in the service, you know, whether they were going to make it. And as it was, my one twin brother, he lost his hearing, because he was stationed in England during all that bombardment.

BAK: Oh, wow.

IM: And then my brother Bill—I think my brother Bill had been in the Battle of the Bulge, and I think that he probably had a little psychological problems when he came back.

BAK: I didn't realize the navy—the navy was in the Bulge?

IM: No, they were all in the army.

BAK: They were in the army, you were talking about, okay.

IM: Yeah, my brother Charles was with the Seventh Air Division or something, I think it was the Seventh. And my brother Bill was with the Fifth Army, maybe Patton's, yeah.

BAK: Patton's.

IM: So he went through the whole thing, my brother Bill went, from the time they hit Italy, my brother Bill was with the—because he was with a tank group.

BAK: Oh, wow, yeah, that's, I—

IM: And he—yes. Bill and I used to—when I'd go back home, Bill and I used to talk a lot—he didn't talk a lot about the war, he did to me, because I was in it. But he didn't talk—I don't think my brother Bill talked to a lot of people about what happened to him while he was in the service, you know.

BAK: He just saw a lot of—he suffered a lot, in the Bulge.

IM: Yeah. He did—one time, when I was up there visiting, we sat down, and he told me all about the Battle of the Bulge, you know. And I do think that he had a little—I mean, he got over it, but I do think that he had a few problems. Not bad, but, you know. Sort of post-traumatic stress—

BAK: Sure.

IM: Symptoms—syndrome, as they have now.

BAK: Now, were you feeling that way about the war during the war? Or just afterwards?

IM: Oh, no, I—just afterwards, yeah. No, no, we really were sort of gung-ho, when you think about it. I mean, we were eager to do what we could do, there was no doubt about that. I mean, everybody felt that way. All my friends that were in the service with me, they all felt that way. I never heard any of them really complain. You never complained, you know, it didn't do you any good to begin with, but I just never—no, I really, I enjoyed my time, I really did. And it had some benefits, you know, I could come back out and go back to school on the GI—I mean, what the GI Bill—the GI Bill really built the middle group of Americans, there's no doubt about it, you know.

BAK: Yeah, it was very big. So, what'd you think of Truman?

IM: Well, I really—I thought he was a nice man. You know, he'd been a haberdasher. [laughs] [a haberdasher deals in clothing and accessories]

BAK: That's right, I'd forgotten that.

IM: I mean, to think that a haberdasher could be the president of the United States, you know. But I'll tell you, I was so busy in those years that I really didn't think much of—you know what I mean.

BAK: Sure.

IM: By this time, I'm married and starting a family, and my husband's in practice, and so, you know, you really—you didn't have as much time to think about—and the thing is, we didn't have TV, you know.

BAK: Now, where did you all settle, after?

IM: In Indianapolis, we lived in Indianapolis for three years, and then Dick decided he was going to join the VA, because he would have stayed in the navy, but then he thought, no, I don't think I want to stay in the navy. He was a—by this time, he's a full lieutenant, and then he decided, no, I don't think I want to stay in the navy, so then he was in private practice for about three years, and then he decided to join the VA, so he did, and we moved to Asheville, North Carolina, and lived there for seven years. Then he was made a chief of a dental department in North Carolina, so we moved to Fayetteville and lived there for sixteen years. Then we moved to Saginaw, and we were there for four years, then back to Asheville. That's where we really wanted to go, because the children were born there. And we wanted to go back to Asheville, and then he died. And then I moved back to Fayetteville, and all this time, I had lived in Fayetteville for fifty years, and I wanted to go back there, because that's where my friends were.

BAK: Okay. Oh, fifty, not fifteen. Okay.

IM: Fifty.

BAK: Wow, all right.

IM: Yeah, I—once we left Indiana, we never went back, you know. North Carolina has always been our home. And see, the children have gone to school here.

