

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Carolyn F. Dominik

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: April 13, 2012

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is April 13, Friday the thirteenth, 2012. My name is Therese Strohmer. I'm at the home of Carolyn Dominik in Greensboro, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Carolyn, could you state your name the way that you'd like it to read on the collection?

CD: Carolyn F. Dominik.

TS: Okay, let's see how that works. [recording paused] Well, thank you again, Carolyn. Why don't you start off by telling me when and where you were born?

CD: I was born on the eighteenth of June, 1950, and in Queens, New York. As a matter of fact, I was born on Father's Day, so that was kind of fun.

TS: Nice present for your dad.

CD: Yes, oh it was. And then we moved, let me see. We lived for a while with my mom's parents until my dad was building our house on Long Island. So—and I don't remember much of my grandparents' house, because I was two years old when we moved.

TS: To Long Island?

CD: To New Hyde Park.

TS: I see.

CD: Yes, New Hyde Park. And so I was there until I graduated from high school, there on Long Island.

TS: Well did you have any brothers or sisters?

CD: Yes, I did. I had three sisters, so my dad was definitely outnumbered. I was kind of considered the tomboy of the group because I'd always want to be with my dad learning things and kind of helping him.

TS: What did he do for a living?

CD: He's a machinist.

TS: Oh, who'd he work for?

CD: He worked for, it was called Quaker Made, A & P supermarkets up in New York.

TS: Oh, right, sure.

CD: And so he would fix the machines that were on the assembly line, you know, for the food things. And so he worked there and then we would go, as a family we would go camping. So we started out in this, I guess I was probably seven when we started out. Yes, because my youngest sister was still in diapers; she was about a year and a half. And people thought my mom was crazy for [laughs] for taking us camping when she was still in diapers. There was no hot water at any of the campsites, you know, there was outhouses, and so she was washing diapers. You'd boil the water on the little camp stove that we had and cleaning those in the pail and mix it with some hot water. So that was kind of fond memories. We started out, like I said, in a sixteen by sixteen squad tent—

TS: Okay.

CD: —that my dad had picked up at a surplus store. And we went camping and we had the privilege of—my dad had a three-week vacation, so we would get to go camping every summer for that three-week vacation time. So my friends were all jealous because they didn't usually get to go on a vacation back in the fifties and sixties. You know a lot of

times it was too expensive but we could afford to go, because of how'd we go camping in that way. And then, after a few years, we would go each summer—my cousins, my mom's brother and his family, they had seven children, and so we would meet them at different campsites in New York and Pennsylvania and different places so we'd get to know pretty well that way growing up.

TS: Were they around the same ages as you and your sisters?

CD: Yes, they were, kind of. We were in the middle between them. My oldest sister and then I came, and then their son was probably a year younger than I was, and then it was kind of like in between my sisters and—

TS: Oh, I see.

CD: —and then they had ones that were younger, you know, quite a bit younger. There were the first five, and then they had two surprises [laughs]

TS: A little bit later.

CD: Kind of later on. So we didn't get to know the two younger ones too well, or I didn't anyway. Because by then I was in college and here.

TS: Right.

CD: So those were the fond memories. Went to the same high school that my mom graduated from, in New York.

TS: What was the name of that school?

CD: Sewanhaka.

TS: Okay. Did your mother work at all or was she a homemaker?

CD: She stayed home with us.

TS: Yes, so she took care of you.

CD: Yes.

TS: And so you lived in Long Island. What kind of a community was it? Was it suburban?

CD: Yes, it was suburban.

TS: Yeah.

CD: So we had—

TS: Was it a new community? You said the house was built.

CD: Yes.

TS: Was it like one of the ones like they were building after the war?

CD: It was built in 1952, so, yes, my dad built it. He, you know, he had people that were, plumbers and you know that would come and help, of course, electricians, because he didn't feel comfortable doing some of that stuff.

TS: Had he been in World War II at all?

CD: Yes, he had. He was—

TS: What service was he in?

CD: The army.

TS: He was in the army?

CD: Yes.

TS: Do you know what he did in the service?

CD: He was—they built bridges and he was in the Corps of Engineers.

TS: Oh, okay. And did he, then, maybe use his GI Bill to help build this house?

CD: He—I don't know if he used his veterans' to get—Mom, do you remember if Dad used his VA benefits to, for a loan for that house?

[Vera Dominik, Carolyn's mother, in background]: Well, I can't remember, Carolyn, but anything that was available I guess he had a mortgage out with them, can you do that?

CD: Yes, okay.

[Vera]: I don't remember.

CD: Okay, that was a few years ago.

TS: That's okay.

CD: That was a few years ago, so.

TS: Now what's your mother's name so we have it?

CD: Vera.

TS: Vera, that's right. Vera.

CD: Vera Dominik.

TS: Okay. So growing up then in Long Island, what was it like as a kid? What kind of stuff did you do for fun?

CD: The neighborhood, you know it was kind of, the houses were close but not as much as the city. There was more property. So we'd have friends there, we'd go ride bikes, roller skate in the neighborhood, and back then, I mean, you could go around the neighborhood and of course there's, it's not like today where you—people are afraid, you know, to let their children go out. But we'd all be playing, you'd go outside and you'd be out there from morning until time for dinner, you know, and then they'd have to go back in. So, yes, we had a lot of neighborhood friends, we'd do things—I remember in the summertime we'd take beach chairs and some old blankets that my mom would let us have and we'd put them over the beach chairs and we'd make like a tent so we could play in there. Then we'd have a little pool in our backyard that we could go, that was our

swimming, or running over the sprinklers, you know, that was, that was that time. So that—I don't know, we just kind of used our imaginations and kind of played.

TS: And what did you do in the wintertime? Did you get much snow?

CD: In the wintertime, yes, we did get quite a bit of snow. We'd go--there was this one pond that wasn't too far away, so we would get to go ice skating there, because that would freeze over enough. And then we'd go sleigh riding and you know the usual snowball fights and all that the kids have. I'd help Dad shovel the snow, and I remember as a kid it would look so high, by the time you shoveled it was like, it just looked like really, really high. Go back now, probably wasn't, but—

TS: From your perspective as a young child it seems really tall snowbanks, right?

CD: Very much so.

