

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Barbara Wujciak

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: December 16, 2011

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is December 16, 2011. This is Therese Strohmer. I'm at the home of Barbara Wujciak, and I'm in Durham to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Barbara would you state your name the way you'd like it to read on your collection?

BW: Barbara A. Wujciak.

TS: Well, Barbara, thank you for letting me come and talk to you today. How about if you start out by telling me where and when you were born?

BW: I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, on the twenty-first of September, 1961.

TS: What kind of town is Elizabeth, New Jersey?

BW: It's just outside of New York City. In fact, Elizabeth is where Newark Airport is. It kind of bleeds into that. But family didn't live there very long. We moved to North Carolina when I was four.

TS: Oh, is that right?

BW: I really don't recall—

TS: Much about that?

BW: Right.

TS: So, where did you move into North Carolina?

BW: Into Charlotte.

TS: In Charlotte?

BW: Yes.

TS: So how was growing—is that where you grew up then?

BW: Grew up there, and then eventually moved to Rocky Mount [North Carolina] when I was in between the seventh and eighth grade, so I consider Rocky Mount as my hometown.

TS: Okay. Well, let's talk a little bit about you, what you remember about growing up. Well, first of all, do you have any siblings?

BW: Yes, I have two sisters. I have one full-blooded sister, Chris, who is two years younger, and then another sister, Susan. My folks got divorced, my mom remarried, and he had a daughter who was two years younger than Chris.

TS: Okay, so two younger sisters.

BW: Yes.

TS: What did your folks do when you were growing up?

BW: My father was a research chemist. Then his division got eliminated during the, kind of early seventies, so he bought a miniature golf course and ran putt-putt for quite some time. My mom has been a stay-at-home mom. My folks divorced, my mom remarried, and Hugh, who is my stepfather, got a job with Hardee Hamburgers in Rocky Mount and so he was an executive there.

TS: Is that Hardee's?

BW: Yes, that's Hardee's.

TS: Oh okay, I didn't know it was called Hardee Hamburgers.

BW: Well, that's—yes, that's the way we always referred to it; Hardee Hamburgers.

TS: Okay.

BW: My father sold his putt-putt and retired down to Myrtle Beach [South Carolina] until he passed away in ninety-three. Both my stepdad and my mom are still living.

TS: I see. So, did you get to play much putt-putt?

BW: All the time.

TS: Did you? Are you a golfer?

BW: Yes.

TS: Are you? Did that putt-putt help shape your golfing skills?

BW: Of course, of course. No, my dad played golf, so I always—I enjoyed playing golf with him growing up.

TS: Well, tell me what it was like growing up in Rocky Mount then. Was that—that's kind of a rural area?

BW: It's a—it's a small town, less than fifty thousand people. We rode our bikes all over the place. It was just a great town to grow up. You know, if you got in trouble your mom knew about it before you got home, that sort of thing. We lived close to the high school. During lunch we could go home, and every day mom would say "How many kids are coming over for lunch today?" Because we lived really, really close by and, you know, I'd have this gaggle of friends that'd come over and hang out for lunch.

TS: That's pretty nice.

BW: Yes.

TS: That's pretty nice. What kind of things did you do growing up? What kind of games did you play—things like that?

BW: Like with my sisters? Board games and stuff like that. I played softball in junior high and high school, and you know, rode bikes, threw Frisbees, you know, all that kind of stuff.

TS: Yes? Did you—did you enjoy school?

BW: Yes. Yes, I did. I had a great, great, great group of friends and I was a big nerd and still am. I mean, being an optometrist you have to be a nerd.

TS: Do you?

BW: Yes. It's definitely required.

TS: Okay, all right.

BW: But I had—there were so many nerds in my class that we didn't know that we were different. So we didn't get bullied or picked on or anything like that because we were all just as goofy as the next one was.

TS: How many kids were in your class?

BW: We graduated 396, and—

TS: That's a lot of nerds.

BW: Well, I wouldn't say the whole class but, you know, my gang of friends. My gang of friends was very special and still am.

TS: What was so special about them?

BW: It's, you know, just a friendship that endures. In fact I had my thirtieth high school reunion a couple years ago and I brought my mom. We'd—all of us—that's when I realized like "Wow, I had good friends in high school" but I didn't realize how good they were. Like they were still—felt—I mean, I don't see them very often but when we do it's just a very heartwarming feeling.

TS: I bet they—were they wondering if you mom would bring them—was bringing any sandwiches for them? [laugh]

BW: No, no, they didn't know—I didn't tell anybody that she was coming.

TS: Oh really? Oh, that's kind of neat. How's your mom enjoy that?

BW: She—she—well, in preparation for this whole trip—my mom lives in Florida now and she had a broken foot at the time, so there was all this things you had to do to prepare for her to get here. And, she was like "I'm not going to miss it. I'm not going to miss it. I'm not going to miss it." So, I think that provided a little motivation for her to go through physical therapy a little bit more effectively.

TS: Oh, that's good.

BW: And then when she got here she just, I mean, we both just had a blast.

TS: Oh, that's really neat. Well, now, what kind of subjects did you enjoy the most in school?

BW: More math and science; I remember having better math and science teachers. That's what I was more interested in.

TS: Did you have an idea from an early age what—did you always want to be an optometrist, sort of thing?

BW: No, golly, growing up I always thought I'd be an architect, but somewhere the creativity just, just isn't there or wasn't there, and when I actually decided on a major when I was in college I just kind of looked and like "Well, who—what class do I have the best grades in?" and I had the best grades in math, so I ended up being a math major.

TS: I see. Did you have, were you encouraged in class? You know, because they talk about how young girls don't have the opportunity or in classes are not encouraged to do math and science. Did you have a lot of good teachers who encouraged you to pursue that?

BW: Yes, yes.

TS: Do you remember any particular that were memorable?

BW: I would think one of the more memorable teachers was my chemistry teacher. Her name was Reba Bone, and she just passed away last year. She was a great gal. My calculus teacher, Mr. Rublein, was pretty wonderful as well. He also taught physics.

TS: What was it about them that you enjoyed so much?

BW: Well, for me, I like gathering information and finding an answer, and with all the social sciences you can just kind of elaborate, and with math and physics you have to come—you have to find that one answer and that's me.

TS: So, having that sort of focus and like a conclusion too, right, some closure to whatever you're trying to discover was good, right. Well, that's kind of neat. So, did you always want to go to college then?

BW: I think it was just sort of preprogrammed that I went to college. My mother only went to high school. My dad has his PhD, and it was always thought that we would go to some kind of college. But I never felt any pressure, it was just "Oh yeah," that's what you did next.

TS: So, how did you figure out what you wanted to do next; where you wanted to go to college?

BW: That's a cute story. When I was a junior in high school my stepdad and my mom wanted to go to this boat show which was in Annapolis [Maryland], and so they piled us, all three of us girls, into the car and we drove up to Annapolis and spent the weekend up there. Well, you know, I wasn't—we weren't real interested in looking at boats and my stepdad was so he went to the boat show and we toured the [Naval] Academy. I remember driving away and Hugh says "Well Barb, you going to go there?" and I said "Yes I am."

TS: Why was it that you felt like you wanted to go there, then?

BW: Well, one, 1976 was the first year they allowed women to go to the service academy, so this was all pretty new. If I was a junior in high school that was '77 to '78, so this was really, really, really new. And my mom wasn't particularly a women's libber or bra burner or anything like that, but she was always all of her children's biggest fan. "You do

whatever you want to do and I'm behind you no matter how kooky," like going to the Naval Academy sounded in 1977.

At the time when I was really seriously looking at colleges, you know, I was pretty focused on the Academy. Because one, you got a good education. Number two, it was much more of a challenge mentally. And the other thing is you had a job afterwards; you didn't have to do that. Plus, you know, I'm not your typical girl. I wasn't into clothes or fashion or anything like that, so they told you what to wear every day, you know, I didn't have to make any decisions. That kind of stuff [laughs].

TS: [unclear] Did you consider any of the other services?

BW: You know, I didn't. My cousin married a fellow that had gone to [The United States Military Academy at] West Point [New York], and when we were smaller, golly, I was in the seventh grade, our—one of our neighbors, one of the fellows got into West Point, but he—I don't even think he lasted a year and I remember he came back and he gave me a cap; an army cap. And I thought, well he was just the coolest thing. He taught us how to water ski and stuff like that, so he was just a cool guy. But never really wanted to go to The Long Gray Line [refers to all graduates of West Point]. [both chuckle]

TS: Did you know any—I mean, was anybody in your family had any service experience?

BW: Not really. My stepdad was in World War II for two years but, you know, nothing—

TS: Well, that's experience.

BW: —nothing spectacular.

BW: I mean, he played the drums for cadence for the training at Great Lakes Naval Base [sic, Naval Station Great Lakes in Illinois]. It wasn't, you know, no. And my father was an interwar guy and he was in college, so he didn't go. My uncle was in World War II, but you know, ground, a tank guy, but again just two years and boom that's—that's it.

TS: No career people.

BW: No.

TS: But you had people that you knew that were in the service.

BW: Yes.

TS: So, when you talked to, like, your friends, and things like that and said "Hey I think I'm going to go to the Academy in Annapolis," what did they think?

BW: They thought it was great, and I've got a wonderful story about that. I was—we were seniors in high school and I remember being in the calculus class, and it must have been

during Christmas break and in—I was class of '79 and so in the class of '78 there were two guys that got into Annapolis and two guys that got into West Point from my high school. One of the guys from West Point had come back during Christmas break to just sort of see teachers. So, he was hanging out in our classroom and he was sort of boasting. He's like, "Well, four guys from class of '78 got into the service academies, blah, blah, blah, blah." Basically like, "What you got?"

And I remember one of my good friends Steve, he turns around and he goes "Yeah, but how many of them are girls?" and I just—that was just a tremendous amount of support that he probably didn't even know that he gave me at that time.

TS: Wow, awesome, that's a pretty good story. That's good. So, did you have any negative reaction to it for, you know, people like in your close circle?

BW: No, I couldn't say that I did, no.

TS: So, you finished high school, then.

BW: Right.

TS: How is that process of getting into the Academy? Why don't we talk about that because I don't think a lot of people are familiar with what you have to, kind of, go through to apply and—

BW: You have to be nominated by a congressman, or the Vice President or President in order to just have a chance. You have to submit letters of recommendation, your grades, your SAT's, all the normal kind of application to college stuff; usually write a letter. Then each representative is allowed to select a certain number for—as—to give them a nomination. And then those nominees then get—they get into a pool at the Academy, and that's who competes for an appointment, which is admission to the academies.

TS: So, do you remember which—was it a congressman that—

BW: Yes, it was our representative L.H. Fountain [Democratic United States Representative Lawrence H. Fountain] from the second congressional district in North Carolina.

TS: Did you just, like, write him and ask him, or—

BW: I applied. You can apply to your representative and to your two senators, which is what I did.

TS: Okay. So then, how was it when you found out that you got in?

BW: Well, I didn't get in my first time.

TS: Oh, okay.

BW: So, I got a big rejection letter, because at the time and—one, it was so early on. I was in the fifth class of women. They didn't know what to do with women, especially in the navy because women couldn't go on combatant ships at the time, so your jobs afterwards were quite limited. So, they were only accepting a hundred women per class.

TS: Out of how many? Do you know?

BW: Classes are between eleven and twelve hundred people.

TS: Oh, so like ten percent.

BW: Yes. Yes, and if you're asking me how many women applied I don't know that.

TS: No, no, I just meant like how many—how big was the class. So, it was like eleven hundred something, and only about ten percent were women that they—

BW: Right.

TS: Okay, I get that.

BW: Also in the navy, and also in the air force, there's a vision requirement and I've worn glasses since I've been eleven years old. So, because I wore glasses I was put in a—had to go into a medical waiver pool. So, if you don't have 20/20 vision, or if you're colorblind, or something like that you don't—yes, there's certain physical standards they look for. If you've got flat feet; if you've got asthma; you know, you are just automatically rejected. I mean, you could be the smartest kid in the class, but if you've got one of these physical limitations you're automatically rejected. I wasn't automatically rejected. Like I said, I was put on a medical waiver.

TS: Okay.

BW: There are a certain number of waivers for a certain number of physical limitations that people have. And I didn't get a waiver, so I went to [University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill my freshman year and had a real freshman year at a civilian college and then reapplied again and got in.

TS: Oh, well, talk about that year at Chapel Hill. How was that?

BW: Oh, it was fine. It was fine. I was pretty focused on doing well.

TS: Did you know you were going to reapply to the Academy when you—

BW: Right, yes.

TS: That was, like, your goal?

BW: Yes, I knew the next day.

TS: [laughs] When you got the letter?

BW: When I got the letter.

TS: Is that right? So you were really focused on going.

BW: Yes.

TS: What drove you to want to do it?

BW: Well, one, they said I couldn't.

TS: Okay, that's a good motivation.

BW: And, you know, I thought I'd be good at it. So, that's why I wanted to—

TS: How did you feel about being, like, at the beginning of this, too? Really, only, like you said, only a few classes had really graduated even.

BW: Right. How did I feel being at the beginning?

TS: Yes, was that inspirational for you? Did that—was that kind of neat or did that not even cross your mind?

BW: I don't think it did. I don't think it did. I don't think—you know, now looking back I'm like "Wow, that was pretty something" but at the time it was just—

TS: An opportunity that you saw? And that's what you saw it as. Okay, that makes sense. That makes sense. So, you went to Chapel Hill, and you probably took a few math classes or maybe didn't have to. [laughs]

BW: No, I did. I did.

TS: Okay, so then you reapplied.

BW: Yes.

TS: And then what happened?

BW: Then I got in. Then I got in.

TS: When you got that letter how did that go?

BW: Actually, my sister got the letter because she was at home.

TS: Okay. She saw it?

BW: I was in Chapel Hill, and she got the letter, and she—I remember her reading it to me. Yes, that was a good day.

TS: You were pretty excited?

BW: Yes.

TS: So, did—then did you start like with the new school year? You went through the whole freshman year at Chapel Hill and then—

BW: Yes.

TS: Okay, so tell me about getting ready to go to Annapolis. What kind of preparation did you have to have for that?

BW: Preparation?

TS: Like, did they say “Here is a checklist of things you need to bring.”

BW: You know, I don’t remember that, but they do do that now, and I’m what’s called a Blue and Gold Officer, so I am a—

TS: You mean right now you are?

BW: Right now I am.

TS: What is that?

BW: I am a liaison from the Naval Academy to high school kids, to fill them in on what you need to be able to do, what you can bring, what you can’t bring, blah, blah, blah. I help them through the application process. I think I’m a little bit more hands on than my Blue and Gold Officer was back then. He basically came in, in uniform, and gave me a diploma, or a certificate saying—and read it—and I remember having a party in our back yard with all my good pals; friends and neighbors, teachers, and stuff like that. But nowadays they inform you a little bit more about what’s going to happen and what you need. As far as preparation, you know, of course doing well in school is always a big thing, and being physically active because—

TS: Were you—were you physically active? I mean, were you into—you said softball, anything—did you play any other sports?

BW: Oh yes. I mean, I've always—I've run and played golf and stuff like that, so I've always been an athlete.

TS: Active.

BW: Yes.

TS: Okay. So, when you—so, then you're going to the Naval Academy and this is 1980.

BW: Yes, 1980.

TS: Okay. Why don't you tell me about—do you remember anything about, say, the first day or week or anything like that? What was that like?

BW: Well, it was very different from what you'd ever expect. I mean, since I had no family experience of people being in the navy, or much less in the military, all this was very new. It was definitely a challenge, and I had two great roommates up there and everybody was just thrown together, and it became very obvious that if you worked together things were a whole lot easier. I think that was the biggest thing. One of the coolest stories—you have to go through six weeks of something called Plebe Summer, and that's where they really rake you over the coals. It's kind of like boot camp in the army.