BAK: Now, how many—you had Margaret, and—

IM: I have a youngest—a young daughter, that's—she went to State [North Carolina State University], I have a son—and she lives in South Carolina. I have a son that's a professor, and he lives in Boston, and he has a PhD in chemistry, and he lives in—he's in Boston.

BAK: Okay. Did you have any heroes? Who were your heroes or heroines during that time?

IM: Well, Major Broome was one of my heroes.

BAK: Major Broome?

IM: Yeah.

BAK: Okay.

IM: I—I—he was just, to me, the epitome.

BAK: Of soldier?

IM: Of a—well, he was such a gentleman, and he was so fine, you know what I mean? You know, he wasn't a burly man at all, he just was a nice gentleman, you know, a gentle gentleman, you know. [chuckles] He wasn't a sissy or anything like that, he just—there was something about him that was different than a lot of people, a lot of the soldiers.

BAK: Was it a refined—

IM: You know, he had a refinement—yeah.

BAK: Okay, got it.

IM: Yeah, yeah. You could just tell, and when I'd talk to him, he was so well-educated, and you know, I just—I felt so sorry for him, because I knew he wasn't going to live.

BAK: Did he know he wasn't going to live?

IM: Well, I don't know. We never talked about it.

BAK: Got it.

IM: You know. I was just there to keep him comfortable, really, and to ease any pain or anything he had.

BAK: Did he get morphine?

IM: I don't think we—we had to put him to sleep when they changed his dressings. And—but I can't remember giving him any morphine. I don't think he had much pain, even though he had this broken arm, and then this leg that was gone, and then the gas gangrene. And—but I don't think Major Broome comp—he didn't really complain a lot, you know. I don't think he liked the circumstance he was in, and that he couldn't control it, you know. And he really—it just tickled me how he just demanded these things, you know, because you don't see that. And he was a major in the Marine Corps, well, you just don't see officers conducting themselves that way. And so I really got a kick out of him.

BAK: You mean, demanding things?

IM: Yeah, demanding, yeah. I mean, he just demanded. I mean, they made him a bed light. Well, you didn't have bed lights.

BAK: He got one, though.

IM: He got one.

BAK: Got it.

IM: And you didn't get the food that the captains got, or you know, the powers that be. He got it, too.

BAK: Did he do it quietly, or did he yell, or?

IM: No, no, he wasn't—oh, no, he never was—he never was rude or anything, he just—he just stated a fact, and that's the way it was going to be.

BAK: Got it.

IM: Yeah. [laughs]

BAK: Actually, what did you think of Eleanor Roosevelt?

IM: Well, I thought she was a fine—I know people made fun of her, but I thought she was a fine lady.

BAK: Okay. Did you have any favorite songs or movies from that time?

IM: Oh, we saw—yeah, there were a lot of them, but I can't remember. I remember when White Christmas came out. And I remember—and what, that famous Christmas story, you know, the great—what is it, with James Stewart?

BAK: Right, um, I'm blanking on it.

IM: It's a Wonderful Life.

BAK: It's a Wonderful—right, It's a Wonderful Life.

IM: And we saw movies every day, if we had the time.

BAK: Every day? Okay.

IM: Yeah, because that's—and that was up at the hospital, I mean, you'd just go to the movies, you know, and that was fun. And so you did have some entertainment, you know.

BAK: Right.

IM: And—

BAK: But you went to dances—were those, did you have specific groups or bands that you liked, or songs?

IM: Oh, I loved Tommy Dorsey and, yeah, oh, I love all these old songs, yeah. They bring back memories.

BAK: Now, did Tommy Dorsey ever—sure. Did Tommy Dorsey ever come to—as a—

IM: No, I don't think we ever had any big bands come.

BAK: Okay. But you liked Tommy Dorsey.

IM: Yeah, I liked Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey. There—and Guy Lombardo, yeah. I remember those. Of course, I was always used to hearing them on the radio when I was in nurses'—you know, we had radios in our room and all.

BAK: Were you a good dancer, did you like to dance?