TS: Yeah.

CD: And then I remember my dad would get upset because he'd just about get the driveway shoveled out and then the snowplow would come and you'd have to go back out and shovel it out again.

TS: That's right.

CD: Little things like that were kind of, that stick with you. And you lay down and you make snow angels in the snow, some of that stuff sticks out for me.

TS: Sure.

CD: But, yes, it was fun. It was fun, I had a good time.

TS: You've got a big smile on your face as you're talking about it.

CD: Oh, yes, I'm having a lot of memories that I hadn't even thought about in a long time.

TS: Yeah.

CD: A long time.

TS: Well tell me a little bit about school, then, did you like school?

CD: No, I always looked forward to vacations. [laughs]

TS: Is that right?

CD: I had a little trouble reading, I was a little behind on that, and I was kind of like hiding in school. I mean, I wouldn't ever raise my hand or anything.

TS: No?

CD: And like when it was coming to time, I wouldn't want to get called on to read, you know, in the class, because I wasn't a very fast reader. I'd stumble over some of the words, so that kind of stuck with me. And I went to Catholic school, so we had the nuns, and it was very disciplined. We'd have like, it seemed like fifty children in our class so it was a pretty big class.

TS: Was it more than one grade at a time, in your class?

CD: No, it was just the one grade, yes, and then we'd have like two or three different classes of that grade.

TS: Did you have a favorite teacher?

CD: Probably my first-grade teacher was probably my favorite. She was real nice. She was this, you know, a layperson that taught for that year.

TS: Oh, she wasn't a sister?

CD: No, no, she wasn't. She wasn't a nun. But there were a couple of nuns that were nice, and I can't remember their names. My memory is—

TS: Oh, that's all right, that's okay.

CD: From back then.

TS: Did you have a favorite subject at all, maybe? Not reading, obviously.

CD: Right. I enjoyed science, I enjoyed science.

TS: What was it that you liked about science?

CD: Learning about—I just thought it was amazing about animals and then I get—I don't know, I'm trying to remember which you would learn in grade school, but you didn't get into anatomy, that was definitely later on. [both laugh]

TS: But it was—something resonated with you as a child with the sciences.

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: Sure, I mean they're fun, right? It's fun to learn about science, not so much, you know, some other subjects. So did you—as a young girl growing up, did you have any idea, like, did you ever think about what your future would hold?

CD: I knew at a pretty young age that I wanted to be a nurse. Probably I was in about third grade, and I remember thinking I'd like to help people and to be a nurse. And I would kind of, um, bring home—like there was a little bird that had a hurt wing or something, he couldn't fly, so I brought him home and put him in a little box and tried to feed him and take care of him. And then I'd be like if somebody got hurt, I would be wanting to help them. Then I'd end up—I had several like broken bones when I was younger.

TS: Oh, how did that happen?

CD: I was like three years old, and I fractured my clavicle and, from falling out of the bottom bunk of the bunk beds.

TS: Oh, my.

CD: [laughs] My sister was on the top and I fell out of the bottom and broke my clavicle. And then--

TS: You just hit it in the wrong spot?

CD: I did. And then when I was ten, my right—I was riding the bike and I had my sister on the back, because we didn't each have a bicycle, and I was going around the corner,

around the block, and we were expected—my cousins were supposed to be coming, so my mom said, you know, don't go far, and she let me ride around once but then I rode around twice, and that's— [laughs]

TS: That's when you—

CD: That's right, I fell off, and fractured my femur, as a matter of fact, so I ended up in the hospital that summer in traction.

TS: Was your sister okay?

CD: Yes, she was fine. I don't know what happened. [laughs]

TS: She bounced better than you did, I guess.

CD: And they started to think I had brittle bones or something was wrong with me.

TS: Oh.

CD: So then I was in the hospital in traction for that pretty much most of the summer, seven weeks, and then I was—after I got out I was in like a body cast all the way up my leg, you know. And I was home out of school probably until the following January, I think. So my mom taught me at home and helped me.

TS: So that's like what, 1960?

CD: Yes, exactly, exactly.

TS: Do you think that that contributed to you wanting to be a nurse?

CD: I think so.

TS: Do you remember, like, being, the nurses who were taking care of you in the hospital?

CD: In the hospital, yes.

TS: Do you remember how they were with you?

CD: Some of them. [phone rings] Some of them were really, really, very nice, and the other ones were, you know, kind of grumpy, but there were a couple that were very nice and that, I thought, “Oh, I want to do that.”

TS: Oh, neat.

CD: And there were other kids that were in there and that, um—there was one little girl I remember specifically, she had leukemia, which I didn’t know what it was at the time, but they were giving her—she was across the hall, and I remember them, you know, having to give her blood transfusions and that, so.

TS: So you kind of had a little interest and then you had the science kind of interest and the background also at the same time.

CD: Right, right.

TS: Well, let me pause this really quick while this [sound of message being left on answering machine in background, recording paused] Okay, we just let that recorder go for a little bit for a pause. So you got interested in maybe being a nurse from some experiences growing up.

CD: Yes.

TS: So did you ever when you, when you went into high school, did you start liking school a little more or anything—did you ever embrace anything about school?

CD: It was a little, you know, I just had to—it took me, it seemed like it took me longer to do like my homework and that kind of thing. But when I was in high school I had another experience of another broken bone playing volleyball and I broke my ankle [laughs] so then I was in a cast and on crutches for a while after that. But nothing, you know, too bad.

TS: So like three broken bones before you’re sixteen?

CD: That’s right, that’s right.

TS: Okay.

CD: So, and then then I had some good friends there, kind of a little group that we'd walk to school together and do things together on the weekends and that. And then I was working, I did--oh, you know what? When I was old enough I was a candy striper at the hospital in the summertime.

TS: What does a candy striper do?

CD: They help out, kind of little things like, you know, passing out water to the patients or, you know, bringing the flowers, or, you know, little things that they could, the nurses could have them do without it being a problem.

TS: Right. How long did you do that?

CD: I did that probably for a couple of summers, for two summers in high school--

TS: So that kind of also got you interested in nursing too? Now, what—

CD: Yes, yes. I continued that at first and I expanded it.

TS: What year did you graduate high school?

CD: From high school? Nineteen sixty-eight.