TS: That's before classes start?

BW: This is before classes start. Yes, this is the first week of July that you show up in hot, hazy, humid Annapolis and you sweat, sweat, sweat, sweat, sweat. I remember towards the end of that time there was a time when I was running down the hall and one of the upper classmen stopped me, and they could stop you at any time and ask you a gazillion questions, and for some reason I was just Johnny-on-the-spot that day, and knew answer after answer after answer. They were just, you know, relentless as far as quizzing me about something and then I remember my company commander kind of walking by and he basically said to his classmates "She's mine. You can cool it," and he gave me a wink and let me go. And that, again, was one of those subtle "I've got your back. I support you. You're doing a good job," without him ever having to say anything about that.

TS: Did that happen very often?

BW: I just remember that one [laughs].

TS: That's a good validation.

BW: That was just a kind of a momentous thing because I know it was getting towards the end and I know these guys were really harassing me badly, and like I said, my company commander came by and said “No, this is—this is it. You’re done.”

TS: Yes, “You’re done.”

BW: “You’re done. You’re done. She’s mine. That’s it. Get out of here.”

TS: So—so there—I’m thinking, okay, so seventy-six was the first year. The seniors—there would have been some female seniors that year, too, right?

BW: Yes.

TS: Did you have any interaction with them, or any of the other classes?

BW: During Plebe Summer, no. There was one woman, who incidentally I’m friends with now.

TS: Is that right?

BW: That I—She was not in my company because you really stayed pretty sequestered from everybody else in your company, but she—of course you had the ladies’ room, and you’d run into her in the ladies’ room and I just remember being just scared to death of her. And she didn’t say much, and she was quiet and those are always really the scarier ones; the ones who don’t yell and scream. That was the only one Plebe Summer that I remember, but after the academic year started of course there’s—you know, everybody’s all jumbled up together.

TS: Do you want to say who that was? The name of the person that you—

BW: Her name is M.C. Hennessey.

TS: M.C. Hennessey?

BW: Yes.

TS: Okay. So, she would have been in the first graduating class then.

BW: She would have been the second.

TS: Second.

BW: Yes, the class of ’80 graduated.

TS: Oh, I see, right because then you’re starting—I gotcha.

BW: So, then it was the second—the second class.

TS: Awesome. All right, so when you're going through that Plebe Summer, and you're thinking "What have I gotten myself into"—

BW: No, I just thought this was—this was an incredible opportunity, a terrific challenge—I loved being there.

TS: Was there anything that you just really enjoyed doing?

BW: Well, you had to play a sport—

TS: Okay.

BW: —and I played softball. So, I loved going out, and that's where I could—where everybody was like "Huh," takes a big deep breather, you know, you weren't getting yelled at, you weren't getting raked over the coals, that kind of thing. You'd actually do what you really liked to do.

TS: Was that, like, intramural? You played between—

BW: Yes, right.

TS: Okay. Did you have a good team?

BW: No [both laugh], but I have very dear friends who are still very dear friends from that.

TS: Okay, so you make it through Plebe Summer, and then you go into your classwork, right?

BW: Yes.

TS: Oh, also, in the summer did you have to do anything on the ships or boats or anything like that?

BW: Oh yes, we learned to sail.

TS: How was that?

BW: Oh, it was great.

TS: You were on the Chesapeake [Bay]?

BW: Yes. I mean, come on, yes.

TS: Had you sailed before?

BW: No.

TS: Did you fall in love with it, or anything like that, or just like—

BW: I just—I like the water. I mean, I can look at the water and just relax. I think it's very relaxing. Being out on the water and then learning about oceans and tides and currents and all that kind of stuff.

TS: Right. Did you learn to tie a few knots?

BW: [laughs] You know, I don't really recall that.

TS: Really?

BW: But, I mean, more about navigation and what all the little things are.

TS: Oh yes, you're going to be the officer so you're, right, you're not—

BW: I'm not what they call the deckie. [slang for deckhand]

TS: That's right. Okay, so that's the ones who learn all that, because I hear about that in the navy. Okay, so alright, now you're starting your first year of classes. How was that?

BW: It was just fine. It was just fine. I had—Since I'd been to a year of college I was advanced academically.

TS: You had to start at the beginning.

BW: I had to start all over at the beginning. But you—they'd place you into certain classes. So, I placed out of a math class, or a physics class, or something like that. I can't remember all of that.

TS: How is it? I mean, so, I guess describe, like, a typical day.

BW: You have to get up for morning meal formation. Usually there's a bunch of plebes, or freshman, who—there's this thing called the chow call and it goes off ten minutes before the formation and five minutes before the formation. You announce the officer of the day, what you're supposed to be wearing, what the meal is, what the time is, and take off.

TS: And where are you taking off to?

BW: Well, either back to your room if it's the ten minute formation or if it's the five minute formation you run the formation.

TS: How did you do on all the dress, and you know, making—did you have things like demerits or something like that?

BW: Yes, yes, I mean, there's a demerit system. I only got two demerits—two times I got what's called "fried," or got demerits.

TS: What were they?

BW: One, my plebe year, my freshman year, I got demerits because I came back late from Thanksgiving, because there was a traffic accident on [Interstate] 95. So, that's—yes, they give you demerits for that.

TS: You've got to get to the gate at a certain time?

BW: Right, right, and different—different—you know, they make the freshman come back earlier than they do the seniors.

TS: Okay.

BW: That was just unfortunate. It was Thanksgiving Day traffic on 95.

TS: Did you have to get up, like, super early and do—did you do a lot of physical activity?

BW: Well, I mean, every—you have to take a P.E. [physical examination] every semester.

TS: Okay.

BW: Whether it be, you know, the women took gymnastics to hand-to-hand combat, to you know, basketball, to swimming, you know—every semester you had to pass a swimming part. You had to do an obstacle course. You had to do a mile run. Sit-ups and, not push-ups, but the women had to do what's called a flexed arm hang—you just kind of had to hang there with your chin above a bar. The guys had to do chin-ups. And I think there was maybe a standing broad jump or something like that, for some reason.

TS: Well, some of the—you know, some of the criticism at that time you get from the outside is that women didn't have to do the same sorts of things as men, and so—

BW: Oh no, no. We had to do exactly the same thing that the guys did. Now, they did give us—instead of going over an eight-foot wall during the obstacle course, I think we went over a seven foot wall. But, no we had to do—and the times were a little bit different—like we had to run in—or for to pass the guys had to run a six-thirty mile and the women had to run a seven-thirty mile.

TS: So, did you ever hear any of your, like, upperclassmen or guys in your class grouching about that at all?

BW: There was a certain sect of guys that didn't want women there. I mean, this was just still very, very early in all of that. So, given an opportunity to cut a woman down for something they certainly would. But I had the attitude where—it's not going to happen to me.

TS: Did it happen to some of your friends?

BW: They—You can kind of see the people who couldn't handle it, and so they became a little bit more targeted as far as that goes.

TS: So, oh okay, so like they could seem vulnerable, and then—

BW: Right.

TS: All right, and then they would be more easily picked on or more readily picked on.

BW: Right, right, like I remember there was what they called a rumble, or a little fight, between two classes, like my class who were freshman and then the juniors, I believe, at the time. There, you know, our classmates went and picked on one of the upper classmen, which is a big taboo but, you know, if you have this stuff going on you got to follow it through. So, there was this whole thing, and some heads were dunked in toilets or something like that, and I remember like, this was going down and I ran straight into the fight, and I think got a reputation after that of "leave me alone," so—

TS: So, you had to back up the other people that you were with?

BW: Right, right. And that I was willing to participate in this as well, so I became part of the—the game.

TS: Oh okay, so that—did that, do you think, help you fit in a little more tightly?

BW: Oh yes, yes. Also, the guys in my company were just super great. They were encouraging of women, rather than discouraging of women. And especially women that were there for the same reason that they were there, rather than some other women who were there for—

TS: What reasons were different?

BW: —the reasons were different, like, I can remember one of my roommates. She was—she was more flirtatious with the guys. I'm like "Come on, you're not here to do that. You're here to—"

TS: You're not here to pick up someone.

BW: You're here to learn how to be a naval officer.

TS: I see. So, was there some friction between the women because of that?

BW: You can—yes, I can see that.

TS: So, some—because sometimes people have said that not just in the Academy but just in the regular military where, you know, women who couldn't prove themselves or tried to rely on guys to do things for them really got, [phone ringing] it looked bad for the rest of the—rest of the women. Okay, do you want me to pause? I'll pause for a second.

[conversation regarding phone redacted]

TS: Okay, so that idea of, like, did you ever feel like you couldn't make a mistake?

BW: I still feel like that.

TS: Do you really? [both laugh]

BW: Yes.

TS: Is that just how you are wired?

BW: That's how I'm—that's how I'm wired.

TS: Yes, but I mean especially like being in the spotlight, being a very small percentage of women in this academy that's really, you know, male dominated system. Did you feel like you had to prove yourself as a woman?

BW: I didn't feel like that, but looking back on it I can see where that was, but at the time I didn't feel like it. I just felt like I was going to do my best.

TS: Okay. And you felt like you could do it, right?

BW: Yes.

TS: Was there something that—As you're going along and you said you weren't quite sure what to expect because you didn't know anybody that had been through, was there anything that really surprised you about the Academy? Either the culture, or just anything?

BW: Boy, I'm going to have to think about that question.

TS: Okay.

BW: I can answer that later, but I'm going to think about that.

TS: That's okay. Okay, well was there something you really, really enjoyed, like, "Oh my gosh. I'm so glad I'm here, I'm doing this."

BW: Just being there. Oh my gosh, I mean the—you know, talk about hallowed halls of people who had been there. [President James Earl, Jr.] Jimmy Carter was president, and he had gone to the Naval Academy, when I was there. He was president when I got in. You know, you name an admiral, I mean, and they were there. I mean, it's just—it's a historic place, and I cannot describe what it was like to be there because it was just over the top. It was absolutely over the top to be included into that.

TS: How is that passed on to you? You probably didn't know about these admirals before you got there, right?

BW: Right.

TS: So, how did they—how did you learn about this culture?

BW: Well, there's a class, Naval History, and I remember the instructor was a [United States] Marine Corps captain, I believe, and he started off every class with a reading of a citation of the Congressional Medal of Honor. So, you learn about what folks had done ahead of you.

TS: He started every class with that?

BW: Yes.

TS: Did you have any female role models in the institution at all?

BW: [chuckles] That is so funny, because there were—there were none. There were just none. But, as far as at the Academy, I remember there was one Marine Corps officer who was there. Of course, she's not an Academy grad because that was past her time, or after her time, but she was there. I didn't have any interaction with her, but a couple of the gals I played softball with were in her company and apparently she did very, very good things.

TS: Like what? What kind of things?

BW: Just, kind of, stuck up for them. And nobody gave her shit. One, she's a Marine Corps officer and she was—just had that persona as "tough as nails." But, the legendary Admiral [Dr.] Grace Hopper came and lectured to us one time. I don't know where it is

but I have one of her picoseconds. [sic, nanoseconds; Admiral Hopper used 30 cm long wire at her conferences to show the distance light travels in a nanosecond]

TS: One of her what?

BW: Picoseconds.

TS: What's that?

BW: It is the—it's a piece of wire that she gave everybody, and it's the amount that whatever an electron travels, in a picosecond.

TS: Oh, okay!

BW: And I don't know if it's the speed of light, or something like that, but it was about an eight or nine-inch long piece of wire.

TS: Explain why she's so significant.

BW: She was the person that—well, one, she is the person who coined the term a “bug” in your computer.

TS: Is she really? How about that!

BW: Yes, because there was literally a bug in her computer.

TS: Oh, okay.

BW: She was on the forefront of women in—

TS: Computer science?

BW: —computer science, but also in the navy. So—And I remember her lecturing to us at that time. I mean, she was old, old then, but it's like “wow, wow” you know, to see—because we never saw women with lots of stripes, you know, lots of gold on. Here she—you know, here's Admiral Hopper coming in and you're like “Wow.” And she did it at a time way before us; before there was even just a hundred of us together in a class.

TS: Well, there were zero at the Academy.

BW: Right, right.

TS: Did you have—did you feel like you had the support of most of the, say, instructors?

BW: Yes, I really don't remember, like, not having support or, you know, there being anything—are you talking about as a woman?

TS: Either academically, yes—well, in any way, I mean, just, you know, as you were going through did you—did you feel like you were supported along the way?

BW: I didn't feel like I was not supported, you know, instructors were instructors, and class is just one of the things you had to do at the Naval Academy. You had to play a sport. You had to do all this leadership stuff. You had to interact with your company mates; that kind of thing. You know, class was just—oh yes, that's what you did during the day.

TS: Well, talk about the leadership stuff. How was that? How did you feel about that? What kind of things did you do for that?

BW: Well, you know I was only there a year and a half, so like me as a leader—I wasn't, but I saw people who were going to be good leaders and people who were going to be bad leaders and you could see that.

TS: You mean you recognized that.

BW: You could see that. You could see that early on.

TS: Okay.

BW: And I've got a great story about this.

TS: Well, let's hear it.

BW: Okay, so after my first year that's when you're no longer a plebe. You're a sophomore and you're called a "youngster" at the Academy and you're part of the upper class, you're part of the leadership. So, I go down, and every squad has an assigned table to sit at, and you eat family-style. The plebes serve the seniors first, then the juniors, then the sophomores, and then they get whatever food is left over, and I remember there was a fellow who was a year ahead of me. He—So, our first meal together he said "Miss Wujciak, would you mind, now that you're a youngster I realize you are part of the upper class, but would you mind if I still called you Miss Wujciak as a professional—we want to continue—I want to maintain a professional relationship." Now, he absolutely despised women there. Just had absolutely nothing to do with us.

TS: What was his role?

BW: He was just a guy in my squad. He didn't have any sort of authority over me or anything like that.

TS: Oh okay. Okay, so he was just like a peer.

BW: A peer. Well, he was a class ahead of me, but at the time he was more of a peer.

TS: I see, okay.

BW: And it was really unusual for someone not to call you your first name if you were part of that upper class, and I sort of sat there for a moment and I was like “Well, that’s kind of strange,” and I said “Well, you can call me Miss Wujciak as long as you call me ma’am also.”

And his classmates sitting next to him said “Hey, do you know[?], wipe the egg off your face” and he pushed himself back from the table and he never spoke to me again.

TS: What did you think about that?

BW: I thought I scored [both laugh], and obviously his classmate did too.

TS: I guess so, I guess so. So, is that how you handled those kind of situations or did they come up very often?

BW: Oh yes. No, they didn’t come up often. I—again, because you say something like that nobody’s going to mess with you.

TS: You get the reputation, sort of, that word travels; it’s a small community.

BW: Right, it’s a very small community. It’s worse than a junior high school girls’ bathroom.

TS: How is that? In what ways is it worse than that? That seems—what kind of things—

BW: Well, I mean you’re just sequestered there. You can’t go out. You—you are in the yard, which is what they call the campus of the Naval Academy. You are in the yard, and you know, that’s that.

TS: Did you get in trouble for anything? Did you ever have to do any extra duty or anything like that?

BW: The only time I got into trouble was because my roommates fought. We had—Our room overlooked this one parking lot, and during football season we had—there were skits that occurred in that parking lot for motivation for the football game. Like, “Beat Army,” all that kind of stuff.

TS: The football game.

BW: Yes, each week, you know, it doesn’t matter if you’re playing you know Duke [University] or Carolina [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill] or whatever there’s—there’s skits that go on.

TS: Okay.