IM: Oh, I loved to dance, yeah. Yeah. It was fun, we—you know, you—the thing is, I—you made the best of what you had. You had to, you know, there was no alternative, there was no going back.

BAK: Right.

IM: And I made some good friends, I had this very dear friend, there's pictures of Mary in amongst my stuff. And she lost a brother in Australia, he was her brother John. He was—I think he was a pilot. But anyway, we became great friends, and we double dated, and I got her dates with different army officers and stuff, you know, and navy, you know. And so anyway, Mary—and then her youngest brother, Patrick, came over to see her, he was in the navy, and he was being shipped to the South Pacific, so I met Pat, her brother, and he was there a few days, visiting her, and then he went off. So then, I heard that his ship had been hit by a kamikaze.

BAK: Oh my.

IM: And so I went to Mary, and of course, she's brokenhearted, you know. Because she didn't know what happened. And then she found out he was killed. So, she went to the superintendent of—or the head nurse, and said "I have to go back to the States, I have to tell my parents, I don't want an officer going to their door and telling them they lost another son." So she left, she got permission, they flew her back, and she was from Iowa, and so she told her parents and had a week or so with them. And then she came back to Hawaii. And I felt so sorry for her, because their—oh, and she had, her youngest brother was in the Coast Guard, and when that happened, they pulled him out right away and sent him back to the States, because he was the last son in that family.

BAK: So, she had lost other brothers.

IM: She had lost those two brothers, yeah. And I guess that's part of the thing, the government, if you were in the service, you can't lose all the males that are in that family, you know. That happened after the Sullivans, those five brothers—

BAK: Right, the five brothers, yeah. [The Sullivans were five brothers who were all either killed in action or died shortly after the sinking of the USS Juneau on November 13, 1942.]

IM: Yeah. And so, Mary's brother had to leave the Coast Guard and go back to the farm, because I think she was raised on a farm. But I felt so sorry for her, because I had met her young—and he'd just gotten married.

BAK: Oh.

IM: And see, my grandson was killed two years ago.

BAK: Where?

IM: He was a pilot, he was killed in Afghanistan.

BAK: I'm very sorry.

IM: Yeah. And so, you know, but I have some happy memories of my life, and the time I was in the service, and my nurse's training, you know.

So—and I think Margaret is always amazed, because, you know, having lost my parents, and we all stuck together, she says "You know, Mother, families don't do that anymore."

BAK: Wow, that's—I was very impressed with your whole story.

IM: Yeah, it was amazing, you know. My brother-in-law was—and I loved my brother-in-law, he was a great guy, you know. And he took us all in, and as I say, if one had a nickel, we all had a nickel, you know.

BAK: That's really great.

IM: Yeah. And it was my sister Irma, and I, we were responsible to do all the grocery shopping, because my sister worked—well, Irma worked too, but she would have free time. So she and I would do all the grocery shopping, and I can remember for five dollars, we would go to the grocery store and have enough groceries to last a week.

BAK: Wow.

IM: For four or five people. Yeah. But somehow or other, the five of us stuck together, you know, we just were very loyal to each other. And I wonder, sometimes, although I was so young, I wondered if somehow or other, my mother, our mother, must have instilled something in us, that you do—you know, you don't ask for help, you get yourself, you know—you rise above. And so, when I hear people complain about their environments, it makes me mad, because there's no reason to have to always be poor.

BAK: Okay.

IM: And of course, you know, I didn't know we were poor.

BAK: Right.

IM: [laughing] You know, it never dawned on me that we were poor. But when my father was alive, we had a very nice life, because we even had a farm that we would go to in the summer. Now, I don't remember it, but I have pictures of it. But—and my father would raise gladiolus, and then they'd sell them to the florists.

BAK: Got it.

IM: And we'd live out on the farm in the summer. But as I say, there's a lot of stuff I don't—as I say, I never knew that we were poor, I just thought we were like everybody else at that time.