TS: Okay, 1968. So in the sixties there's a whole bunch of stuff going on.

CD: Yes.

TS: And so let's talk first about—do you remember when JFK was assassinated?

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: Or even elected? Tell me about that.

CD: I can remember specifically where I was when that happened, when he was assassinated. I was on my way from school to—I was in Girl Scouts, so I was on my way from school to our Girl Scout meeting. We had that at a little, at our troop leader's house, and we had the TV on. I mean, she had the TV on, so it was pretty much, that was, and I remember that being so tragic and just thought at that, even at that age, I was probably—

TS: Thirteen?

CD: Yes, at that age I just thought, you know, John Kennedy was so loved, you know? I think as, you know, our country—

[speaking simultaneously]

TS: From a Catholic family and—

CD: Yes, yes, and that was such a big thing, that that really stuck with me. And that was very sad, to have that. But yes, it's definitely if you were around, alive during that time, I think most people remember exactly where they were when they first heard the news.

TS: Right. And do you remember [pause] anything about like the “Duck and Cover”? You would have been a little bit—

CD: Yes, yes—

TS: Do you? Did you do any of that?

CD: Oh, yes, we had those drills in school. You'd have to get under your desk, they'd have those sirens. We'd have practice for that in case, and then there was talk about, you know, people having bomb shelters and you know, talk about the Communists and, I had forgotten all that.

TS: Was that—as a young girl did you feel scared by that at all?

CD: I don't remember that so much, maybe I did, maybe I was, but I don't remember that. I guess because I figured well, we're—you know, the adults were there and they'd take care of us either at school or my mom and dad, so I didn't think too much about it at a young age. I just thought we'd practice that, and we have fire drills, so I just of that as—

TS: As part of the—

CD: —a different drill.

TS: I see, okay. Now at what point did you really decide, yes, I'm going to go into, you know, nursing?

CD: Probably in high school because I was trying to take the classes that I needed to, you know, for getting into college and taking the SATs, and it was right—we ended up moving down here to Greensboro, my family, because of my dad's job, and that was right after the summer that I graduated from high school, so that's how I ended up applying to UNCG and—

TS: Oh, is that right?

CD: Yes.

TS: Okay.

CD: Yes, because I had applied to schools in New York but then we ended up moving here, and—

TS: And you ended up coming—

CD: —decided going to UNCG.

TS: So you stayed around with the family too?

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: Is that something that you wanted to do; you didn't want to get really far away or?

CD: I guess it was just because mostly because we had just moved here and then to get in-state tuition—

TS: Oh, right.

CD: You know, I mean, we had to—of course they couldn't get it right away, I think you had to be here like six months or something—

TS: Okay.

CD: —before, but I did go and live on campus, even though my family was here because I wanted to have that experience.

TS: Yeah.

CD: So I did.

TS: So tell me about that a little bit, tell me about your college days here.

CD: That was a lot of fun. It was hard work, in the nursing program. But met a lot of nice people, had a little group of friends that we kind of did things together, there was probably about four or five of us, four of us, I guess. And some guys came up—I don't even remember how we met these guys, but they would come up to Greensboro from Fort Bragg on the weekends, and it turned out we were dating like four of those guys and we all, you know, had this whole group that we would—

TS: Hung out together?

CD: —go around with, and so got a little bit of military, you know, hearing about them talk about the military, and stuff, so that kind of was, that was during my freshman year.

TS: I see.

CD: And then we kind of went, well I stayed probably stayed friends—but that following year, the one girl that was in the group, she ended up going, getting an apartment in Greensboro, and then for that sophomore year, we still were kind of together. But then probably toward the end of sophomore year, they, the guys were getting out of the military and they were moving back to wherever, you know, family or wherever they had jobs and stuff, so we kind of—

TS: Well this was in like the '68-'69?

CD: Yes.

TS: So this is the height of the Vietnam—

CD: Yes.

TS: And so what were you thinking about that at the time?

CD: They—most of those guys had been in Vietnam, and so I learned, you know, I'd hear about it there. There were a lot of protests, that's the time of the protests on the college campuses, Kent State, you know, and all of those things going on. They'd even had some protests on the campus at UNCG.

TS: Did you participate in any of those?

CD: Oh, no, no, I didn't.

TS: She's vigorously shaking her head no [both laugh], okay.

CD: I thought, "Hey, you know, that's not—" I guess I had trouble with people—[pause] I had mixed feelings, I guess, about what we were doing there, you know, in Vietnam, which probably a lot of people had at that time, but I thought we should support, you know, the military people. And how a lot of them got treated when they came back, I didn't know the whole extent of it at the time, but—so I was pretty straitlaced, if you will, and kind of follow-the-rules kind of person, so I didn't get into too much of that.

TS: What did you think about Kent State, with the shooting that happened there?

CD: I thought, oh my, you know, that that was awful, and that for people to just, you know, get together and try and go against something that they thought was wrong, and that, you know, students had to get shot, that was, for it to get violent, that was really against what I would believe in.

TS: Right. Well, now, back at UNCG, was it coeducational yet? Were there--

CD: There were some males but very few, they didn't even have any sports teams—

TS: No?

CD: —because there weren't enough guys.

TS: Oh, okay.

CD: So it was, it was pretty, yes, mostly women still.

TS: Right. And had it been integrated too?

CD: Yes, yes. And so then on the weekends, sometimes the—they'd have buses to Chapel Hill for different sporting events or whatever, and people, you know, would go down there and maybe meet a guy, guys or something, but, or the guys would come up there, so it was like— [both laugh]

TS: Now do you remember any of your professors at all?

CD: I do, probably more in the nursing program once I got into my junior year, that was the junior and senior year that that was the focus.

TS: Who do you remember?

CD: Dr. Lewis, for sure.

TS: Who was Dr. Lewis?

CD: She was the dean of the school for many years there. She was a very impressive, demanded a lot, but I was very thankful looking back, you know. I liked—the one that I remember also was Micky—oh and I can't remember her name—Reed, Reed. She was the pediatric, so she taught pediatrics and was the person that would, you know, at the hospital she would be working with us when we did our pediatric experiences.

TS: Was that something you had an interest in, was pediatrics?