BW: So, it was called “Eighth Wing Players” and we were in the eighth wing of the dormitory. After Eighth Wing Players was over one night we—okay, one of the things is you dump water out your window on the people if they do a bad job. So, we had our bucket of water sitting at our window, and it was still there, and Beth went and she just tossed the bucket of water out the window. There wasn’t anybody down there, but all of a sudden the Officer of the Watch, you know, sword, everything, you know he was all dressed—you know, if you’re an officer of the watch you’ve got to carry a sword for some reason, so he came busting into our room so we got demerits for horseplay.

TS: I see, and so what did you have to—did you have to do any kind of duty?

BW: I kind of remember having to march.

TS: Not in the rain, or do any push-ups, just—

BW: No, no nothing like that, it was like march with your rifle one Saturday evening for, I don’t know, for some period of time.

TS: So, you were pretty straight-laced going through?

BW: Oh yes, yes.

TS: Because you don’t want to make a mistake.

BW: I don’t want to make a mistake, yes. Although I did drink a beer with somebody.

TS: Uh-oh, when did you do that?

BW: This kind of all ties into why—why I got kicked out.

TS: Okay.

BW: One, I was a freshman and our company commander, a very, very, very good-looking guy, said something about coming and drinking a beer with him one night. This is during the academic year, so it was past the Plebe Summer, it was later in the year.

TS: Describe the company commander as far as hierarchy goes.

BW: He’s the number one guy in our company, and the company was about a hundred people at the time including—

TS: Is he in the same class as you?

BW: No, he was a senior, I was a freshman. But like I said, very good-looking guy, company commander—I don't think he was company commander that semester, I think it was the second semester, so he had been our company commander. He said something about coming down to his room and drinking a beer. I'm like "Okay, I'll do it." Again, part of the—well, if you don't then what happens, and then, but what is going to happen, you know, there is this sexual tension, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah between not just me and everybody else but men and women, what's going to happen. Anyway, he turned out to be the sweetest guy. We talked about our families. We drank a beer. You know, we just sat and we talked. He—they had desks at the Academy where one person sat on one side and one person sat on the other, you know, and kind of looked at each other.

TS: Okay.

BW: I remember him doing that.

TS: Were you not supposed to have any kind of contact?

BW: No, no the doors were supposed to stay open. If there was a male and female in the room the doors were supposed to stay open.

TS: I see, so very strict rules about that, okay.

BW: Right, right, and never mind the fraternization thing because he was upper class and I was a plebe.

TS: Right, that's right.

BW: So anyway, I went and drank a beer with him, came back, no big deal. The next day there's a shoebox on my desk. I guess there was one beer left over. There was etched in the—or written on the label, "Welcome to the club." My company had a nickname of being "Club Thirty-Four" as opposed to "Company Thirty-four" because they had the reputation of being really slack. So, I was in the club, you know, even though I didn't do anything with the guy except enjoy an evening talking and drinking a beer, and that was it. Anyway, my roommates were horrifically jealous. They were like "What are you going to do with that beer?" because you're not supposed to have alcohol in the dorm either.

TS: Could he have alcohol?

BW: No.

TS: Okay.

BW: No, that was illegal too. I said, “Well, I’m going to drink a beer after dinner.” So, I put the beer in the window because it was chilly outside, so I closed the window to chill it.

TS: Is that not visible?

BW: No, because you lay it down.

TS: Oh, okay, okay.

BW: And there was a storm window and a screen.

TS: Okay, okay, I see. You got it laid in there. Okay, that’s clever.

BW: So after—afterwards I drank a beer and I remember I kept that beer for a long time because it said “welcome to the club.”

TS: Ah, okay, so how does this tie-in to what happened later?

BW: Well, I think my roommate—my one particular roommate was extremely jealous that I was—and I got along with the guys in the company like they were my brothers. She was of the more flirtatious kind. That didn’t sit well with her because I was getting the attention, although it was not sexual or anything like that, from the guys, or help from them, or studying with them, or something like that. She related to men differently.

TS: Oh, okay, well before we get to that let’s cover a few more things.

BW: Sure.

TS: Did you notice any kind—like, you talked about the sexual tension and, kind of, you’re talking about it right now, sometimes between the men and the women. How do you act? You all want to be officers and go this route.

BW: Right.

TS: Was there any tension that you saw, like sexual harassment, things like that going on? Actual harassment, or heard about it maybe from somebody that you knew?

BW: Good question. You know, I know there was some. Actually one of my good friends on the softball team was in a company and they absolutely despised women. I mean, just absolutely despised women. On your uniform you had your name that was your name tag, and when women left the Academy they would take their name tag and keep it on their company office—in their company office bulletin board, as the women that they had gotten kicked out; that had left because of them.

TS: Who would do that?

BW: The upper classmen.

TS: Okay, so who did—

BW: They were keeping a roster of the women that had left.

TS: Just for, like washing out, or—

BW: For anything.

TS: Okay, and so were you aware of this at the time?

BW: No. I knew Robin was from 18th Company, which had the reputation of being just the really hard-nosed bully kind of thing, where I was in “Club Thirty-Four” where we’re drinking beer with our upperclassmen.

TS: Who’s Robin?

BW: Robin is my friend on the softball team.

TS: I see.

BW: That was in 18th Company that had to endure—that had a much different experience than I did.

TS: Okay. Did she make it through?

BW: No.

TS: She didn’t? What happened to her?

BW: Same thing that happened to me.

TS: Really?

BW: Yes.

TS: So, did you—when you said that about [phone ringing] —

[Conversation about phone redacted]

TS: When they're playing—Was there anything about the sports that triggered any kind of animosity from the men at all?

BW: Well, they really liked me because I played varsity sports, and every company is in this competition called the Color Competition and you got points if you made the Dean's List, points if you were on a varsity sport, points if you made an Excellent on your physical fitness kind of thing. So, I was scoring points for the company by being on the varsity team.

TS: I see, so that all supports the whole company, and then at the end of the year you get some sort of recognition for—okay.

BW: Right, right.

TS: So, you didn't actually experience any tension yourself, but you knew that, like, your friend Robin had this going on.

BW: I don't think hers was sexual in nature, it was just that they hated women.

TS: Who's "they"?

BW: They; that whole company.

TS: Just that whole company?

BW: That whole company, yes.

TS: Do you think that—where did that come from? Where did that—

BW: I have no idea.

TS: Have you thought about it at all?

BW: Yes. I really don't know. Probably have to have a discussion with her about where it came from. I don't if it was just tradition.

TS: But your—

BW: Was it the tradition in Club Thirty-Four to be a bunch of slackers? I don't know!

TS: Well, were they really slackers, or do you mean it just wasn't as intense as this other one?

BW: No, I don't think they were really slackers.

TS: Right.

BW: I think—I think they just saw that “Wow, women are going be here. We got to do this.” I don’t even think it’s a male-female kind of thing. I think they perhaps had that reputation even before the women were there.

TS: That particular unit?

BW: Yes.

TS: Okay. All right.

BW: Oh, incidentally, that company commander that I drank a beer with? He was a member of Congress.

TS: Is?

BW: Yes.

TS: Still?

BW: Yes.

TS: Really? Do we get to say who that is?

BW: I don’t know if I should.

TS: All right. [both laugh] Okay.

BW: That was the other thing that—

TS: You’ll have to—you can add it in in the transcript if you want later.

BW: That was also part of the whole Naval Academy thing, having the opportunity to see people advance to that level of, you know, even, government. The guy that I sort of put the egg on his face?

TS: Right.

BW: He’s the undersecretary of the navy now, so that’s—like I said, just to have those kind of opportunities, those doors open for you by going to the Naval Academy.

TS: It’s definitely a power place to go to excel.

BW: Yes.

TS: Okay. Was there—At that time that you were in, did you feel like you had male role models that were helping you along the way? We talked about you really didn't have any female role models. Did you have any male role models?

BW: I wouldn't say—

TS: Or mentors?

BW: Mentors? You know, you're supposed to have an upper-class that you're supposed to do that, but the guy I was assigned was pretty much a dirt bag and didn't do a whole lot. Maybe that's part of the slacker attitude of the Thirty-Fourth Company, but again you could see "Oh, I want to be a leader like that guy, because I certainly don't want to be a leader like that guy."

TS: Would you try to model yourself after that person that you admired, even maybe if they didn't realize that you were doing it?

BW: Yes, yes, probably so, like, okay "I'm going to do that when I'm a senior" rather than something else.

TS: How was this one guy a dirt bag? What kind of things—

BW: He just didn't pay a whole lot of attention, and didn't spend a whole lot of time with—well, then again, I was really busy because I played varsity sports, so I was gone or at practice or in the weight room.

TS: Oh, you didn't just do intramural, you played the varsity?

BW: Yes, yes.

TS: So, you traveled.

BW: Yes.

TS: How was that?

BW: Oh, it was fun, of course.

TS: Well, that's the short answer. What's the longer answer? [laughs] Where did you go?

BW: One, it was time away from the Academy.

TS: Right.

BW: Time to spend with my friends, and you were all together with all the ladies. We got to travel and just have fun and just, kind of, decompress.

TS: Right.

BW: You know, you didn't have—you weren't on guard, you didn't have to—well, yes we did have to stay in uniform because I remember we went somewhere for a ball game, and they were coming back and we stopped at a restaurant. It was somebody's birthday, like somebody in the restaurant; it wasn't one of our parties or one of our team members' birthdays. So anyway, they started singing "Happy Birthday" so we were all singing "Happy Birthday" and they were like "Oh, you must be the Glee Club from the Naval Academy," and we were like "No, we're the softball team." [both laugh]

TS: That's a good story. You must have sang very well. So, where did you get to go? How is that—like, did you—who did you play, I guess is what I'm saying? What—did you play other naval bases?

BW: Colleges. No, other colleges.

TS: Oh, you played other colleges?

BW: Yes.

TS: Oh, who did you play? Oh, kind of like "You beat army."

BW: Exactly.

TS: Did you play army?

BW: We did not play army. We were not in—navy—all the service academies were independent at the time so they didn't have a conference. Now they're actually in the Patriots League or something like that conference so they have a set schedule. But I remember playing Lehigh [University], and Lafayette [College], Delaware, University of Maryland-Baltimore, UMBC [University of Maryland, Baltimore County], University of District of Columbia; you know, smaller colleges in the area.

TS: So, that—how many—so, there wasn't very many on the team probably? Out of—if you're thinking about the hundred women—so it's a small group. But there's other varsity teams that they could be on that they could travel?

BW: Right.

TS: I'm just trying to think, as a percentage of women that are playing sports and doing varsity compared to the percentage of men that are playing, probably then, a higher percentage of women—

BW: Well, either that or women played multiple sports.

TS: Okay, oh probably because there's less that could do it. Did you play multiple?

BW: Right. I did not.

TS: Okay, enough just to do the softball and study.

BW: Right, go with my strengths. Yes.

TS: Okay, all right. So, did you—that was an enjoyable experience to have that—

BW: Oh yes.

TS: —pressure relief as you talked about it.

BW: Oh yes, totally.

TS: Did you guys—were you like—did you make sure you didn't drink or—

BW: No, we certainly did! [both chuckle]

TS: Wasn't that against the rules?

BW: Yes, that's against the rules.

TS: Okay. How did you get away with that? Isn't there somebody like watching over you every second?

BW: There was a little bit of freedom.

TS: Yes?

BW: There was a little bit of freedom.

TS: How did you find that freedom? Where was that crack? Where did it come from?

BW: You're with a bunch of Naval Academy girls. They're all smart and innovative and everything else, yes.

TS: Ah, I see, all right, okay. Well, let me ask you a couple of—before we get to what happened and why you had to leave, let's talk a little bit about that era, okay, that you're in. So, you're looking at the Iran Hostage Crisis.

BW: Right.

TS: Did you have any sense of what was going on with that?

BW: Oh yes, because as a plebe you're supposed to read the paper and you're supposed to be conversant in three articles off the front page every day.

TS: Oh, okay.

BW: That was on the front page every day, and I remember there was—when you—I mean, because you had to wear the uniform all the time, and a lot of people on the inside of their covers had a sticker that said “Fuck Iran.” So yes, that was—

TS: Okay. Do you remember the sales of the AWACS [Airborne Warning and Control System, referring to the sale of Boeing E-3 Sentry planes in 1981] to Saudi Arabia at that time that was going on?

BW: Golly, I don't recall that particular—

TS: That was something; should we sell them or not. Did you have—did you admire Jimmy Carter or any of the leaders at that time?

BW: Oh yes, yes.

TS: Yes, so did you feel—were you, like—a sense of patriotism by being—like, wearing a uniform and how did that feel?

BW: Well, it was just great. Patriotism, I think I feel it more now than I did then.

TS: Okay, in what way?

BW: Because now I see more of a big picture. Before, at the Academy, you're just so jammed into the Academy and that's it. You can't really see beyond that. And I think the Academy actually now is doing a much better picture of allowing mids [midshipmen] to see outside of the Academy, and certainly my position now is I definitely see the big picture of stuff.

TS: Were you still in when [President] Ronald Reagan was shot, after he became president?

BW: Yes, I remember that day.

TS: Tell me about that day.

BW: We were—my softball coach was, like, in the forefront of cross-training.

TS: What's that?

BW: You know, you do something else in order to make your sport better. You know, like if you're a runner then you swim more.

TS: Oh okay.

BW: That kind of thing. It's a methodology of coach—of training. She had the bright idea that we should be playing basketball that day, so you get a bunch of cloddy, softball players playing basketball. It was—it's not as fluid as—

TS: Not a pretty sight?

BW: It wasn't a pretty sight, and I remember one of my teammates coming in saying, "Reagan got shot."
We're like, "Oh man, who would want to shoot a dog?" because our coach's dog's name was Reagan [chuckles], and we're like "Oh man, I can't believe they did that."

TS: Did you have a male or a female coach?

BW: We had a female coach.

TS: Okay; named her dog Reagan because she admired Reagan?

BW: You know, I don't know. I need to ask her that.

TS: I think that would be a good question to ask her. Well, tell me a little bit more, to give a sense to somebody who's listening to this transcript or reading this transcript, of, like, that down time. I mean, you talk a little bit with—on your softball team, but outside of being able to leave the Academy and Annapolis did you have a lot of down time or was it just intense?

BW: It was intense, like pretty much—pretty much all the time when I was there. So, getting out, you know, traveling with the softball team or going to practice or something like that was—that was the time to decompress.

TS: What'd you do on weekends? I mean, when you weren't playing sports.

BW: Well, studying for one.

TS: Yes.

BW: Going out to town. You know, college student stuff; drinking beer and eating pizza, you know.

TS: Okay, and did you have—did you get breaks for the holidays like a regular college or did you—

BW: Yes, we did. I remember having Thanksgiving and Christmas, and in Easter or spring break that's when we were in season so we traveled.

TS: Oh, okay, you mean for—

BW: For tournaments.

TS: The sports. So, not a lot of down time?

BW: Not a lot of down time, no.

TS: Did you—were you exhausted? Did you feel like, you know—

BW: No, I was nineteen. [both chuckle]

TS: Okay, different sense of exhaustion at that time, it's true you can go and go and go.

BW: Right, and also during the summers at the Academy you are required to do what they call "cruises," and so unfortunately at the time women weren't allowed on some ships so the guys got to go on submarines and aircraft carriers and all that kind of stuff. We were sort of relegated to these little boats called "Yard Patrol Crafts." I mean, yes, they were eighty-five-foot boats but they were like a navy ship but just compacted down into eighty-five feet. We went from Annapolis all the way up to Boston and then back down to Annapolis because our boat got hit by lightning so we off-loaded everything—unloaded everything, and then loaded everything back on another ship, or another boat, and we went down to Norfolk and had weapons training. Then went back up to Annapolis, and that was, like, a three or four-week excursion.