BAK: Do you remember where you were when you heard about VE [Victory in Europe] Day?

IM: Oh, well, you know there were two.

BAK: Right, I was going to get to VJ [Victory in Japan] Day, but we were going to start with VE.

IM: Oh, sure, I was in Hawaii, and we just hooped and hollered it up, you should have heard us, you know. We got out of our quarters and were out on the parade ground, you know, and yelling and screaming, and—

BAK: Was this for VJ Day?

IM: Yeah, this was the first one.

BAK: Oh, VE, okay.

IM: But, now, you talked about VJ Day?

BAK: Well, no, that's my next one, so, what—

IM: Yeah, that was VJ Day. Now, when they—that was in '41—when did we invade Europe, in '41, wasn't it?

BAK: No, that was like '40—D-Day, like '43, I think.

IM: Oh yeah, that's right, it was a year or so after the war started.

BAK: Right. I think it was '43. [D-Day was actually June 6th, 1944.]

IM: VE Day was '44. I mean, not VE Day—when they invaded Europe, that was in '44.

BAK: Right, right.

IM: D-Day. And then I remember when we—when the war was over, that was something, when we were in Hawaii—

BAK: So, that was even—do you remember anything specific about VJ Day?

IM: Oh, in Japan?

BAK: Yes, when the war was officially over in August.

IM: Oh, yeah, see, they declared it twice, you know. When they dropped the first bomb, and then a week later, wasn't it, they dropped the second bomb, yeah.

BAK: So it was twice, okay, so you had two parties.

IM: Twice, yeah, and so we knew—see, we knew then we'd have to stay in the service for six more months, because when we entered, it was war plus six months.

BAK: Right.

IM: So we knew then that within six months, we would be out, you see.

BAK: So you were all happy.

IM: Yeah, oh yeah, because those who weren't going to stay in the service, now, I think a lot of them did stay in the service. I had friends that stayed in.

BAK: Navy—the nurses.

IM: The nurses, yeah. But I didn't really want to stay in, I wanted to get back to my family, you know.

BAK: Right.

IM: Although I never really went back to Fort Wayne, I still wanted to see my sisters and brothers more, you see.

BAK: Right. Do you remember anything about VJ Day, what you did, or?

IM: No, I don't remember.

BAK: Just a lot of hooting and hollering.

IM: Just hoot—yeah. And maybe the club was full, of course, I didn't drink much, so really I don't—there probably was drinking going on. [chuckles]

BAK: I would guess so, that would be my guess.

IM: Yeah. But I really didn't drink that much, so, you know, maybe I'd have one drink and that would—I just wasn't a drinker, you know. And so, obviously, there were people that got drunk. [chuckles]

BAK: That'd be a good day to get drunk. [both chuckle]

IM: But you know, due to the fact that you had to always be in your quarters at ten o' clock at night—

BAK: Even that night, huh?

IM: Yeah, oh yeah, there was no—yeah, even that night, yeah. You had to be in your quarters.

BAK: Did you have nurses that weren't in their quarters, or did you—

IM: I don't know. If they snuck out, I wouldn't know. You know, because we had two quarters, we had the first one, was the permanent quarters, and then when they decided we had to have more nurses, then they added—then they had a space and they added another quarters behind that.

BAK: Okay. Can you talk a little bit about your adjustment to civilian life, was there a big adjustment?

IM: Oh, no, I don't think so, because I got married. And then we lived in Chicago, because Dick was still stationed—he was still stationed at Great Lakes, and—no, I don't think so, I think—I think it was probably a relief. You know. I think that was it, that now we can start our lives.

BAK: Right, got it.

IM: Like, you know. That was a—you know, I was eager to get married and go on.

BAK: Now, did you live on—I mean, I know housing was hard to find after the war.

IM: Oh, no, we rented a room in a house, because we knew we weren't going to be there very long.

BAK: Okay. Do you consider yourself an independent person?

IM: Oh, I'm very independent.