CD: Yes, I enjoyed the kids but it was hard for me to work with them when they were sick, you know, and hurt, so.

TS: Yeah, yeah.

CD: That was hard. Also I had an interest—we did public health experience and I think all the instructors, I don't remember disliking any of them, but I can't, unfortunately I can't remember all their names.

TS: Well that's okay, you don't have to remember them all. Do you remember which—when you were on campus, which dorm you lived in?

CD: Yes, first year, freshman year, I lived in—oh golly, I thought I did.

TS: Now that I ask you—

CD: Yes. The new dorm, which isn't new now, Cone, I lived there for three years. First year, though, it was the old, the old dorm where the main street used to come in, but I don't know if all that's kind of changed now. And it was on the corner there and then Cone; Cone was built with those other two newer dorms.

TS: Okay.

CD: Those high-rises.

TS: Yeah, I don't know what they're called, but that's something we can add to the transcript if we remember it, so. Now was there any—were you there during the food service strike in 1969?

CD: Yes.

TS: Do you remember that?

CD: I must have been if I was in '69?

TS: Do you have any recollection of it?

CD: I don't, I don't, really.

TS: Was there--

CD: That didn't, I don't really have a memory of that.

TS: Well, that's all right. The other thing—one of the other things that happened, I guess this might have been before your time, but there were some Black Power forums, but that might have been the year before you went, back in '67.

CD: Yeah, I don't remember.

TS: Did they have any teach-ins, like that had at the other campuses, like the Vietnam teach-ins?

CD: No, I don't remember that.

TS: That's right, you were the like strait—the, following the rules [CD laughs]

CD: Trying to focus on my studies I mean, I have to go, I'm also a person that, to concentrate, I really have to have it quiet.

TS: Oh, okay.

CD: So I know a lot of my friends would stay in the dorms, and study and all that and it's like, no, I have to go to the library and I'd be down in the stacks--

TS: Oh, you would?

CD: —you know, like where it's really quiet and I'd be in one of those little [probably referring to carrels] [laughs]

TS: The cubicles? There you go.

CD: [laughs] Trying to study because it had to be quiet enough, and, so, yeah, I was pretty focused on that.

TS: Doing your studies.

CD: Yes.

TS: Well the last one I have about what was going on then, is like, apparently Tate Street had a hippie hill?

CD: Yes! Oh, yes.

TS: Oh, you do remember that. Well tell me what you remember about that.

CD: That was where all the kids would hang out, that, you know, that was kind of, you think of people going there, that marijuana and, the drug, kind of the drug culture going on there, and the people that were dressed in the flower, flower people, whatever.

TS: Right. Well, what did you think about all that as somebody who was more—

CD: It was very, very different from me, it's like, "oh." They're kind of—I guess it's because they were different and I guess I probably judged them, in a way, because they were. Looking back on it now, I mean, I've had so many other experiences of course it's, none of that really mattered, but it's like, "No, I don't want to do any drugs, I don't want to be around that." Because I'd say, hey, if you get arrested and you're in nursing, I mean, that, I didn't want to compromise—

TS: Right, your studies—

CD: —any of that.

TS: —and you want to be able to graduate.

CD: Yes.

TS: Right. So what—so overall this counterculture is really a dynamic time—

CD: Yes.

TS: —In our culture, and so did—you kind of kept the door closed to that.

CD: I felt kind of like I pulled back from that.

TS: Right.

CD: Kind of a watch it from, as an observer—

TS: At a distance.

CD: Kind of, yes. So I was probably kind of the observer of all of that from a, like you said, from afar.

TS: Yeah. Now did you break any more bones in the—

CD: No.

TS: Just checking. [both laugh] Well at what point then did you get interested in the military?

CD: That all started in my senior year.

TS: Okay.

CD: Like I said, the recruiters came one day, and they took us on a flight, the air force recruiters took us on a flight, down to base and Warner Robbins, down in Georgia.

TS: And what made you interested in going on this flight? Because obviously you were—

CD: I guess because my friend, Wanda, and we talked about it, and when the recruiter first spoke to us in our class--I don't know if it was the actual class, but it was a group of the nursing students.

TS: Oh, Wanda's the one that you told me about that's in Alaska?

CD: In Alaska, yes.

TS: Oh, okay.

CD: Yes. And she, um, and the two of us, I think there was someone else that went with us too, I'm not sure. Yes, no, they, she was in the army. There were a couple of people in the nursing program that were in the army, and so they paid for their school when they were officers already for their last two years.

TS: They're in the nursing program at the school?

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: Okay. Did the air force not offer something like that?

CD: No, they didn't at that time, not to pay for your school. So we went on that flight and they showed us all around the base, and you know, the nurse recruiter, she was telling us all what it was like for her and how much she enjoyed it and the chances to travel. It just sounded very, you know, exciting, you know.

TS: Yeah?

CD: And I didn't—I thought, "Hey, this would be nice." You only had to sign up for two years at that time, and so I thought, "Well, you know, two years, that's not very long, if you decide you don't like it." So that you wouldn't be committed for, you know, a really long time. But that was the glamour, I guess, of it.

TS: Is that what made you interested in it? Is it because it offered some things, maybe—

CD: Opportunities, yes.

TS: What kind of opportunities did you think you saw there that you didn't have in the regular, civilian nursing world?

CD: To travel—

TS: Okay.

CD: —and to have the opportunity to go from place to place and do different jobs, you know, like each assignment, it turns, you end up, you have an opportunity to have a different role—

TS: Right.

CD: —or work in a different area of nursing. Whereas I think in the civilian—not to say that you can't do that, but I think it's a little tougher. And see, in the military you keep your rank, so your pay, you know, even though you're [noise in the background] changing, your pay would be—you know, supporting to your rank and it's not—

TS: Was the pay that you got as a nurse in the military equal to the—

CD: It was higher.

TS: It was higher?

CD: At that point.

TS: Was that some kind of incentive also?

CD: Yes.

TS: Okay.

CD: It was higher at that time, quite a—I think it was quite a bit, if I remember right. But now it's probably not so much, I think it's—

TS: More even?

CD: Yes, probably.

TS: When you went on this nifty little flight, and—how soon after that did you decide this seems like, you know, something I want to do. How long did you have to think about it, I guess, is what I'm asking you?