TS: Oh, for three or four weeks, okay.

BW: You had, maybe, a month off during the summer.

TS: Did you do weapons training—is that for the ship or is that individual?

BW: You had your individual handgun sort of thing at the Academy, you know, got the little ribbons and stuff. But no, when we went down to Norfolk, no that was big guns training.

TS: Big guns, okay, that was what I was wondering about.

BW: It was like the ship that shoots planes.

TS: How was that? What kind of experience was that?

BW: That was pretty tremendous, you know, learning how to aim and fire and then, you know, seeing bullets that are—well, I call them bullets, I suppose they're called shells, that are two to three feet long.

TS: Yes, that might not be a bullet. [chuckles] Even I might recognize that, in the air force. Okay, so did you enjoy that experience?

BW: Yes. It was fun. Yes, I'm thinking "Who else in my high school class can do this?"

TS: What other things did the people in your high school class—did anybody go into the military that you knew?

BW: Not the gang that I hung out with.

TS: Any—So, no females? You were the only female that—in your group that went into the military at that time?

BW: Male or female.

TS: Male or female?

BW: Yes, of my kind of brainiac group, yes.

TS: Okay. Okay, well tell me then what happened and why you left.

BW: Why I left. Well, it was during the summer after my freshman year. I started a lesbian relationship with one of the seniors on my softball team. She had just graduated, so the softball team kind of hung out altogether supporting her during graduation. Her folks came up, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. We started this relationship at that point in time. Since she was graduating she was going to go to Newport, Rhode Island for her first duty station.

TS: Okay.

BW: And, so we were apart, and this was back in the day before email and text messaging and unfortunately cell phones, so we wrote letters to one another. Then when I got back to Annapolis, what happened was my roommates went into my locker and took a letter and read it and turned it in. There was an investigation and I was put on trial, and found guilty of being a lesbian.

TS: Okay, so that's the short story.

BW: Yes.

TS: What's the long story, about like?

BW: What's the long story?

TS: Well, the story about when your roommates—why did they go into your locker?

BW: You know, I don't know.

TS: Isn't that a violation of some code?

BW: Yes, yes, you know, I don't know to this day and it's thirty years later. I mean, it's exactly thirty years later.

TS: Is it really?

BW: I really don't know why they went—and the only thing that I can think of, and I've talked to another woman that was in my company and she's now a child psychiatrist and so she has this insight into all of what happened back then. She thinks it was just girl jealousy. That I was successful, not only academically and athletically but with the guys, and I don't recall her being not successful though. I remember her getting good grades. I think she rowed crew, but maybe not varsity. My other roommate, she was bright and she played basketball. It was just—she was just jealous. She was one of those mean girls they have.

TS: Was there any, you know, that discourse that's going through that rumor mill about lesbianism in the Academy?

BW: There had been a—there had been an investigation or something like that before we got there, but I wasn't part of that and you just kind of heard crazy rumors. Like I said, the rumors fly and you just never know what to believe. But as far as, like, me, we weren't connected with anything like that.

TS: Well, when you went in, when you signed your papers, I mean it wasn't "Don't Ask, Don't Tell". [refers to Defense Directive 1304.26 issued in December, 1993 mandating the discharge of openly gay, lesbian or bisexual service members while also prohibiting military applicants from being asked about their sexual orientation]

BW: Right. This is before that.

TS: Did you get any kind of lecture about "Here's some things you can't do."?

BW: I don't recall anything. I didn't think I was a lesbian. I didn't—I mean, that was also my first relationship.

TS: Your first relationship was with this woman on the softball team?

BW: Right, right.

TS: So, were you nervous about that at the time? Did you have any fear of people finding out?

BW: You know, it was weird. I didn't think I was a lesbian. I just was really attracted to this woman.

TS: So, there wasn't this category. It was just, like, this relationship you're having with a person who happened to be a woman.

BW: Right, right, but then as we kind of got into it, it was like "Oh, this is"—I remember she bought a book and it had the word homosexual in the title and that freaked me out.

TS: Why?

BW: Because, I wasn't going to be considered a homosexual. So that—that was really scary, and actually I broke off the relationship because, like, "I can't handle this. I can't do this."

TS: How old were you then, Barb?

BW: Nineteen.

TS: Nineteen?

BW: Yes, nineteen, twenty; somewhere around there.

TS: Twenty, okay—so you—tell me—walk me through the steps of when you come back and you find out that you've got these charges or whatever against you.

BW: Okay, I had spent this—my girlfriend at the time had come down from Newport and we'd spent the weekend together and I had broken up with her and it was a gut-wrenching, heart-wrenching weekend. It was just awful, awful, awful—

TS: Oh my gosh, okay.

BW: —because I had done this, "Oh, I can't do this—oh but I really like you—oh I can't do this but I really like you," that kind of thing. I was having a very difficult time with it, to say the least. That weekend was when I said, "I just can't do this. I cannot do this"—you know, lots of tears and everything else.

Anyway, I came back to the Academy and I just remember going [makes an exhaling sound] "Boy, okay I'm done with that." I got up to my room and my room was

just—it was just a mess, like, after the weekend, because I had gotten back—like, I was gone—I had—you know, we had stayed in a hotel out of town and done whatever, whatever. And I got back and, like, my room was just a real mess, so I was like, “This is really unusual.” And I remember they were standing on the other side of the desk—

TS: Who; your roommates?

BW: —and they said—my roommates, yes—and they were being very stern about it. They were like, “We know what’s going on with you and this other woman. We want your resignation.”

And I was like “It’s over; I’m not like that.”

She said “Well, I know what you did in Chapel Hill.”

I’m like, “What did I do in Chapel Hill?” because I dated guys when I was in Chapel Hill. I’m like “Um, you got the wrong story there. This is not what it is.”

She said—she was like “No,” or they said, “We want your resignation or we’re going to turn this in and take it up the chain of command.”

I was like “Go ahead.”

But apparently they did because a couple of days later I was at an inspection in the main area, because you had to send a representative every night to have fire watch. I remember this guy, he was inspecting my uniform, and he was like “Wujciak, I need to see you in my office afterwards.”

So, I’m standing there in the office and the only book on the shelf was *Court-Martial Procedures*. That’s when I started getting super-duper nervous. I went back to our company area; our company all lived in—on the same floor. There was our company commander, the officer that was there, and usually the officers disappear at night and that’s where the brigade of midshipmen just sort of run what’s going on. He was there, there was all these other guys with lots of stripes on, and they said “We want your permission to search your room.”

Also, there was a female Marine Corps captain there, and I remember she looked scared shitless. Her eyes were just, you know, as big as donuts. That’s—She was there to protect my feminine virtues, or something like that, but I said—I looked over at my company commander and I said “Do I have to sign this?”

He said “No, you don’t have to sign it.”

I’m like “Okay,” because I knew I had an iron in my locker and you’re not supposed to have an iron to iron your uniforms because you’re supposed to get them dry-cleaned. But me being anal-retentive and everything, if I wanted to—like, that last-minute iron to have everything look nice, so I know I don’t want them to find the iron.

TS: You’re worried about an iron?

BW: I was worried about the iron [laughs]. Yes, I’m like “No, if I don’t have to give permission then I won’t give permission.” Anyway, the next piece of paper was an authorization to search my room from the commandant of midshipmen. And I’m like

“Well, screw you! If you had the authorization why did you ask my permission in the first place?”

Anyway, they came in and they tossed my room. I mean, it looked like some bad movie scene afterwards. They looked through everything; everything. They looked through tampon boxes and underwear and in shoes, and through inseams and—

TS: Did they find your iron?

BW: You know, I kind of remember them finding the iron but it was like “Oh, what’s this?” and you know, them just kind of tossing it—

TS: It wasn’t the object of their search.

BW: —and there was a little place in the desk where you could hide a fifth of liquor, which I didn’t have a fifth of liquor but it was the perfect size where you could slide one in and not see; they looked there.

TS: They knew all the places to look.

BW: They were all Academy grads, too, so they knew.

TS: Okay.

BW: And the only thing—

TS: Are you standing by why they are doing all this?

BW: I’m standing at attention the whole time.

TS: What are you thinking?

BW: I’m just thinking I felt like I was being raped.

TS: Really?

BW: Yes, because they had—somebody’s looking through your tampon boxes; my God, you know, looking through your laundry—

TS: Very violated, you were feeling.

BW: Exactly, exactly.

TS: So, was your mind racing about what—I mean, were you allowed—

BW: What was happening, what was happening, what was happening; I had no idea.

TS: Okay, and you didn't have anybody to talk to? I mean, they didn't have any legal representation for you or anything like that?

BW: No. No.

TS: Just this scared—was this Marine captain still hanging out?

BW: Yes. Yes.

TS: Was she still looking scared?

BW: Yes.

TS: Why do you think she had that look in her eyes?

BW: I have no idea. Well, one, she's—she was very junior to everybody else there.

TS: Okay.

BW: I don't know.

TS: Okay.

BW: She also had a bad perm. I remember that too.

TS: Do you? [both laugh]

BW: Yes.

TS: Okay, fleeting thoughts that you have as your life is flashing before you.

[speaking simultaneously]

BW: Yes, I know, it's like [makes a popping noise]

TS: Okay, so—oh go ahead. So, then what happened?

BW: Yes.

TS: So they are rifling through everything that you have and everything; every piece of furniture and—

BW: Yes, and the only thing they took was a photograph. They went through my photo albums, like, page by page by page, and it was a picture of my girlfriend at the time at her graduation and there was—everybody else was in the picture; everybody else, like from our softball team. There was four or five gals in the picture, but I don't even think I was standing next to her in the picture, but they took the picture out of my photo album. There were other pictures of her in my photo album but they never took those. I don't think they knew what she looked like.

TS: Oh, okay.

BW: They knew her rank, but they didn't know what she looked like, so they saw that one and they—and they took it.

TS: I see, okay.

BW: And if I can find my photo album, I've kept the whole—I—

TS: Is that right?

BW: Yes.

TS: We'll have to look at that.

BW: If I can find my photo album. I think it might be in storage somewhere.

TS: Okay.

BW: But that was just interesting. It was like, "Why did you take—

TS: That one.

BW: —that one?" Yes.

TS: Right. It's not like there's anything incriminating. It's like, by association; you're on a softball team with someone.

BW: Right, right. Well, in parallel with that, I was talking about my friend Robin, and something similar happened to her. Her roommates turned her in because she was seeing this other woman and they did the same thing. They searched her room and they took pictures, and they took this picture of this woman sitting on Robin's lap. Well, that woman was her mother. So, I mean, just how ridiculous that was.

TS: Wow, okay. So, now they have your picture, and they have this letter apparently.

BW: I didn't know they had the letter.

TS: Oh, but you knew that the—did you know your roommates had found that?

BW: No.

TS: You weren't sure why they were saying that.

BW: I didn't know why they were saying that.

TS: I see, okay.

BW: That was because I [unclear] crap, and sentimental, and so I had this box of letters in my locker. Who'd a think that they'd have gone through my locker?

TS: Right.

BW: But there's—there was this kind of underground lesbian group at the Academy that I was not part of because I didn't think I was a lesbian, but I got a visit from this one gal one night. She said "Barb, do you have anything; any letters, blah,blah,blah?"
And I said—

TS: This is while this was going on?

BW: This was just afterwards, because of course shit hit the fan after that and everybody kind of knew.

TS: Okay, and everybody knew. Okay.

BW: Well, everybody sort of kind of knew, but the lesbians found out.

TS: Of course they did.

BW: Yes

TS: Okay.

BW: And so, anyway she came to my room and she said "Do you have any letters?" She goes "You've got to get rid of everything. You have to get rid of everything and now."
I'm like, "Okay." So, I went to one of my friends on the softball team and I said "Here's this box of letters." I said, "They need to disappear, and I don't want to know what happens to them."

TS: Okay. They disappeared?

BW: They disappeared.

TS: Except for this one that's out there that you didn't know about.

BW: That they took before—before I knew it was actually missing.

TS: I see, okay. So, then what—so now you're like probably scared to death.

BW: Yes.

TS: Did you call your parents or tell them what was going on?

BW: Not at that time. I didn't—hell, I didn't know what was going on.

TS: Did you talk to anybody?

BW: I did. There was—there was another woman on my softball team who—she was like the mother hen.

TS: Okay.

BW: And so, I went and I talked to her about that. And then there was another woman on my floor who turned out to be in the lesbian group, and she gave me, like, a safe place to stay because one day I came home from class and, I mean, everybody had a rifle that you had to march with during parades. Anyway, one day I came home from class and the bayonet on my rifle had been taken off my rifle and the sheath had been taken off and it was on my pillow. And, yes, so I had to sleep with one eye open until I changed rooms.

TS: Kind of a threat?

BW: No shit Sherlock, yes! I can remember confronting them about that and they were like “Oh, we were just goofing around.”

TS: Your roommates?

BW: Yes.

TS: So, they admitted to doing that?

BW: Yes. But they were like “Oh, we were just goofing around.”

TS: And you didn't tell—

BW: I'm like “Oh yes, how did the bayonet, like, get unclicked from my rifle and then get unclicked out of the sheath and placed very, you know, centered on my pillow like that?”

TS: Wow.

BW: Yes.

TS: How long did you stay in that room with them?

BW: Not long [chuckles].

TS: Okay, so when you say “a safe place to go” what—how do you do that on the Academy? Where do you—

BW: Well, you trade with another roommate—

TS: Oh, okay.

BW: —or with somebody else in your company, so I ended up—that was one of the saddest days. I mean, besides leaving the Academy, that was one of the saddest days; was leaving my company area because I loved those guys so much, and I think they had an appreciation for me too. So, I had to move out of my company area.

TS: When?

BW: Soon—soon thereafter.

TS: But why?

BW: Because of the—

TS: The threat?

BW: [laughing] Because somebody left a freaking unsheathed bayonet on my bed!

TS: Okay, okay, so who did you tell? I mean, did you tell—

BW: It was just the right thing to do.

TS: I see.

BW: I don’t know if the company officer made that sort of decision. I can’t—it’s all very, very foggy.

TS: A little blurry, right.

BW: I remember trading with this other gal, so—

TS: Okay, all right, so then what's next then after this?

BW: Then my trial started.

TS: Okay. Again, did you have any counsel or—

BW: Yes.

TS: Okay, now you have somebody.

BW: Yes, I finally was assigned a counsel.

TS: Okay.

BW: He—he said “What is your goal?”

I said “My goal is to stay,”

And he said “Probably not going to happen,” and he said “What's your second goal?”

I said “To stay till the end of the semester and get my credit so I can get, you know, at least college credit so I don't have to pay so much when I go back to Carolina.” In retrospect that was kind of a mistake because I didn't do very well that semester because I was kind of busy being stressed out.

TS: Right, right.

BW: But—So, he delayed stuff for as long as he possibly could, and at the Academy you have your academics during the day just like a normal college day and then everybody was required to participate in a sport in the afternoon, and that's when we usually did softball stuff. But I considered my sport to be court, so I had to get dressed up in the service dress blues every day and go down and watch my teammates come in one at a time and be questioned. They were all like “What? What?” I mean, because nobody knew.

TS: So, the relationship that you had with this other woman was very secret?

BW: Yes.

TS: The people on your team didn't even know about it?

BW: No. No, and then except for, like I said, the mother hen.

TS: That you went and talked to?

BW: That I went and talked to, and she—she—I still remember her testifying and she was very—like, she sat forward in her chair, she was very sure of herself, and she described a friendship as closely as she could. And I still—I mean, I still admire her for that today.

TS: When you say that you mean—explain what you mean by that a little bit.