BAK: Did you think the navy made you more that way, or did you just sort of—

IM: No, I was always very independent.

BAK: Okay.

IM: And I've always been an optimist.

BAK: That's important.

IM: Yeah. I've—somehow or other, I don't know, if there's a problem, let's fix it. You know?

BAK: Did—many people consider women in the service of that day to be pioneers. Did you think of yourself as a pioneer?

IM: No, I don't think so, no. I just felt I was doing a duty, yeah.

BAK: Okay. And you said—for your—were your children in the military? I know you've told me that—

IM: No.

BAK: Just your grandson.

IM: Just my grandson, that's it. And he and I—he was sort of my clone, you know. And he was a doll. And—no.

BAK: Okay. Did you ever encourage your children to join the military?

IM: No, I—no, because they never, ever, really thought about it, I don't think. Although we lived in Fayetteville, which is right next to [Fort] Bragg, they had a lot of army friends, but it never dawned on them that they'd want to be in the service. Maybe—well, I don't know why. You know, we talked about it. But I don't think they ever thought of—you know, they just wanted to go to college someplace, and we gave—told them that they had

a choice, you know. And we just said—they knew they had to go to college, I mean, that was bred in them, I think.

And that they—whatever they did, they had to—like, with the girls, I said “Whatever you major in, major in something so in case you ever got married and lost your husband, you could make a living.” You know.

BAK: So, what are your thoughts on the women’s liberation movement and feminism?

IM: Well, some of it I thought it was good. Like, I think that—like the fact that a woman could establish her credit right away, see, I had no problems. Now, my sister-in-law did. When her husband—and they were very wealthy, but they—when her husband died, she had a hard time getting credit in her name.

BAK: Why was it different for you, do you think?

IM: Well, when my husband died, I had no trouble at all. All I did was write to the companies and say “I need a credit card in my name,”

BAK: Oh, because she was trying to get it earlier.

IM: Yeah.

BAK: I see. I see.

IM: And I never could—well, see, her husband had died, and she wanted all the stuff in her name.

BAK: Right.

IM: And she had a long time establishing credit, not that she needed it, but she wanted it. And I didn’t have it—all our accounts were put in my name, then, and eliminated his name. No, I—now, there are some things, I still like the fact that men hold the door for you, I think it’s nice that they help you at the table, I mean, there are some things that’s anti-feminist that I like.

BAK: Okay.

IM: You know. I’m not a—you know, there’re just some parts of that, when we had that feminist movement, that helped women.

BAK: Okay. Would you recommend the service to young women today?

IM: Oh yes, absolutely.

BAK: Because?

IM: Well, for one thing, it has the benefits, that maybe—say you couldn't afford to go to college, maybe, when you join the service, and then you can go to college. I would think from the educational background, it would be great.

BAK: Okay. How do you feel about women in combat positions, or on submarines?

IM: Well, you know, there again, I'm a little bit ambivalent about that. You know, whether they should be on the front lines.

BAK: Okay. Why? Just—

IM: Well, I don't know. I think there's something about being a woman, would I be willing to kill somebody? You see? That would be my—that would be the only thing that would hold me back. Not that I would get killed, but that I would have to kill someone else.

BAK: Right. What are your thoughts on women serving on submarines, which is new?

IM: I don't like that. [chuckles]

BAK: Okay, why?

IM: Well, it's such a close—you're in this submarine for six months, there's probably sex that's going to appear at some point, you know.

BAK: So you just think for unit morale?

IM: Yeah, yeah, I think so, yeah.

BAK: And are [sic, is] there any other work that you think should be off-limits to women in—

IM: No, I think a woman—I really think my generation lost out on it, because I think we lost a lot of things, a lot of things being a woman that you couldn't succeed in, do you see?

BAK: Yes.

IM: Like medicine. All kinds of things that women—you know, when I was first married, women didn't work, you know.

BAK: Do you think you would have maybe thought about going to med school if you were—things were different?