CD: Not long at all—

TS: Really?

CD: —especially since Wanda, you know, the two of us talked about—“yeah, let's go!” you know, so.

TS: Well, let's talk about that a little bit because we talked about that before I started the tape. So who's Wanda, tell me—

CD: Wanda's my--she had gone through the nursing program at UNCG as well. We were good friends there, and—

TS: What's her last name?

CD: Sutter. S-u-t-t-e-r. And so she and I—It was Wanda Hall at that time, Sutter's her married name. And so she and I had gone on this recruiting little trip, and so we talked about it

and we thought this would be fun. And then of course they talked to us about, that we could go in on the buddy system, so we would be assigned to the same, you know, base, for our first assignment at least. So that wasn't quite as intimidating, you know, when you're moving halfway across the country to Texas from here, that you would be going on your own.

TS: But you knew somebody.

CD: Yes, exactly.

TS: And if you had just signed up for two years, then maybe this is the only assignment that you'll ever have—

CD: Exactly, exactly.

TS: —and then you'll do it with a friend.

CD: Yes.

TS: Okay.

CD: And then we ended up getting an apartment together and that, so we, we got to be even better friends then—

TS: After that?

CD: —experience, yes.

TS: Well what did your family think about you joining the air force?

CD: I think they thought that was, that was good, whatever I wanted to do, they pretty much supported me in that.

TS: They weren't worried about you with the Vietnam War still going on? Even though I know it was winding down then.

CD: Yes, it was kind of winding down. No, I don't remember. I don't remember that, because they knew, you know, as the air force you wouldn't really be like the army nurses and all that.

TS: I see.

CD: Really as much in harm's—

TS: Harm's way?

CD: In harm's way, and too the fact that I was new and they were, they wouldn't send you over there right away, and it's kind of winding down.

TS: Okay.

CD: I think they're probably praying that— [laughs]

TS: That, that—

CD: That that would happen, you know, for it to officially end.

TS: Right.

CD: There was something else I was going to—that came up in my mind that I was going tell you, but then we got off talking about that, and [pause]. That's okay, it'll come back.

TS: We were talking about Wanda and—

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: You had become better friends with her.

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: Well you got to know her a little bit better in Texas?

CD: Yes. And so—anyway, it'll come back.

TS: It'll come back to you.

CD: Yes.

TS: Okay.

CD: And I don't know if you want me to go into this yet.

TS: Well, before you do, what, what—did you just only consider the air force or did you look at the services too?

CD: We looked at the other services, you know, like I said we had friends that were in the nursing program that were in the army, so we decided since we had already, um, you know, we had already finished, you know, we had already—

TS: You're going to graduate.

CD: —paid for our school, and were going to graduate, we chose the air force and also that recruiter was—obviously they did their job well. [laughs]

TS: Pretty dynamic.

CD: They did their job well.

TS: I see. So tell me about that, then, tell me about you, you know, heading out to--where was it, where was your basic training? Sheppard [Air Force Base]?

CD: At Sheppard, yes.

TS: Tell me about that.

CD: Well, we drove, drove out and we followed each other. We each drove our cars, Wanda and I. And so—

TS: What kind of car did you have?

CD: —we kind of, um, it was a Rambler, I think. It was a car that my dad, he kind of helped me to buy that, and so we drove across country, and following each other so that was a different experience, no cell phones, none of that. [laughs]

TS: Right. Did you have—was it a pretty uneventful trip or?

CD: Yes, yes, but that was kind of fun, seeing all different—because I hadn't traveled in that part of the country and all, because like I said when we were growing up most of our camping was in Pennsylvania and New York and that area.

TS: The East Coast?

CD: Yes. So I had not been west at all, so that was a whole new experience for me. And being in Texas, that was very different, totally different because it's so nice and green and—

TS: Here?

CD: Totally different climate here in Greensboro and all the East Coast, so that was a very stark contrast.

TS: Getting into the desert, and dry.

CD: In the desert. Very much so. The food, the--a lot of the Mexican influence. I remember my first time having a jalapeno pepper, and I just—I didn't realize that's what it was on the salad, and I ate it, and it's like [laughs]

TS: Oh my goodness.

CD: I had never had anything that spicy before, so that was, that was kind of fun and memorable.

TS: Yes, I think it would be.

CD: I have not had any more jalapeno peppers.

TS: Since then? That was your one and only? [laughs]

CD: Right.

TS: Well, I think the way that you had it would leave you maybe not want to have another one.

CD: Right, right.

TS: So what about when you got to the base, what was it like to actually get in your uniform and become part of the military? What was that like?

CD: That was very different. They kind of helped us all the way through that, which, that was, that was a good thing, you know, you kind of go into the military clothing store and you know, they have you, they give you that allowance initially, and you—it's not like you're going shopping, because you have to have certain things, and to get those all right and wearing them right and putting your name tag and I guess we only had one ribbon at that time—no, maybe we didn't have any come to think of it, not at that point.

TS: Just your name tag, at this point.

CD: Yes, yes, that's right. And then the classes weren't too bad. We were only there for like two weeks—

TS: At Sheppard? For your basic?

CD: —and they taught us, you know, just the real basics, how to salute and [laughs]

TS: You didn't have any kind of exercise or did you do any of that?

CD: No.

TS: No?

CD: See we missed out on all of that—

TS: All in the classroom.

CD: —mostly classroom except for they taught us marching and some of that and we went outside, but not a whole lot. It was very, very different walking down, walking around the base and having people salute you, so it took a lot of getting used to, it's like [laughs]

TS: Because you had to salute back, right?

CD: That's exactly right—

TS: Were you a lieutenant?

CD: —and it's like—yes.

TS: Second lieutenant?

CD: First lieutenant.

TS: Oh, first lieutenant. Okay.

CD: Yes, we came in as first lieutenants. And that was very different. And then to have people that are younger than you are, your same age, to call you ma'am and it's like, "I'm not ma'am, I'm younger than you." [both laugh] So that whole thing at that young age was kind of like, in your twenties, early twenties, it's like, that was very, very strange to me.

TS: Yeah?

CD: It took some getting used to. And never liked hats— [laughs]

TS: Oh, no, oh, that might be a problem outside, then.