BW: Well, she described our relationship as a friendship rather than as a physical relationship.

TS: Oh, the one that you actually had the relationship with.

BW: No, no. No, she was gone.

TS: Oh this other—the mother hen, the mother hen. I see.

BW: The mother hen, yes.

TS: But that's all you had with her wasn't it?

BW: What?

TS: Just a friendship.

BW: With her?

TS: Yes.

BW: Yes.

TS: Okay.

BW: No, but she—she was talking about—they would ask her about the relationship that my girlfriend and I had.

TS: I see.

BW: And she—

TS: Described that?

BW: She answered the question as narrowly as she possibly could.

TS: I see; without having to lie.

BW: Right.

TS: I got you, okay, sorry I wasn't following that all the way.

BW: She was just dynamite. She was just dynamite.

TS: Okay, so are you sitting, like, in a courtroom while this is going on?

BW: No, I remember there was a guy here and he had a tape recorder just like this, and then I was sitting, like, here and then everybody would come in, like, maybe this was the investigative part of it or something like that, yes.

TS: Okay, and they would come in—but you would be in the room?

BW: Yes.

TS: Did you get a sense from any of the—like, the people on your softball team that apparently some of them were in this lesbian secretive group that you weren't aware of, that they might have been a little bit nervous about associating with you?

BW: Yes, one gal was; was really nervous.

TS: How could you tell?

BW: Well, just the way she answered questions, and then afterwards you got a transcript and you had a—you had the option of crossing stuff out and were rewording or something like that, and I can remember the mother hen gal she, you know, changed maybe one or two things. Somebody else from the softball team changed one or two things. This woman changed half of it. Yes, it was just like "Wow, that was really different," because I got a transcript from everybody; everything everybody said.

TS: I see, so she was trying to construct it in a way that—

BW: She—it won't implicate her.

TS: More favorable to her, I see.

BW: Right.

TS: Okay, so at what point—have you told your parents now that you're on this trial?

BW: No.

TS: Not yet?

BW: No, I told my mom over Thanksgiving break.

TS: Okay, so when did this actually happen?

BW: That was before Thanksgiving.

TS: Okay, so from the time that they—you know, you came back from this break-up—

BW: Yes.

TS: When was that when that would have been?

BW: October.

TS: October? Okay, so like, there's a period of about a month where this—

BW: October to whenever Thanksgiving is; whenever that period of time is.

TS: Okay, maybe two months.

BW: Yes.

TS: Okay, so then—so you're trying to get to the end of that sem—oh I see what—you're trying to get to the end of the semester then. Okay, then what happens next?

BW: I tell my mom and she's real upset, you know, of course, and—and—

TS: Well, actually, how did you testify?

BW: I didn't have to.

TS: You didn't?

BW: No.

TS: What about this other girl that you had the relationship with?

BW: Her trial was in Newport.

TS: Oh, she had a trial too?

BW: Yes.

TS: How did that work out?

BW: Oh, she got kicked out too.

TS: Okay.

BW: Yes.

TS: Okay, go back to your mom, I'm sorry.

BW: Yes, and so, my girlfriend had come down from Newport and we told her together.

TS: You and your mom?

BW: My girlfriend and I told—

TS: Told your mom, I see, got you—

BW: Together, yes, and that didn't go very well, but you know. Nothing you can do about it.

TS: Right. So, you didn't have to testify. It was all, like, what people were saying?

BW: Yes.

TS: What—what were the—what was the grounds that they actually used to kick you out?

BW: You know, I still didn't know about the letter.

TS: Oh, okay.

BW: You know, I didn't know about the letter until, like, way at the very end and I'm like "Holy shit," and it was a letter that my girlfriend had written to me and unfortunately it was a chronicle of our relationship, because I was saying "No, I can't do this. No, I can't do this," and she was like "Oh, you know, we did this; we did that, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." I was like [makes swooshing sound] you know, "I'm toast now," and I was kicked out for—I don't know if I should say because I'm back in now.

TS: Well it's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" now.

BW: Yes, but this—this is all kind of funny because the air force doesn't know all this.

TS: Okay.

BW: So, I'm not sure—this is why it's kind of weird saying that this is going to be all on the internet.

TS: Oh, I see, okay. I gotcha; let me pause.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Okay, I'm with Barbara, we took a break. We're going to start a new section here, but—so you were talking about you had talked to—you and the gal that you were with talked to your mom.

BW: Right.

TS: Okay.

BW: Like I said, she wasn't very happy and so basically finished up Thanksgiving break, went back to the Academy, and it was—maybe had to go to the Army-Navy Game, and then had exams, and that was the end of the semester and packed up my stuff and left.

TS: Okay, and we were talking about what was—you know, you found out the reason that they actually used to discharge you.

BW: Right, was—was that one letter that they had stolen, and I remember getting, kind of, advice, not from a lawyer or anything like that, saying "You know, if that had been taken to a civilian court you couldn't admit it because it was stolen evidence." And there is this thing called the "fruit of the forbidden tree;" anything derived from something from an illegal act is not admissible.

TS: Would it have been admissible under UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice] though, do you know?

BW: Don't know. Don't know. I don't know what—I'm not a lawyer.

TS: Right, and you didn't have any kind of counsel that was really—except for just to protect you a little bit, so—

BW: Right, right. You know times were different in 1981. I mean, nobody was out, there were no gay icons. I mean, maybe [Wladziu Valentino] Liberace [famous American pianist and vocalist] but I mean [chuckles] that was before the AIDS movement, I mean, before people actually started doing anything like that, so no, there was—

TS: ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, an advocacy group started in 1987 to end the AIDS epidemic by fighting social injustice as it relates to those with AIDS] hadn't gone on yet.

BW: There was nobody; there was nobody.

TS: But you—so at one point you're like "I'm not—you know, I'm not this lesbian. I'm not this homosexual." How are you feeling about all that?

BW: Well, just really confused, and you know, if I am in a relationship with this woman, you know, I lose the opportunity of a lifetime to go to the Naval Academy, and it's like "How bad can that be?"

TS: Right.

BW: So, I was dating this guy.

TS: At the same time you're dating the woman?

BW: Yes.

TS: And why were you doing that?

BW: Because I liked him.

TS: Okay. [chuckles]

BW: He was a good dancer and he played golf, so he was a nice guy.

TS: Do you think you were trying to, maybe, figure out your sexuality in this—?

BW: Without being conscious of it, right.

[speaking simultaneously]

TS: Without really being conscious of it, right, because you're nineteen, and—okay.

BW: Right.

TS: And you didn't—so, it's not anything like growing up you didn't have—you know, you're not thinking "Oh, I have a crush on this girl" or anything like that.

BW: Looking back I can see that I did, but at the time totally oblivious to it; totally oblivious.

TS: Yes, so it was just really when you met this girl that the relationship blossomed.

BW: Oh, the first time you kiss a girl—yes. [both laugh]

TS: That was it right?

BW: It makes a big difference, yes.

TS: Okay, okay, so how are you doing? I mean, your grades are suffering. How are you emotionally?

BW: Really shut down, really shut down. I remember through this whole ordeal never crying, because I knew I was right and I can be a little arrogant. It's like "Damn it, don't kick me out because I know I'm going to be a good officer one day."

TS: Right.

BW: And I was just really, really pissed off.

TS: So, then—so—and your girlfriend also got kicked out.

BW: Yes, yes, and that really pissed me off because she graduated in the top hundred of her class. Smart as a whip; you know, totally, totally motivated for the navy, and it's like "Man, they spent four years training her, educating her, and they lost a super officer, absolutely."

TS: And so how was she doing?

BW: You know, not well. She came down to Chapel Hill. I had a place to go. I had—I had college to finish up.

TS: Right.

BW: So, I stayed out a semester. Lived with my parents and I was a substitute teacher at my old high school, and then by that spring she had gotten kicked out of the navy. She came down to Chapel Hill and we lived together and had a tumultuous relationship after that.

TS: A lot of tension, I'm sure.

BW: Yes, yes a lot of history; a lot of bad history. Not bad history with us but just—

TS: The whole episode.

BW: —our history, right, right.

TS: Well, now how—what are you telling people about why you're not in the Academy anymore?

BW: I would tell people it just wasn't for me.

TS: And then on the inside you would say what?

BW: I'm lying.

TS: Did that bother you?

BW: Oh yes, oh yes.

TS: How long was it before you actually were able to tell anybody the truth about what happened?

BW: Well, I would tell certain people.

TS: Sure.

BW: But—select.

TS: Right.

BW: Select folks.

TS: How would you figure out who those select folks were?

BW: Usually after a lot of alcohol [both laugh]. I really couldn't talk about it for the longest time.

TS: Yes. What helped you to start to be able to talk about it?

BW: Boy, I have no idea. I don't know if it's just time, or what.

TS: Because it was pretty raw, I'm sure, for a long time.

BW: Yes.

TS: And so, I'm sitting here with a navy cup; drinking out of a navy cup.

BW: Right.

TS: Do you have any kind of resentment to the navy about what happened to you? I mean, you seem very proud of the navy.

BW: Well, well, you know, a couple years ago, this is a very cool story too, in the mid-nineties when Colonel [Margarethe] Cammermeyer wrote her book and had her made-for-TV movie and stuff like that, she went on a book tour. [Colonel Cammermeyer was Chief Nurse of the Washington State National Guard, and the highest ranking service member to challenge in court her separation from the military due to her declaration as a lesbian. Her book *Serving in Silence* was published in 1994; the movie based on her book first aired on television in 1995] She came and she spoke at Duke [University], and I'm like

“I’ve got to go see this woman speak.” So, I went to her lecture, and afterwards she had a book signing. She—and so, I’m waiting in line and, you know, just real nervous about everything and—push stop for a second.

TS: Okay.

[Recording Paused]

BW: You can start.

TS: Okay, Barb has come back with a book that I’m very jealous of [both laugh]. Looks like you got a signature.

BW: Yes, I do.

TS: What does she say?

BW: So, I’m standing in line and I’m wondering what to say to the Colonel. And, if you’ve ever met her, I mean, she has a presence like you would not believe. I mean, I think she’s six-two or something like that.

TS: She’s pretty tall.

BW: She’s very tall and she is—she just commands respect. I mean, this woman is just incredible. And, anyway I’m standing there and she starts to write, you know, like “What’s your name?” blah, blah, blah—and I just blurted out “I got kicked out of the Naval Academy because I’m gay.”

And I remember she sat back in her chair and she took a deep breath and she said “I’m so sorry.” I didn’t see what she had written until later, and this is what she wrote. She goes “In sympathy for your loss of career for being who you are. It is for you that I continue to fight.” [pauses]

And I’m thinking, “If this woman, a colonel, is fighting for me”—yes, incredible, incredible—that I’m not the only one; that my girlfriend and I are not the only ones. So, at that point in time she told me about this group called the Service Academy Gay and Lesbian Association, and this was in 1994; I just saw the date on here. This was when the internet was very young and so when I actually got an internet connection that was one of the first things I did, was I looked up their website and I signed up. It was mainly guys, of course, and it was like “Oh we’re having a party in Washington. Oh, let’s march in this Veteran’s Day parade.” Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Anyway, it was years later and I got this note one day from a guy named Jeff Petrie, and he’s from the Naval Academy class of ’89, and he said, “Well, I think SAGALA, the Service Academy Gay and Lesbian Association, is a cool thing but wouldn’t it be great if we had a gay Naval Academy alumni group?”

And so I wrote him back and I said “I don’t know if I can be a member of this because I never graduated,” and I told him a little bit of my story. And I remember his email back, and it’s a really long email. I just remember reading the email and just crying, and crying, and crying as if it was like the first time in twenty-five years I had cried because of this. He got it.

He said “I don’t know what I would have done if I had to go back home after all that under your circumstances.” He was living in San Francisco at the time but he was coming to Winston-Salem to go to a friend’s wedding.

I said “I have to meet you. I just absolutely have to meet you.” So, it was just, you know, just strange twists of fate and timing and all that kind of stuff. Ended up meeting him, you know, just a few weeks after we had met like that, and we—I call him my baby brother to this day.

TS: Yes?

BW: So, we started this group called USNA, United States Naval Academy Out. We were—we attended—pause that again?

TS: Okay.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Start it again?

BW: Yes, go ahead.

TS: Okay. Okay, we’re back.

BW: Anyway, we had petitioned the Naval Academy Alumni Association for our own chapter.

TS: Okay, and what year was this?

BW: This was 2003, 2004, something like that.

TS: Okay.

BW: Anyway, there—you know, the meeting of the Grand Poobahs down there—I mean, they’re all retired admirals. The chairman of the board was the former chief of naval operations, and so we had decided to go to a board of trustees meeting because it’s open to all alumni. Oh, let me back up. So, in finding out if I could be a member of this group we called the alumni association, like “Can non-graduates be members?” and they said “Yes, they can.” At army and air force you cannot, but this was a rule that was changed in the thirties or forties at the Naval Academy only.

TS: Oh, okay.

BW: Of how non-graduates—day one, you raise your hand and you are an alumni of the Naval Academy. So that was—that was kind of a momentous thing for me because—

TS: Sure, you're an alumni.

BW: It was like, yes, I had been there but I'm really not an alumni. But now I figure out that yes, I can be an alumni. Yes, in fact, you said that I can be alumni.

TS: You are. Did that change a little bit of your, I guess, emotional connection to that academy?

BW: It was just a little bit more of an empowering feeling.

TS: Good word.

BW: You're like "Yes, yes" because before it was like "Oh yes, I went there but I'm really not an alumni and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah"—

TS: What am I, right?

BW: But now I can really say, "I am an alumni of the Naval Academy."

TS: So everything is not connected to you getting kicked out of it.

BW: Right.

TS: It's now you have a connection to the experience of the Academy.

BW: Oh, nice way to reframe that. Yes. So anyway, on this Board of Trustees meeting when we submitted our proposal for us to be a chapter, six of us went to the meeting.

TS: Six of you?

BW: This is—this is our gang of six.

TS: So, tell me who these people are. Maybe we could get a picture of this. This would be nice to have.

BW: This is Trey Riddlehoover. He's from the class of '89. This is Paula Neira, from the class of '85. That's myself. There's Zoe Dunning, class of '85. There's Jeff, class of '89. There's Dave Mason, class of '88. And this is—this picture was taken in front of Alumni Hall with a very cool Naval Academy crest behind us there.

TS: Right. Okay.

BW: At this meeting it was very significant because, we didn't know this was going to happen, but the Board of Trustees kind of went around and introduced themselves, like where they were from, like "Oh, I'm president of the Tulsa chapter" or something like that. Then this microphone came up into the audience, and they pass it around. I'm going to take this back, this must have been 2004. In 2003 we petitioned for it but they turned us down because we were a special interest group and the academy defined their chapters by geography. So, we went back here in 2004 and we defined our geography as the Castro district.

TS: [both laugh] Sorry, okay, that's San Francisco, right?

BW: Yes, so anyway, when the microphone came to Trey first he said, you know, "I'm Trey Riddlehoover, class of '89. I'm from the proposed Castro district," and we all went down.

TS: You all said the same thing?

BW: It's like, I'd have moved to San Francisco and gotten a P.O. Box in the Castro, or something like that. I'd have done—I would have done anything to have this set up. But anyway, so they—of course, they turned down our request and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

TS: Okay.

BW: But anyway, this is what got me involved with finding out that there's—I mean, we have over two hundred and fifty gay Naval Academy alumni right now, on our roster. Yes, tremendous.

TS: And you have had this, so less than a decade that you've had this group—organization.

BW: Right.

TS: So, what do you do? What do you do as part of, you know, what do you do in this organization?

BW: What do I do?

TS: What's your goal, I guess? What's the mission of this organization?