IM: No, I never—

BAK: You always wanted to be a nurse?

IM: No, I never had a desire to go to med—now, my son did, but I never did, and the girls were in medicine, in some phase of medicine, like Barbara started as a med tech, and then she got married and decided—her husband was an engineer, she decided to become an engineer. Well, she's an engineer with Duke Power. Well, you know, fifty years ago, you didn't hear of women engineers.

BAK: No, you didn't. Nope. How has your life been different because of your time in the Navy Nurse Corps, would you say?

IM: Well, I met my husband. [laughs]

BAK: Husband, okay, that's big.

IM: Well, I don't know. Maybe it made me more tolerant.

BAK: Of what?

IM: Of other people.

BAK: In what ways, would you say?

IM: Well, you know, you dealt with so many different classes of people.

BAK: Sure.

IM: That you didn't—I was never biased, you know, I've never—I'm as good as you are, you're as good as I am. And I think that's the way you should think, you know, that—why should I be any different, why should you be any different if you're of a different color?

BAK: Yes. What do you think of the whole “Don't Ask, Don't Tell,” and gays and lesbians in the military?

IM: Well, you know, there again, I've never quite understood being a gay—homosexual, you know, it's so foreign to me that I really don't know the psychology behind it, do you know what I mean?

BAK: Yes.

IM: So, you know, I met—when I was living in Fayetteville, for years I was connected with the theatre. And I knew a lot of gay guys, and they were wonderful! You know, I had nothing—except the ones that were so flagrant about it, when they announced—you met them and they'd say “I'm gay”, well, I didn't want to know they were gay. [chuckling] That's their business. I didn't say to someone “I'm a heterosexual”, you know. I mean, so

there again, I really don't understand them, but I think they have a place, you know. I have some in my family. You know, I think we all do. And I just—you know, I just never, ever thought they were any different.

BAK: So your thoughts about them serving in the military, or?

IM: No, I feel if they want to be in the military, let them be in the military. You know, I can't quite understand this argument that you don't want a gay next to you if you're in battle. Well, I don't believe that. I think he wants to live as well as you do.

BAK: Right.

IM: Yeah.

BAK: Well, those are all my questions I have, is there anything that you wanted to add that I didn't cover?

IM: No, I think you—Margaret has told me, whenever I tell her about my childhood, she's always amazed, because when she mentioned this to me a week or so ago, she said "You know, Mother, your family has always been so different." And I think it's because it was the Depression, maybe. See, I don't remember that we didn't have anything. Maybe we didn't, you know. But, she said "And how you [unclear] stuff together," I mean, you know.

BAK: Did you ever reconnect with your youngest sister?

IM: Oh, yeah, we saw her—I didn't as much as my older sisters did. And I didn't like her husband.

BAK: Oh.

IM: And—he was a crook as far as I was concerned, but. Yeah, I saw her, but we didn't have much in common, because, see, we were only together for eight years, you know, she was adopted shortly after they were—we were sent to the children's home, so we never—I don't think she understood me, and although I loved her dearly, I really didn't—now, I'm quite fond of her children, I mean, I love my nieces and nephews, you know. But I just never understood her, you know. We didn't have that feeling that I had for my others, you see?

BAK: Got it. Right.

IM: And when I went to Fort Wayne, we'd always go up to see her, you know, that kind of stuff. And I enjoyed being with her, but she would—we just didn't have enough in common.

BAK: Got it. Well, Irene, thank you very much.

IM: Yeah!

BAK: And this was great.

IM: Well, listen, I'll show you that—

BAK: Well, let's go look at the stuff.

IM: Yeah.

BAK: Okay, great.

IM: And then you can go through here and see what—or, would you want to take the whole box?

BAK: Well, let me look through it, but I might.

IM: Yeah, because there are a lot of them that you probably wouldn't be interested—

BAK: Right, and I just don't want to—okay, well, I'm going to turn this off.

IM: Okay.

BAK: And thank you.

[End of Interview]