CD: So I had this terrible thing, well, of course I wore them then, but it's like anytime I could get away with— [laughs]

TS: Not putting the hat on? [laughs]

CD: I would definitely try to get away with it, and so I tried to behave; it's like, you know, went up in rank because I thought, "Hey, I have to be an example—" [laughs]

TS: Right.

CD: “—an example for these younger folks.” So there’s that little bit of rebellion, not a whole lot in me. [laughs]

TS: Oh, a little bit, okay. [laughs]

CD: Not a whole lot.

TS: So you—let’s see, you joined in 1973?

CD: Yes.

TS: So was it—you graduated from college, you and Wanda go off to Texas—

CD: Yes.

TS: And then where was your first assignment after that if you’re—

CD: That was at Lackland Air Force Base—

TS: Which is still in Texas.

CD: San Antonio. Yes, Texas again. And that was the largest of—the largest air force hospitals, the medical center, so that was really, a really good experience.

TS: So what’s that like? Tell me about that.

CD: I had wanted to work in like intensive care or something in that area, but I ended up on an eye, an oral surgery ward, and I remember to this day my charge nurse telling me, “Well, you know what you need to do, even if it’s not where you want to work, that you do your best job, you know, you do the best you can and then they’ll see that and when it comes to transferring you to another unit, then you would be more likely to get to go.” So I remembered that the whole time.

TS: So just do your best and that’ll—

CD: Yes, do a good job, and—

TS: They'll put in a good recommendation for you?

CD: That's exactly right.

TS: I see.

CD: You have a good evaluation and that's the way you have the best opportunity to--

TS: So did you find that you liked this particular field?

CD: Yes.

TS: Did you?

CD: I did. I ended up really learning something that I never would have thought.

TS: Yeah?

CD: You know, it was good. The doctors were all very nice. I remember getting a compliment from this one doctor. It was kind of, he said: "I know," he says, "when you're on duty, and you're at night," he says, "I know I will never get a call from you unless it's really, you know, I really have to pay attention; it's not like somebody calling me to ask me some little thing." He said, "I know when you call, there's something really going on, because," he said, "otherwise you would take care of it." [laughs]

TS: Oh, well there, that's a compliment for sure, you got it. So did you feel like you're in the military?

CD: Probably not as much as people that were in other fields, because I think at the hospital it was more relaxed. I mean, yeah, you had to call people by their rank and—

TS: What were you wearing for your—

CD: —"yes, ma'm," and all that. Whites.

TS: Your whites?

CD: You know you wear your white uniform and--

TS: Did you have rank on that?

CD: Yes, you have rank on your collar, and just your name tag and your rank, and--

TS: So was it like a more professional environment?

CD: Yes.

TS: More like a hospital?

CD: Yes, it was more like a hospital, so it wasn't—the military part of it, I think, was less, you know, because, I mean, we were pretty much doing what we would do in civilian, as far as, you know, taking care of patients and that kind of thing.

TS: How about for like the hierarchy of rank and things like that, that—would that ever cause any kind of problem for--

CD: Well, you knew how, you know, who's in charge and all that, the charge nurse and then the chief nurse would come around. She was, you know, in charge of the whole nursing department for the hospital. I guess as far as rank, I probably, I had some really good people, which was a blessing, because I was not one to, pretty much enforce, like when I was working with different corpsmen, they—I would not call them necessarily by their rank [laughs] so it's like, and that can get you in trouble, because then you get used doing that and all of sudden if you say, call by them first name, and someone else is around or you're working day shift where, when you work in the evening, or night shift, and people aren't there because a lot of times on night shift it would be, it would be, you know, me, a nurse and one corpsmen on the unit I was working on.

TS: And not all the administrative people around watching you.

CD: Right, nobody, right, exactly.

TS: Okay.

CD: Exactly. But then later on in my career, I really appreciated the respect, you know, that came with the rank structure, and thinking back I probably should have—because then it's like, if you start out too easy, it's kind of like with raising children. I mean, if you

start out like being, not expecting or being—saying that you're going to discipline them, then it's real hard to go back.

TS: Right.

CD: And then trying to be disciplinarian later on. [noise in the background]

TS: Right.

CD: Oh, that's the mail.

TS: Oh.

CD: We have a slot in the door, so the—

TS: You've got lots of mail coming in.

CD: Yeah. The mailman has put it in there.

TS: That's kind of neat. So you're kind of—how are you feeling about the military, then? How are you feeling about the air force and how you're fitting in?

CD: At that point?

TS: Yeah.

CD: I felt very, very comfortable. I had good, some friends, and then we'd go up, you know, out. A lot of the people that worked on the unit, we'd go to dinner, and things together; we'd do things together.

TS: What kind of things did you do?

CD: We'd go, like in San Antonio of course the River Walk and the jazz, they'd have all the different bands and stuff down there, the jazz, I enjoyed that. So we'd go to those places and go in the officers' club and, then we'd go—I went river rafting for the first time when I was there in Texas.

TS: How was that?

CD: That was kind of—that was a lot of fun. It was kind of scary at one point because you went under, when it was really rough, and I thought, “Oh my gosh, this is going to be it!”

TS: Sure.

CD: But I did come back, I did surface fortunately.

TS: Oh, good, oh, you fell out of the boat? Oh, okay.

CD: Yes, yes, and then it’s like, “Ooh,” and that water is moving so quickly, you know?

TS: Oh, yeah. But you were okay?

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: Didn’t have to repair any bones?

CD: No, no, no.

TS: Okay, good.

CD: Nothing there.

TS: Well, that’s good.

CD: Nothing there, so I bounced back, but that was fun, and then, you know you go around. Then I took, we went on a flight, you know, you’d have, be able to travel, space available.

TS: Oh, right.

CD: Flew to San Francisco and some other places, so enjoyed that.

TS: So you’re getting your travel in, that was one of the reasons that you wanted to join.

CD: Yes, that’s right, that’s right.

TS: So how long were you in San Antonio?

CD: I was there a little over two years before I got my orders to go—

TS: So you—

CD: I went to flight school, probably toward the end, right before I left for Germany I went to flight school and that was up at Sheppard Air Force Base.

TS: What was that like, what was flight school?

CD: Oh, that was fun.

TS: What did you do?