BW: There is a mission statement and it's talking about—

TS: You don't have to read it verbatim, I just mean characterize it.

BW: Yes, well the organization, it's all about visibility, education, outreach, and support for the brigade of midshipmen; kids who are coming out just like I did. My goal in all of this is to make sure nobody goes through what I went through alone, which is what I did.

TS: And you actually were starting this before the repeal happened.

BW: Yes.

TS: How did that fit in to the picture?

BW: Well, I remember—you know, I've been to Congress and I've lobbied them several times and—

TS: Did you lobby that congressman that you had the beer with?

BW: He wasn't in congress at that time.

TS: Oh, okay.

BW: But I'm sure if I go to his office he would have a beer with me now. I'm a hundred percent positive he would.

TS: Okay.

BW: Zoe was Chairman of the Board of the Servicemembers' Legal Defense Network.

TS: Right.

BW: Oh, so you are familiar with that?

TS: I am. You can explain what it is though.

BW: Okay, it's a group that was started in 1993 to—in order to combat “Don't Ask, Don't Tell”. At the beginning they just—they provided free legal services for folks getting out of the military under “Don't Ask, Don't Tell.” Not like they've won cases but they made it a little softer place to fall. You know, they'd argue for honorable discharges versus dishonorable discharges; you know, veteran's benefits; that sort of thing. And then probably halfway through they decided to become a congressional watchdog group and they're like, you know, “Let's put ourselves out of business. Let's see if we can overturn this thing.” So, they had the legal part of it, but then they also had the legal part of it—the congressional legal part of it, too.

TS: The lobbying part.

BW: The lobbying group, right. So, I got involved with that.

TS: Okay, and so that's like, even though you get legal representation in the military, this is an outside military source that—

BW: Yes, right. This is—these are just civilian lawyers.

TS: Are you allowed to use civilian lawyers in the military?

BW: Yes.

TS: That's part of it?

BW: You can hire them—

TS: I see.

BW: —but Servicemember's Legal Defense Network does not charge for their legal services.

TS: They don't charge. How does one get to be—like, if someone has a problem how do they connect up with—

BW: It's an 800 number; it's an online group now.

TS: Yes, they just—do they—are they selective about who they are going to help?

BW: No, they will help anybody.

TS: Really?

BW: As long as it's related to “Don't Ask, Don't Tell,” or now, sexuality issues.

TS: Is that how they have reframed it, as sexuality issues?

BW: Right.

TS: What about—are they working with any transgendered—

BW: Yes, Paula is transgendered.

TS: Paula? Okay. So, is that—is that, like, maybe a new direction?

BW: That's one of our—our things. Right now I'm on the Board of Directors of SLDN as well, so that's our—

TS: You're on these two different organizations?

BW: Yes.

TS: How do you feel—When you heard “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was repealed, what was your emotional reaction to that?

BW: Oh my God. Well, [chuckles] let me back up because that whole year, 2010, was—it seemed like “This is the congress. This is the president.” And I remember sitting back and talking to Jeff on the phone one night, and I’m like “Dude, it’s going to happen. It’s going to happen.” I—you know, you saw this perfect storm, because I’ve got kind of an inside view of stuff and then you see what’s going on the outside. You see the—kind of, the temperature of the nation changing as far as being accepting of gays in the military and the whole—all of that. You saw that, you saw the congress, you saw the president, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I’m like “It’s going to happen. It’s going to happen. I don’t know when but it is going to happen.” That was the first time—

TS: You ever thought it was possible.

BW: That I ever thought that this was ever going to change.

TS: Okay, so like, I was an outsider looking on this and there was hope that it would change. But there seemed like an incredible amount of resistance within some pieces of congress, and certain leadership of certain parts of the military.

BW: Right, right.

TS: How do you think that those objections, and really barriers, and obstacles that had been in place for a long time, since “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was implemented, how do you think that those were overcome in this really—a year, an eighteen month period almost from when President Obama started to push for it, you know, to get the repeal.

BW: I think one is Representative Patrick Murphy, from Pennsylvania. He was an Iraq War veteran, an army officer. He’s a JAG [Judge Advocate General's Corps]. He did not go to West Point but he taught at West Point. He was a huge, huge, huge advocate. He was on the House Armed Services Committee, and pushed and pushed and pushed. I think Aubrey Sarvis, who is the executive director of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network now, plays a wonderful game of Senate chess.

TS: What do you mean by that?

BW: It’s all about the vote counts, and who—who you can get and the alliances you can make and, you know, just the way politics works.

TS: Okay.

BW: He was just brilliant, just absolutely brilliant.

TS: It seemed like one of the big, you know, anti-don't repeal, or one of the people who didn't want to repeal it, was John McCain. It seemed like that was a huge obstacle at the time, because of him running for president.

BW: Right.

TS: Did he ever get on board for that? I don't actually remember.

BW: No.

TS: He never did?

BW: No, he never did.

TS: But he wasn't ever on a committee that was going to be able to stop it, is that part of—

BW: He was on the Senate Armed Services Committee, yes.

TS: Oh, he was, okay.

BW: But the Democrats were in control of the committee—

TS: At the time that it was—

BW: —and they voted to pass it.

TS: I see.

BW: That was—yes, it was you take this vote count, you take that vote count, and who can you get this time, and who can you get this time, and yes. The thing is the more McCain spoke about it, the more the nation went “What the hell are you talking about old man?” and I think that's what really drove it home, was just, you know, public support of this. And the fact that people like Colonel Cammermeyer, you know, came out. I mean, there was just more and more and more people that came out who said “Yes, I was doing this. Yes, I was in Iraq. Yes, I was in Afghanistan.” Or “No, I was in World War II,” you know? It was just story, after story, after story, after story and I think as more people came out, as more it became “Oh yes. Whatever. They're gay, so what?” I think that was the attitude the nation had.

TS: Do you think it was also—oh, go ahead.

BW: Also, the Log Cabin Republicans also had a court case going through that looked like it was going to overturn it on legal grounds, as well. And so, I think the combination of

Congress, the President, you know, the legal part, the nation's change, twenty-four nations in NATO had open service. They didn't have an issue with anything—blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I mean, it was just, you know, "I can trump your card every single time." I mean, there was just no good reason not to.

TS: What about all this, you know, argument made about the cohesiveness of a unit.

BW: Well, that was put to—put to rest a long time ago. It was Admiral [Michael] Mullen who testified in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and he's the one who said it was a matter of not lying about who you are, and about—I can't—I can't remember the quote or the—that he made. It was just, just tremendous. It's like "No, you don't want people to lie about who you are," and that's, and I think— [2 February 2010 Admiral Mike Mullen commented during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing that "We have in place a policy that forces young men and women to lie about who they are in order to defend their fellow citizens. For me, personally, it comes down to integrity: Theirs as an individual, ours as an institution."]

TS: They were forcing people to do that?

BW: And I think—and were forcing people to do that. Yes.

TS: Did you think it was going to be overturned as quickly as it was? Well, I mean, that's—you know, that's relative [laughs]. That's a relative characterization of that.

BW: If was going to be repealed it would have had to have been repealed when it did, or before, because when that new congress came in—I mean, you just don't have the votes.

TS: It was a window of opportunity?

BW: Yes, it was like that was the window. It was quickly closing. We had to get this done.

TS: Well let's talk a little bit about while all this was going on, you also joined the Air Force Reserve?

BW: Yes.

TS: Well, why did you do that? And why did you pick the air force, of all services? [both laugh]

BW: You know, when I saw that sort of perfect storm happening, it was when Obama was running for president.

TS: Okay.

BW: One of his promises was that he was going to repeal “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”. And I kind of believed him. And I was getting older, I was forty-seven at the time, and I’m like “You know, I might have another shot. Let’s see what happens.” So, I called up the navy, and I said “Do you hire reserve optometrists”, and they said “No, we get them all off of active duty.”

I went “Oh, rats.” So, I called up, or I was having lunch with a friend of mine, and I told her this cockamamie story about joining the service again. She was in the air force reserve, and she goes “Well, you know, there are other branches of service.” I’m like “Really?”

TS: There are?

BW: “I didn’t know that!” So, I called up the air force, and you know, the guy on the phone was very nice, you know, “Name, address, blah, blah,” all that kind of stuff. Do I have any tattoos? How many piercings do I have? I mean, it’s very interesting questions they ask you. He must have asked me like five times if I had any tattoos. I’m like “Really, no, I don’t.”

And then he said “Age,” and I’m like “Well, this might trip you up a little bit.”

I said, “You know, I’m forty-seven.”

He goes “Well, what’s the worst thing they could say is no? Let’s continue the application.”

TS: Okay.

BW: So, that’s what happened. Three days later this health professions recruiter called me and says “I’ve been looking for an optometrist! They don’t have one down in Seymour Johnson [Air Force Base].”

TS: Where is Seymour Johnson?

BW: Seymour Johnson is in Goldsboro, North Carolina.

TS: Okay.

BW: He said “Oh, we have one retiring.”

I’m like “Okay, great.” So, we go through the whole process, and found out there was—that he wasn’t retiring, he had retired, and they were without a reserve optometrist for over a year. In the air force that’s kind of a critical thing. But in the whole process of doing this I had to get transcripts from the Naval Academy because they wanted college transcripts.

TS: Sure.

BW: So, I kind of hesitated, and went onto the Naval Academy’s website. Oh, let me back up. I missed a huge part of that story.

TS: That's okay.

BW: In reconnecting with my USNA Out folks, there was another classmate of mine who had gotten kicked out the year after I did.

TS: Okay.

BW: And I had reconnected with her through our group, and I said "So, you know, whatcha been doing?"

And she said "Well, you know after I left the Academy actually I joined the army."

I'm like "How did you do that?"

She said "Well, it was before 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell', and she said "They were—they took me."

I was like "Oh my gosh."

And her story is that she enlisted in the army, and being the smarty-pants that she is, one of her sergeant's says, "You know, you're the best soldier I've ever had. I'm going to recommend you for commissioning." In the army you're only required two years of college and she had had that. And so the army commissioned her, and soon thereafter she met her partner, and you know, they both got out of the army and they've been together twenty-plus years now, so everything [unclear].

TS: Is that right?

BW: So, I asked Connie. I said "What did your DD214 say?" [refers to Department of Defense form 214 which states a veteran's status of discharge from service]

And she goes "Well, I don't know." So, she went and she looked it up, and she said—

TS: Do you mean the first one?

BW: The first one from the Naval Academy.

TS: Okay.

BW: I'm like, "How did that happen?" She has a, you know, it says "honorable," and what you can't read on here is there is a code.

TS: Right, there is always a code on the discharge.

BW: Yes, yes, and I'm like "You know, I've never seen my DD214." Just on a whim I called up Veteran's Records and requested it. It didn't come in, didn't come in, I was on the phone with people, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Turns out, I don't have one.

TS: You don't have a DD214?

BW: In veteran's records, no I don't.

TS: Okay.

BW: And I'm like "Well shit, that was a really bad dream if I wasn't there and endured all that stuff." [both laugh]

TS: "I thought I was there."

BW: I'm like "Damn, was I just making that up or what?" But anyway, in applying for the air force, on the Naval Academy's website I saw "If you require a DD214 please send request here." So I'm like "Let's see what mine says. Let's see if they"—and they have, this is the only copy that there is.

TS: We can probably get a better copy for you.

BW: No, you can't. The Naval Academy is the only one that's got it. They sent me five very foggy copies like this off of microfiche that you—this is the best one and you can see that yes it does say an honorable discharge and it does have this—

TS: What—do you have your code on there?

BW: It has the code of FND.

TS: And what does that stand for?

BW: Well, we—I didn't know what it meant, so I called up my friend Major Marge, and this is Major Marge's house. Marjorie is my best buddy. She is a West Point grad.

TS: When are we talking to her?

BW: Why are we talking to her?

TS: When are we going to talk to her?

BW: Oh, she—she doesn't live here anymore.

TS: Okay.

BW: But I said—And she's a lawyer, so I called her and said "What's this code?" and she said "Well, let's find out." So she did, and it means that you just left; a change of career.

TS: Really?

BW: Yes.

TS: What's—what are those letters?

BW: F-N-D.

TS: Okay, well that's interesting. So you find that out—

BW: I find that out. I'm like, "I've got a pass. I've got a free pass."

TS: You weren't worried, then, about your transcripts or what it said?

BW: The only thing—I have seen my transcripts, my grade transcripts, and the only thing that's different between my grade transcripts and, you know, something bad, is my grade transcripts say "Resignation" on it. It doesn't say "Voluntary Resignation."

TS: But it doesn't say "Involuntary" either, right?

BW: It can say—it could say "Voluntary," it could say "Voluntary Resignation." It could say "Voluntary Resignation." It could say "Resignation." It can say "Separation."

TS: I see, okay.

BW: So, I got the middle one.

TS: Okay.

BW: But to somebody not in the military a resignation is a resignation.

TS: Right.

BW: You know, they don't know that there's a voluntary resignation versus just a resignation. So, I knew—I knew my transcripts would be fine. Now my DD214 says it's okay. When I went to the recruiter I had all this paperwork and he goes "Oh, we don't need to see that. That's from the Academy. It really doesn't count."

I'm like "Oh well, whatever."

TS: Okay.

BW: So—So anyway—and the other thing is since now the air force knew I went to the Naval Academy I thought somewhere along the way that they would find out my whole story. So, for—I called them in January and it wasn't until November I was commissioned, so it was almost a year I'd go to the mailbox—

TS: This was '09?

BW: This was '09, yes. I'd go to the mailbox every day, you know, thinking I was going to get a letter going [sharp exhaling sound] "We know who you are. You're that lesbian from 1980 that we kicked out a long time ago, that's now been lobbying Congress for the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." So—

TS: Were you kind of reliving all that again, then, and that whole experience?

BW: Well, it was just—

TS: That emotional—

BW: It was—it was there and it's like "Could I really do this?" Well, one, I'm thinking "Barb, you're crazy for doing this." And number two, it's like "But they're letting me. They must be just as crazy as I am." I'm like, "Oh my god, I can't believe they're letting me. Oh my god, I can't believe I'm doing this."

TS: Right, okay—right, okay. You didn't get the rejection notice.

BW: I didn't get the rejection notice. I did get an email one time from the recruiter, and it was an email exchange between the recruiter, somebody in the air force, and the Naval Academy. Basically the air force wanted my conduct records from the Academy, and the Academy wrote back "We don't keep stuff for twenty-seven years." So I went "Okay," so they wanted me to write a statement as to my conduct.

TS: How did you write that?

BW: I called up my friend Major Marge, the lawyer; the West Point lawyer.

TS: Good plan [chuckling], okay.

BW: It's nice to know friends that—that are useful to you. So, we wrote a letter.

TS: Did you have—did you phrase it as carefully as the—the mother hen on the stand talking about—

BW: Well, basically what I said is—they wanted my conduct record, so I said, you know, "I entered this date. I left this date. I completed all military and academic requirements. I got demerits my freshman year for coming back late. I got demerits my sophomore year for throwing a bucket of water out of a window."

TS: Did you talk about your resignation anywhere?

BW: I said "I played varsity softball. I was a third-string pitcher. Thank you very much."

TS: Okay.

BW: An old crusty lawyer told me one time that “The more you say, the worse it gets.” So, and that’s—

TS: So, you kept it short and simple.

BW: Short and simple, yes.

TS: And so, then you got into the Air Force Reserve as an optometrist?

BW: I did, yes.

TS: You’re at Seymour Johnson?

BW: Yes.

TS: So, what do you do there?

BW: I do eye exams.

TS: And how do you feel about all that?

BW: I feel terrific; absolutely terrific.

TS: Do you feel like you’re closing a circle?

BW: Absolutely, yes. I always felt like I had something unfinished and it’s, you know, I knew that it was going to be their loss that they kicked me out and they kicked out my girlfriend at the time. When this whole thing—kind of like, “Should I do this, should I not do this?” I’m like, if I have a second chance—I mean how many times in life do you have a second chance to do this? Like, hardly any. It’s like if I don’t take this I will kick myself for the rest of my life. So, that’s why I did it. I didn’t want to go down with any regrets and have been so incredibly happy.

And then—a funny story about the whole repeal process. Last year, actually exactly at this time, I was at officer’s school. [chuckles] It was funny. The air force reserves was like “Oh yes, just go down to Seymour Johnson, blah, blah, blah.”

I said, “Do I have to go to boot camp or anything?”

They’re like, “Oh, when it’s convenient for them they’ll let you go.”

I said, “They already know—you already know how to do your job. You just don’t know how to do the officer stuff, so that’s all they need.”

So, like, my first week down there, my first time down there, I grabbed this nurse. I’m like “You have to show me—we have to go shopping because I don’t know how to wear a uniform.” So, we were putting together stuff. They were out of my size, and it just

so happens I went with Major Marge one time when I was in D.C. So, the army and the navy are putting together this air force uniform. We're like, "Okay, how do I look?" [both laugh]

TS: Major Marge is in the army, right?

BW: Well, she was in the army.

TS: Oh, was in the army. Then you were in the navy and then you got this air force thing going on.

BW: Yes, yes.

TS: Where's the Marine Corps person that's helping you out?

BW: Yes. So anyway, I started with them January of 2010. It was December of 2010 when I finally went to officer's school. So, I had been in for an entire year—

TS: Oh my, okay.

BW: —before I went. And so, last December is when the whole Senate was voting on the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" thing. They were having this closure vote and that closure vote, and it was up and it was down, you know, and I went to a compressed officer's school. It's usually five or six weeks, but I went to a two week program for doctors, dentists, lawyers, and chaplains and nurses.

TS: Okay.

BW: So, it was—I mean, if we got four or five hours of sleep a night that was probably on average. I would get text messages and, you know, see stuff on my smart phone but it was like, no, I had to, you know, do all my officer school stuff. You know, and take tests and obstacle courses and all that kind of crazy stuff at the age of forty-eight years old. Or I should say, gosh, I was forty-nine then. But anyway, I was, you know, I wanted to get really excited about the thing but I really couldn't get excited and I had a roommate, and it was like "Okay, like, holy crap."

So, this is no lie, this is absolutely a true story. My graduation day the Senate voted on a Saturday morning whether to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" or not. My graduation from officer's school is that day, and so I went into the graduation ceremony and all the big speeches and stuff like that not knowing—

TS: That it had passed?

BW: —what my fate was going to be.

TS: Okay.

BW: I can—I can read you something that I wrote from that day.

TS: Yes, I would love to hear that.

BW: When—After the ceremony I got back and there were a gazillion text messages and emails on my phone, and it was just done.

TS: Did you just collapse?

BW: I started to cry. I started to cry, and so we were packing up and I'm [sniffing noise] you know tearing up and everything else.

TS: Everybody's looking at you.

BW: Everybody's thinking, "Oh my god, Barb is so sad about leaving us. We just met over two weeks but boy, what an ordeal we've been through." I'm like—

TS: "You have no idea."

BW: I'm like "You have absolutely no idea; absolutely no idea."

TS: Wow, that's a lot of emotions running through.

BW: Yes, so I remember packing up the car and leaving. As soon as I got out the gate I called Zoe, because she was a huge, huge, huge player in the whole repeal process.

TS: Now, were you still part of the—these organizations while you were—

BW: I was part of—I was a board member of SLDN. I actually resigned from USNA Out because one of the things you had to be was out, so I sort of had to go back in but not really because, you know, I'd been out for the last thirty years, but I just had to officially do that in order to, I don't know, feel better about doing what I was doing through the air force.

TS: I see, okay. Well, yes, you want to read what you wrote?

BW: Sure.

TS: I'd love to hear it. Let me pause for a second while you get it, but I'll turn it on, let me turn it on

[Recording Paused].

TS: Okay here we go. We're going to listen to—this is something you wrote?

BW: This is what I wrote, kind of, summing up officer's school last December.

TS: Okay, okay.

BW: And I write this to my navy friends and some other close people like my sister.

TS: Okay.

BW: It says: "Thank you for responding to my request with the outside world as I was sequestered in Alabama. It was an intense two week course, condensed from the typical five weeks in officer training. As I pulled into Montgomery I stopped for lunch and called my mom. It sort of reminded me of when my family dropped me off for Plebe Summer in 1980. Okay, I'm thirty years older and the temperature was fifty degrees cooler. I had a fair idea of what was coming up but was always glad when mom is there with support. For those who have met Flo you can imagine the "Give 'em the hell" encouragement that only she can dispense.

I soon met the man in the Smokey the Bear hat. He asked me nicely to take out my earrings and put my briefcase back in the car. I know, I'm a nerd. Then it was into the dorm for processing. I got issued room keys, computer access cards, building codes, reflective belt, camelback hydration device, and a little book the exact same size of Reef Points [the midshipman handbook of the United States Naval Academy]. Hmm, it's all coming back now." Reef Points is a book that you have to memorize when you're at the Naval Academy—

TS: I see.

BW: —during the summer. "I found my room and roommate on the second floor with the rest of Foxtrot Flight. She is twenty-four, petite, cute, a nurse and prior enlisted. We leisurely unpacked and chatted.

Later that evening we had to be in a lecture hall to be introduced to our flight commanders—the Cadre. As the training squadron commander introduced them I thought 'Boy, I really don't want that guy who looks the scariest.' When the lieutenant colonel turned over control to the Cadre they literally leapt off the stage screaming into the aisles. Guess who was my flight commander? The loudest—the scary looking guy.

The next morning we were awoken by Smokey pounding on our doors. My roommate and other prior enlisted folks clued us into being ready when he came by at 4:30 a.m., so we were dressed and out in the hall in one to two minutes. He complimented us on our superman dressing abilities and marched us outside into the cold, dark Alabama morning. It's not supposed to be that cold in the South." Really, it was like twenty degrees that day. It was like freaky cold. "We had an hour or so of drill instruction; hysterical to see a hundred and two doctors, nurses, chaplains and one lawyer

to learn to march. Our group was also much older than anticipated. One guy in my flight was fifty-seven. Average age was thirty-five to forty.

They asked for volunteers to take command of each flight, a flight is fourteen to fifteen folks, to go to breakfast. I figured since they gave me major I should show some kind of leadership so I raised my hand. We traversed the walkways just fine. Then I saw the Cadres swarming around the entrance of the dining hall. I figured they were there to screw around with us, and yes I was right. I was ready—getting ready to turn the flight when a captain came up to me and saluted. I had to salute and greet her back but in the process I missed my mark. My flight marches through some landscaping. The woman who saluted me comes running and screaming ‘Major, you just marched your flight through my landscaping’ and I respond loud and proud ‘Yes ma’am!’ and kept on going. I figured that if I stopped she’d just yell more and who knows where my peeps would have ended up. By the end of the day my “Captain Loud and Scary” pulled me aside and told me that the last formation and march from the dining hall to the classroom was excellent.

The majority of the training was academic. There were classes in leadership, suicide prevention, profession of arms, conflict management, military law, etc. The law class had a special section in “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”. The take home message there was “If repealed, you will lead.” That simple; no question. A fellow trainee identified herself as a nurse from Margaret Witt’s unit, and told a little story of her in a supportive way. Interesting in the days this fall when the gays could enter the military, she said that two others tried to get back into her unit as well. Of course there was one guy who had a shower question.

We had to do a total of four writing assignments, two tests, and a five to nine-minute brief. We had to know the air force song, the airman’s creed, our squadron chant, the names and hometowns of our flightmates, plus all the reporting procedures and a uniform inspection every morning. This is on top of the P.T. and the cold nineteen degree field house at 5:00 a.m. and the two evaluated leadership scenarios. One on an obstacle course and the other during a field hops, hospital exercise.

When my roommate and I were deciding one evening what our briefs were going to be about she blurted out “I’ll do mine on gays in the military.” I nearly crapped. I took a breath and calmly turned to her and said “That’s a hot topic.” [TS laughs] She said—she said that with “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” she could go to gay bars. I was just waiting for her to do the Google research and see me as a board member of SLDN. Later that evening she decided to do something on North Korea. Thank God for being twenty-four. She also told me her mother was forty-four. I knew I was going to be older than somebody’s mother. She laughed at that one. She said she always thought of me as thirty.”

TS: Well, there you go.

BW: Yes. “The Surgeon General of the air force reserves was a guest at dinner one night. We got carry-on. Yes, we did have to eat with our feet at a forty-five degree angle and our heels together. No talking and there was an interesting ritual of napkin passing and tray clearing.”

TS: What is that?

BW: Well, it's just in, you know, protocol in the dining hall. You just had to do things. You couldn't talk. You know, you had to keep your eyes straight ahead, and all that—

TS: What's the napkin passing?

BW: It was just—okay, you put this down. This guy gets this napkin, this guy—it was all—

TS: Just a procedure?

BW: It was just a procedure you had to memorize so you could screw it up so they could yell at you.

TS: I see, okay.

BW: [clears throat] “As I positioned myself at the next open table this full colonel sits down. Yes, the Surgeon General himself. I had a great time chatting with him, and we seemed to have this connection. Great guy, he's got great insights, somehow it comes out that he is an Air Force Academy grad. I ask “What year?”

“Nineteen eighty-four.” How ironic, my Naval Academy class year.

Thank you for the many letters and treats from you all. Not surprising my mom was the unofficial contest winner as to who wrote the most often. Since we are really in the air force now, our flight commander had come up with call signs for us. Since I was the recipient of many boxed goodies I was christened “Cookie.” No Paula, they didn't tell “Captain Loud and Scary” about the condoms you sent. My roommate just thinks I have “crazy friends.” Picture her saying this while flipping her strawberry blonde hair.

The lessons of leadership were emphasized throughout the two weeks. One of the air force core values is integrity. The training squadron motto is “Always with honor.” I was beginning to have real issues about me being there and the ability to do the right thing. I thought about the advice from my SLDN attorney “It, ‘Don't Ask, Don't Tell’, is the law.” I considered talking with the chaplain in our flight about my story but stuck to the law; don't tell.

Even though we were getting four to five hours of sleep a night I kept up with the news from the Senate. Late night surfing on my smart phone and the gajillion emails from texts and from folks made me feel close to the action yet so far away. As I went to graduation ceremony on Saturday morning the Senate was preparing for the vote on our future. The graduation was held in the auditorium with the “Always with Honor” motto on the stage. Picture a Lifetime movie split-screen. The Senate voting to end “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” and me simultaneously retaking the oath of office. Yes, it was that dramatic. Why am I still surprised by irony?

Afterwards I rushed back to my room, looked at my phone and read one text from a certain army ROTC cadet from Chapel Hill. It said “Call when you're done with graduation. It's a great day.” I did, and she gave me the news. I couldn't hold back the

tears. Finally we could be true to ourselves and unquestionably honoring our service. It's much more of a liberating feeling than I anticipated. I quickly put my stuff in the car; said farewell to Foxtrot Flight. As I told my roommate goodbye, I said that she'd be in my book one day.

P.S. I placed third in the push-up contest and I did not break a hip on the obstacle course." [TS chuckles]

TS: Fantastic. So, you were having a lot of angst then while you were going through this.

BW: Oh yes, because officer school is all about the leadership. They talk about the core values which is integrity, service before self, and excellence in all you do. That whole integrity thing, I—you know, it wasn't like I was lying, but I wasn't telling the whole truth and that's—that was bothersome. And that's bothersome to a lot of people.

TS: Right, right. So now, what—that—it's a year later—

BW: A year later, yes.

TS: How do you feel about—how do you feel about it, because now it's actually been implemented; it hasn't just passed Congress.

BW: Right, right—how do I feel about it? I feel like there is a huge burden removed from folks. You don't have to worry about being found out. You don't have to worry about looking over your shoulder, or people asking you simple questions like, "Wow, who'd you go on vacation with?" or "Who do you live with?" or "Who takes care of your dog when you go away?" All those questions can just lead to other questions. That stress, that concern is just—it's just gone.

TS: And how about the—that gap you had from when you—in 1981 when you had to leave the Naval Academy and you couldn't really talk about it except, you know, to really close people that you trusted. Now people can talk about it, and probably some don't still.

BW: Oh, I'm sure a lot don't. I mean, this is a huge thing for me talking to you today. I don't tell a lot of people my whole story.

TS: And why?

BW: I think embarrassment is one thing.

TS: Of what?

BW: That I got kicked out, you know. I was doing something that I shouldn't have been doing.

TS: But that nineteen-year-old Barb that said, "I didn't do anything wrong. I'm right."

BW: Right, yes, it's still in there.

TS: Is it?

BW: It's still in there.

TS: But the—that dominant culture kind of pushing on you really—

BW: Suppresses that, yes.

TS: Are you feeling better about it?

BW: I am feeling better about it, yes, because now—I mean, one of the proudest things in my life was getting into the Naval Academy. Now I can own that. Before I couldn't admit it, because then it would lead to a bunch of questions.

TS: Right.

BW: You know, it took—it took twenty years or so before I could put a Naval Academy sticker on my car, and unfortunately the night before I went into the air force, my first day in the air force, I remember I had stopped someplace to eat and I saw the sticker on the back of the car—

TS: Your car?

BW: Yes, and I took it off because I didn't want anybody asking "Why do you have a Naval Academy sticker on the back of your car?"

TS: Oh, to questions of—so when you were sitting with that surgeon—was it the Surgeon General? You didn't tell him that you had been in—

BW: No, no.

TS: No? You just kept that closed?

BW: Yes.

TS: Do many people know in your unit that you're in now?

BW: I came out to my commander, and I came out to two other officers who are close friends.

TS: Yes, and so how did that—how did that go?

BW: Wonderful.

TS: Yes?

BW: Yes. My commander was exceptionally—actually all three of them had been wonderful but my commander I was a little nervous about. I mean, I thought my friends would be okay, but you know, he's a commander; you just never know. One of the things that the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" did is it didn't have lesbians or gay people as a protected class under the Equal Opportunity, so we can't claim minority discrimination or anything like that, but if there are problems with some kind of harassment you can go to the Inspector General as opposed to the EEOC [United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] of the military.

So when I told him, I told him that a focus of my life for the last seven years has been repealing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell", and why—because I resigned from the Naval Academy—and we had this group called US—I told him everything. He reiterated to me, he said "You know if you ever have a problem you have to go to the Inspector General." He goes "No, no, no," he goes "If you have a problem you come to me and we will go to the Inspector General." Again, that was just—spoke volumes as far as his support of me being there. And my other two friends that I told, I told them a similar sort of thing and they were both, like I said, super-duper supportive.

TS: So, some people are like "Why do they have to tell now? They can just be. Why do you have to go back—why do you have to go in and tell your commander?" You know, what's the purpose of that, if someone said that to you?

BW: Because if—I mean, if you Google me I come up on the board of SLDN and blah, blah, blah, and I wanted him—if it ever came out I wanted him to find out from me.

TS: I see.

BW: Yes, like "If you've got questions about it, you know my door is open."

TS: Right.

BW: I wanted him to feel free to talk to me and not have to—to worry about anything; about confronting me. I just wanted him to know that I am just as comfortable with it as—as he could be.

TS: What is it Barb, about the culture of the military that you like so much that you really wanted to be able to come—get back into it and be part of it?

BW: Well, I think for me getting back in, it was, one, unfinished business from a long time ago. Why did I want to do this?