CD: A lot of fun. You know, we had, it was like a six-week course, and you learn all the effects of altitude and all that on patients, and depending on if they've had surgery, and all those things so that was very interesting. And then they'd have a mock C-9 where they would have all the oxygen and the different equipment in the airplane, that you would be using if you were flying air evac, and so I learned a lot there.

TS: Then did you operate as a flight nurse later?

CD: No, I didn't unfortunately.

TS: You just got to do the training.

CD: Yes, yes, they didn't have an open assignment there for me, but Wanda, my good friend, from Wilford Hall [Medical Center, at Lackland Air Force Base], she went to, her assignment, she went to Germany as well, she was at, oh, Rhein-Main [Air Base].

TS: Rhein-Main?

CD: Yes, and she flew aerovac out of there.

TS: Oh, okay. So she went to Rhein-Main when you went to Hahn [Air Base]?

CD: Yes.

TS: Okay.

CD: Yes, so we'd get to visit each other still there, even though we weren't--

TS: So I see that you've gone beyond your two years?

CD: Yes, we did.

TS: So why did you—

CD: When we get that offer of going over to Germany, you know, that you couldn't turn down.

TS: Is that why you—

CD: Opportunity to go to Europe, and I was enjoying it. I enjoyed the nursing and the opportunity to do some different things in nursing, even.

TS: So were you thinking, "Well, I'll just see how it goes in Germany," then?

CD: Sure. Just get an assignment to Europe and—I never thought I was going to stay.

TS: You never thought you were going to stay for twenty years?

CD: Not at that point.

TS: Not until—

CD: Not at that point.

TS: No? Okay. So tell me a little bit—so you said you're learning new things about nursing. What kind of things were you learning?

CD: Sure, sure. Some different areas I probably wouldn't have ever gotten exposed to, you know, like I said, being on an eye and oral surgery unit; I never would have thought, you know, to request to work somewhere like that.

TS: Right.

CD: And then I got to work at Wilford Hall before I left there; I got to work on a general surgery unit with maximal care, you know, which they had some, you know, like—what do I want to say? Like some major surgery.

TS: Like big trauma?

CD: Yes, major surgeries and things that they would do there.

TS: Were they civilian-type accidents?

CD: Like vascular, vascular—no, it wasn't accidents, it was like vascular surgery. There was this young man who was—had been shot, so he was in there. It was a dependent of a military person, he was sixteen and so he was in there recovering. They had to do some surgery on him and so that was, learning about that.

TS: Right.

CD: And so just the variety of patients and then in Germany you would have, that was the, you know like Hahn, you knew, but that hospital was small, it was only like twenty-five beds. So to go from Wilford Hall to that, it was a drastic, you know, I mean, to have time to actually sit down on your shift, I mean, at Wilford Hall you were going the whole time and a lot times I don't think rarely we would ever get out of there at the end of our shift; you'd be still there, having to chart because you were so busy taking care of the patients while you were actually there. And so this was like a real, had to really gear down in a way, so it was like—and the other people there, it's like at first they said, "You can slow down." [both laugh]

TS: When you got to Hahn?

CD: It was like almost, you look for things to do, okay, what else do I need to do?

TS: So you just had to kind of relax?

CD: Yes, yes, it was much more relaxed, and there was experience where, you had everything, from taking care of children all the way to retirees, from medical problems to surgical problems to whatever came up.

TS: Because you're staffing this smaller—

CD: And because that one unit, that and OB were the only two units at the whole hospital.

TS: So describe Hahn.

CD: As far as the hospital, or the whole base experience?

TS: Sure, the whole base and then the hospital.

CD: It was—well, of course you lived on base there—

TS: Were you in the—

CD: —and a lot of guys, so different, you know, it's like you're one of the few. You know, the nurses—It seemed like it was nurses or teachers, you know, that they were—guys were dating, or whatever in that way.

TS: I see.

CD: So that was very different.

TS: Because there weren't a lot of other—so this is early—

CD: Wilford Hall was more like, a lot of the people you would work with and you would be experiencing—because it was such a smaller base, you know, that you would get, um, then Wilford Hall and Lackland, all that.

TS: Now when you got to Hahn, it's 1975, so there's not a ton of women in the military?

CD: No, no.

TS: So that's why you're saying the teachers and nurses, I see.

CD: Yes, the teachers that were there, so yeah, we were in the minority. You go to the officers' club and it'd be like all the pilots and other people, the other officers there. So, yes, we were--

TS: And it was mostly the—a base that had—I forget the planes that they had then.

CD: F-4s.

TS: The F-4s were there, then.

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: So that's—so what kind of—was it a cultural difference to, for being in Germany for you?

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: How was that?

CD: You know, just getting used to the language, which, I unfortunately didn't learn it. I could, you know, a few phrases or whatever to get by, but most of the people off base or the ones that were even on base—the German nationals that would work on the base, you know, of course spoke English really well. And we had, the lady that would do the housekeeping, we got to be good friends. She was really nice, and was German, on the unit that I worked on.

TS: So you stayed in quarters there?

CD: Yes.

TS: Now we didn't talk about actually—in Wilford Hall, you're—were you on base then?

CD: We had an apartment.

TS: Oh, you had an apartment?

CD: Wanda and I had gotten an apartment, yes, everyone, all the officers there, unless you were in base housing, but—

TS: Most everybody.

CD: —we were off base.

TS: Probably because it was more crowded there too.

CD: Yes.

TS: So, but at Hahn there was plenty of room for—

CD: On the base.

TS: So what were your—describe your living quarters then.

CD: It was like an efficiency apartment, or like half of, you know, like a BOQ, I guess, but it had like a little kitchen, and—

TS: It was like a suite, kind of?

CD: —so it has like a, it wasn't really separated, the bedroom and living rooms, it was kind of like your bed was in one part and then you had a couch, and so it was their furniture.

TS: I see.

CD: You know, because they put your stuff in storage or at least when I was in they, and then they would—you know, they furnish the places on the base.

TS: So it was like one room?

CD: Yes.

TS: Or did you have—you didn't have a separate bedroom?

CD: Yes, it was. No—

TS: Okay.

CD: --it was like college, it was like—

TS: And then a little section for a kitchen?

CD: I guess an efficiency, you would call it.