TS: Why would you want to join something that, you know, pretty much pushed you out?

BW: Because I knew I was right. I just knew I was right, and like I said, to have a second chance to do this, and I really don't want to come off as arrogant, but you know, I knew I could do a good job. I just never had the chance. It's just that nobody ever gave me the chance.

TS: It's not that you didn't do a good job.

BW: No.

TS: It's just that there was this behavior that wasn't acceptable.

BW: Right, right.

TS: And it had nothing to do with your job.

BW: Right.

TS: So, what do you think about—what do, you know—you say—what's the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"—how's it going to change the culture of the military? Is it going to?

BW: I don't think so, no.

TS: Why not?

BW: I don't think so. I think people are—what I have read with folks that have come out, I think they have commanded more respect because they have come out. There was a great essay written by this Marine Corps Captain [M. Matthew Phelps]. He brought a male date to the Marine Corps Ball, and you know, for a person to be living their truth—I think that does nothing—is nothing but respectful of themselves. I think, you know, you're comfortable with yourself and who you are and nobody can argue with the truth.

TS: Yes, well what—you know, you said earlier when we first kind of started talking that patriotism is a little different for you now than it was before.

BW: Or seeing the big picture. I mean, before it was just the Academy. I was there to get a college education, and now—I don't know if I can find another essay here. Woops. But there was one time that—in the—our base newspaper or something like that printed a photo of the last space shot [launch of a space vehicle beyond the earth's atmosphere] and our jets were patrolling the area, the air space, around Cape Canaveral. My unit—

TS: From Seymour Johnson?

BW: From Seymour Johnson, and you could tell because there's an "SJ" on the tail of the planes.

TS: Oh, is there? Okay.

BW: There's a great picture of the space shot going up and one of the F-15's kind of passing in front. I'm like "Oh man, like, that's one of our"—and the thing is but we're not the F-15 unit. My unit is the air refueling wing, so we drive the gas tanks in the sky. So anyway, I was like "Wow, that's a Seymour Johnson plane," blah, blah, blah, and I was like, "Wow, that was really cool."

Don't you know the next month this one guy who is a crew chief on a refueler comes in and I said, "So, you know, whatcha been up to? Blah, blah, blah."

He goes, "Oh, you know, we were selected to go down to the space shot." He goes, "Man that was an awesome sight. I've got some great pictures and blah, blah, blah, blah blah," and then it hit me. The jets needed the refuelers there as they were patrolling around and this guy wore my contact lenses.

I was like, "Yes!" In a very small—very, very, very small way I was connected to the last space shot. I was like "Yes!" [both laugh]

TS: There you go—that's awesome.

BW: Just having the opportunity to be, you know, that little tiny little cog in the wheel is just over-the-top incredible. Incredible.

TS: So, do you see any difference between—and it might be a few years since you were in the Naval Academy—but between the navy and the air force.

BW: What about them?

TS: Like the culture or attitude, and also you have this time, too—

BW: Well, the time and also I'm in a medical group, and it's a reserve medical group where people are doctors and nurses and stuff like that, so when we go to work we relate to each other as doctors and nurses as opposed to, you know, majors and sergeants. I mean, yes, there are major and sergeants there, and yes people do salute and call me "ma'am" and all that kind of stuff, but it's much more of a colleague working together kind of thing, rather than me ordering somebody to go do push-ups or something like that. Very, very, very different; very different.

TS: Right, right, right—yes, yes—and so if you—how long do you expect that you're going to stay in?

BW: Well, you know, I had this—I signed up originally for three years which is—I have one more year left. I was talking to my friend Paula, and Paula's here [pointing to photograph], and she's the one who's transgendered. She had to leave the Naval Academy because she wasn't living her truth and she went through the gender reassignment surgery.

TS: When did she leave the Academy? Do you know what year?

BW: She didn't leave the Academy. She was—she actually served in the navy.

TS: Oh, she did?

BW: She left the navy, and the only reason she left the navy—and there's nothing that makes this woman happier than driving boats around—and she still gets choked up to this day. She was in the class of '85 and I think she got out in '90 or '92, something like that—after the first Gulf War because she was in the first Gulf War on a mine sweeper. In talking to Paula I was talking about how long I should stay, blah, blah blah. Boy, that I could get promoted soon, you know, all that kind of stuff and she said, "Barb, stay in as long as you possibly can." She goes "Have them rip that uniform off of you."

And I'm like "Okay, I will." I made a promise to her, so I'll stay as long as I possibly can.

TS: That's great.

BW: Just because I can and she can't right now.

TS: I understand. I understand.

BW: Yes.

TS: Well, is there anything that you want anybody to know about your experience that I haven't asked you specifically about?

BW: Oh boy [chuckles]. I guess how I'm finally getting a chance, and that my service is appreciated. You know, by the—from the folks that come in to my office to my optometry techs that I train because they were without somebody for a year and a half. Yes, when I went to—I told you I went to Alaska for one of the—

TS: Oh right, yes, we can talk about those, too.

BW: —for the two week thing there. It was a group of three hundred professionals that went and we did—were dispersed into twelve little villages. One of the villages I went to was a population of a hundred forty-nine. We did eye screenings and exams and as much as we possibly could; got folks glasses. The navy was very nice. They brought their lab to the Fairbanks and they made glasses there on sight. When we got our reshipment plane they brought that, so these people that usually have to wait months and months and months for eyeglasses got them in a couple days.

TS: So, this was like in the villages, smaller villages in Alaska? Okay.

BW: Yes, yes.

TS: Is this a native—

BW: Yes.

TS: Okay.

BW: So, that was great, and at the end of—at the end of that two week thing the army gave me an achievement medal. I remember we had to—maybe I can find that one for you somewhere—Alaska part three. Of course, the army had the lead on this so I wrote this in the army “hooah” style.

TS: Okay.

BW: It was the AAR, which is the After-Action Report; that’s the army thing. A SIT-Rep is what the navy calls it. The title of this is “An AAR, A SIT Rep, whatever, and a souvenir.” Just one more note about the Alaska trip and I’ll do it in the army hooah After-Action Report style.

What was good: Traveling to the interior of Alaska—a place where most folks never get to experience, nonetheless see. Meeting wonderful native Alaskans who opened their hearts and homes to us. I do like moose stew. Working with a dynamite group of folks of all services; officer, enlisted. Yeah, that includes the army hooah personnel. Being on a team of three optometrists who saw over six hundred and fifty people in less than two weeks. The last time care came to these villages was two years ago. I get many hugs from patients. It was estimated that the whole task force of optometrists delivered between five and seven hundred thousand dollars in eye care and glasses. I think we made a difference.

What was bad: Standing in formation. I realized the army hooah usually works with young energetic men who have to be contained, but we were optometrists, dentists, veterinarians, primary care doctors, nurses, and their medics and techs. Really? Another formation to board a plane? There was only fourteen seats on that plane. Mispronouncing my name each time we were in formation. The last formation consisted of somebody reading out the last four digits of our social security number instead. Yes, for all three hundred of us. Hurry up and wait. Ah, a classic military maneuver. No fresh fruits or veggies. It’s all about the sauce on that quote unquote meat.

How to make things better: Better communication ahead of time. I didn’t know I was going until six days before we left. Okay, that was partially because of congressional budget problems. Remember that threat of a government shut-down? Also knowing what kind of equipment we were going to have. Recycling. I felt totally guilty about throwing away stuff. Speak English rather than army hooah. I know that air force has their own TLA’s, three letter acronyms, that require translation, but I’m still building on that vocabulary, too.

An army souvenir: As we were getting off the bus for our final formation my staff sergeant pulls me aside and says I’m getting an award. I really don’t know what he means but I have to join this different group and stand in a different formation. Then an army

first-class comes over to usher us into the hanger and show us where to stand and where to march. Lindsay, who is one of my Marine Corps friends, says, “Lindsay, you said that 04s don’t drill. Well, this must be another army hooah thing. We have to march to the front of all of the three hundred members of Arctic Care, hopefully stop while centered on the three-star general, and left-face. Guess where this puts me? Front and center. I’m thinking ‘How did I get here and how do I get out of the photographer’s view?’

I can’t smile and shake my head as I usually do when I think about this crazy, crazy, crazy ride I’ve been on. In the last eighteen months I’ve tried to fly low under the gaydar [colloquialism combining gay and radar; refers to the ability to assess others’ sexual orientation]. I work in a little office in the dark with my own bathroom away from most everybody. Then the emcee starts reading the citations for the four folks who will receive the Army Commendation Medal. The three-star proceeds down the line and stops in front of me. The emcee reads the citation for the five of us receiving the Army Achievement Medal. Holy hooah, I’m getting a medal? He mispronounces my name, hooah. The general says while the emcee is still talking. ‘He just butchered your name, didn’t he?’ I said ‘Yes, sir’ and we share a chuckle. The folks behind me receive a certificate and get some challenge coins.

As I’m standing at attention my working group, also at attention, is facing me. Shelby, my nurse friend, is making faces like Samantha from *Bewitched*, [*Bewitched* was a popular TV show that originally aired from 1964 to 1972] and yes, the lady lieutenant colonel is winking and smiling during formation. Hooah.”

TS: That’s great.

BW: “Love, Barb.” [both chuckle] Yes.

TS: That’s great. Well, where do you see—you know, if you think about your connection to the Servicemembers’—how do you pronounce that?

BW: Servicemembers’ Legal Defense Network.

TS: Legal Defense Network—and the connection you had with the navy and how this whole process and the circle has gone. Do you feel like in some way you were, I don’t want to use the word pioneer but I’m going to, in moving that bar forward and helping to get “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” eliminated? And not just that, but before “Don’t Ask”—it wasn’t like “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, you know, created this barrier for—problems for gays, because you were in before that happened.

BW: Yes, right.

TS: So, what do you think about that?

BW: I think that I have been extraordinarily lucky to have the opportunities that I’ve had. I remember my first—no second, SLDN board meeting. I’m sitting there, and Zoe my friend is the chairman of the board, so you know, she’s the one that sort of invited me in

and, you know, all these other people, and I'm meeting these folks, and guess who sits across the table from me? Colonel Cammermeyer. I'm like "Oh my gosh." Talk about a circle complete.

TS: That's true.

BW: Yes.

TS: That's true.

BW: There was one morning, I guess before the meeting, and she was sort of sitting outside in the hotel lobby just reading a book and I said, "I've got to reintroduce myself." I mean, because we introduced ourselves during the board meeting but I don't think she knew who I was.

TS: Sure.

BW: So, I went up to her and introduced myself and told her I'd met her years and years and years ago, and it was because [of] her that I got involved with this, and this happened, this happened, this happened, but she was definitely the initial catalyst behind it all.

TS: What did she say?

BW: She is just an incredibly gracious woman, and she said, you know, "Thanks for sharing your story" and all that. It was just wonderful.

TS: Yes.

BW: Just wonderful.

TS: What do you mean by you feel like you've been incredibly lucky?

BW: I mean, to find myself sitting in that board meeting across from Colonel Cammermeyer I'm like, "How in the hell did I get here? How did I get here?" I really—I don't know.

TS: Can you answer that question?

BW: No. I absolutely cannot.

TS: You're still trying to process all that maybe?

BW: Yes, I—yes, I [makes whoosh sound].

TS: Yes?

BW: Yes, I don't know, and I'm just thankful for the opportunities that presented themselves and how they just kind of—it just—like, stuff just seems to happen. I mean, just everything just kind of fell in my lap.

TS: Well, you kind of have to walk through that door, too.

BW: Well, that too, but yes, it's just—I just cannot explain it; cannot explain it.

TS: I believe you made the call to try to get back in, right?

BW: Yes.

TS: So, that was your initiative.

BW: Yes.

TS: And you, you know—that didn't fall in your lap. That was something that you wanted to happen, right?

BW: Yes, yes. Well, I guess it was to see if it could happen.

TS: Okay.

BW: I should—I should say it like that.

TS: Yes, well, do you think—is there anything else that you want people to know about your experience that we haven't talked about?

BW: [pause] Boy, I'm not sure. I mean, I feel like I've talked your ear off this afternoon.

TS: I could probably sit here all day. [both chuckle] The transcriber might—might—

BW: Sorry about that, transcriber.

TS: No, it's fine.

BW: No, I really don't—I definitely covered a lot of it.

TS: Well, here's one—here's a specific question.

BW: Okay.

TS: Is there anything in particular that you'd want a civilian to know or understand about what it is like to serve in the military that they may not understand or appreciate?

BW: That it does feel good to give back. That whole sense of—and this is just going to sound way too—but I remember my father, who was a Goldwater Republican [refers to those who agree with the politics of the late U.S. Senator from Arizona Barry Goldwater], had a little American flag on his desk and it was the Kennedy quote “Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country” and somehow that sticks. I think the people who haven’t worn a uniform really don’t know what that’s all about, because you can’t make this country work if you don’t participate in it at some level. And I think being in the military is one way you can do that. And so I think that’s what I would say.

TS: So, you’re going to stay in the air force reserve until they take that uniform off of you.

BW: Yes.

TS: So, you—but—so you’re in the reserves—so you—that’s the reserve right? You work as an optometrist?

BW: Right.

TS: Are you still working on these two organizations as well?

BW: Yes.

TS: Okay. Is there anything you want to share with anybody about the organizations? To let them know about what they can do?

BW: Well, SLDN still functions. It accepts—it’s a nonprofit so we accept donations, hopefully huge ones, to provide legal services for folks in relationship to their sexuality and issues with the military.

TS: Okay.

BW: Our sort of focus now is parity of benefits because right now veterans don’t have equality of benefits even though some states you’re allowed to marry, some states you’re not allowed to marry, so they’re—we have—SLDN has filed a court case that’s proceeding now through, I’m not sure which federal district, but to kind of strike down DOMA. So—

TS: Which is the Defense of Marriage Act[United States federal law that defines marriage as the legal union of one man and one woman].

BW: Right.

TS: Okay

BW: To, sort of, make it clear that every veteran has the right, if they're married, to have their spouse have access to, I don't know, the Exchange or health care or something—

TS: Well, I just saw—I just saw or read an article about one of the candidates running for the republican nomination. I can't think—they're the one who was governor of Massachusetts. I can't think of his name.

BW: Oh, Romney.

TS: Romney, okay—he was in a little coffee shop. Did you see that article about the man who had the Vietnam hat on?

BW: Right.

TS: And he had said—well, he asked him about his feelings about wanting—“Are you going to repeal—are you going to put the back—implement ‘Don't Ask, Don't Tell?’” and he basically said “Yes,” he didn't think they should be able to marry and—

BW: Right.

TS: He was upset about—that he had a partner that he had married—

BW: And the partner doesn't get—

TS: And he didn't have the same veteran's benefits that he gets, so those are the kind of things—

BW: Right, yes.

TS: Okay, that's interesting.

BW: And then the whole transgendered issue, too.

TS: Are transgendered allowed in the military?

BW: No.

TS: No?

BW: No.

TS: Not even, like, after they have had the surgery or change?

BW: No.

TS: No?

BW: No. Now in some militaries, yes.

TS: But not the United States.

BW: Not in ours.

TS: What militaries do they allow?

BW: I think Britain—Britain, maybe Canada, Australia. I'm not sure of the whole list of countries though.

TS: So, there's still a lot of work to be done?

BW: Yes. Lots of work to be done.

TS: Well, I am very grateful that you took the time to talk to us today and talk to me and have it on tape.

BW: Sure.

TS: Anything else you'd like to add?

BW: No, I don't think so.

TS: No? Okay, well maybe we can get some of those pictures or something.

BW: Yes.

TS: Alright, well, I'm going to go ahead and stop the tape then.

[End of Interview]