TS: Okay.

CD: A studio apartment, I guess, is what it could compare to.

TS: Oh, okay.

CD: You know, like a studio apartment. And, like I said—

TS: Did you have it to yourself—

CD: —you have one little kitchen.

TS: —or did you share it?

CD: Just—

TS: Just yourself.

CD: Yes, which, that was nice. And, let me see. So that was, lots of opportunities to travel, oh it was wonderful over, you know, you get a long weekend because we would do, we would work different shifts, but we would have a schedule where we would work, after worked a stretch of seven nights, then we would have a four-day weekend. So on a four-day weekend you could go—you know, I tell people that have never been over there that it's like going from state to state here, you can go from country to country over there.

TS: So where did you go?

CD: Went to England, and to Belgium and Holland, went, did some skiing in Switzerland, Austria, went to Italy, where else? Didn't get to the Scandinavian countries, which, wish I'd had more time, you know, it's like [laughs]

TS: Sure. How many years were you there?

CD: Two.

TS: Two years?

CD: Yes, two years.

TS: Well you saw a lot in those two years. Did you see a lot of Germany? Did you get a chance to—

CD: Yes. Went to Garmisch and, you know, wine country, and up the river there, and--

TS: Well Hahn's in a beautiful wine country too.

CD: It is, it is.

TS: Down by the Moselle [River].

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: Did you get to any of those wine festivals?

CD: Some of the wine, the wine festivals and the Oktoberfest, and that was all fun.

TS: Did you ever get to, down by Zell?

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: On the river there.

CD: Oh, it's all, it was all really--

TS: And Burg [Eltz] Castle, I think is the one that I really enjoyed too, Burg Castle. That was a pretty—did you see any of the fireworks they did?

CD: Yes.

TS: Did they do those at that time?

CD: Yes, they did.

TS: From the castle and then on the river.

CD: The castles, and that was another thing, going to all those castles and thinking about how long they'd been there and the whole history was very, very amazing.

TS: When you were in it was still East Germany, West Germany.

CD: Exactly.

TS: Did you feel any of that tension at all?

CD: No, the only thing I knew as far as—I guess that while I was over there, they had a bombing at the officers' club at Rhein-Main, and then, there was—well, now that you mention it, I think about it more—there was attention in the fact of along the autobahn sometimes they'd have, you know, officers with machine guns and you would stop and they would check your vehicles and all that. So there was extra security during that time. It was like the Baader-Meinhof group, was doing some, you know, bombing and protesting.

TS: Well weren't the Olympics in Munich in '76, was it '76, or that was '72, maybe? I forget which year.

CD: I forget what year, but.

TS: Were they Olympics there when you were there?

CD: No, they weren't there.

TS: It must have been '72, then.

CD: It must—It was before.

TS: Yeah. Did you get—

CD: But, yes, so there was some tension at different times.

TS: Yeah. Did you get to go to East Germany at all?

CD: No, and I so much wish I had.

TS: Yeah?

CD: You know, especially when the wall came down.

TS: Right.

CD: I mean, I just remember talking to the lady, the German lady that worked at the hospital with us, and she talked about her relatives that were over in East Germany and how difficult it was for them, and how she would go to see them and how it was so different. But, yeah, that was such a surprise, and a wonderful surprise when the wall came down. [TV noise in background]

TS: Right, sure, sure. Well did you feel any, like, did you have any kind of culture shock being in Germany at all? From, compared to, you know, living in the United States?

CD: Yeah, you know, I think it was made a lot easier because you're familiar and you're on a base, where it's kind of like a little community, kind of like a little part of the United States in a way. So you have all, you know, the stuff that's familiar to you there, but then going outside—I thought of it as a learning experience. I learned a lot and it's, it's helped me to grow, and when I come back and know people that have never left here, never been outside the United States, or even other parts of the country—I don't say this in a[n] arrogant way or anything, but they have a more narrow view.

TS: It gives you a different perspective.

CD: It does.

TS: A world perspective, a different worldview, I guess, perhaps, in some ways.

CD: Yes, yes, and having met people and worked with people from all parts, you know, different parts of the country, you know, people that were from the Philippines and Asian, that were in the air force with me.

TS: How do you think that broadened your perspective?

CD: I just don't see people in terms of, as, especially when people try to talk about different race and all that, I never, I never saw it as a difference. I guess having been in that environment and exposed to that. Well, I never saw it as growing up, even in the sixties. I was so much against the, you know, the black and the white. [ongoing low-level noise in background]

TS: Well, when you're working with somebody, right, and you, you're getting a job done, you're focused on that, right, and then as you reflect on it, you're not looking at your differences—

CD: Not at all.

TS: —you're looking at what you can do to get, and maybe you see much more similarities—

CD: Sure, sure.

TS: —that you have and the shared values and things like that.

CD: You're right, exactly. And I just always like to, like I said, even before when I was in high school and college, it's like, I'd much rather look at the character of the person and take them each as individuals. I mean, there are people, no matter what their color, they're doing the wrong thing or you know, wouldn't want to be around, or, you know, so I just never thought to stereotype groups, but—

TS: Did the military—did the air force have any kind of diversity training at that time too? No, you don't remember?

CD: I guess it wasn't [laughs], I mean, we didn't—later on, I don't remember it in the beginning, but I remember later on, probably in the eighties, I think, I remember going to—

TS: Started to have more?

CD: —going to that—

TS: —kind of thing?

CD: I thought [unclear] because I never thought of it as like, okay [laughs]

TS: Right, because you had already acclimated yourself to—

[speaking simultaneously--unclear]

CD: I know, but it's like—

TS: Yeah.

CD: We don't need this. [laughs]

TS: Oh.

CD: But I guess people did.

TS: Some people might have needed it.

CD: Yes, yes. I don't know if it helped them, though.

TS: Well that's what I was going to say. Now how did you feel like it, as part of the military, how you were treated? As, you know, like your promotions and evaluations.

CD: As far as being fairly treated?

TS: Yes.

CD: I had, I had a wonderful experience because I felt like all my charge nurses, my supervisors, were very fair and that they would usually let you know as you're going along, so you kind of, you weren't surprised, you know, by your evaluations, and so I felt I was fairly treated, and encouraged.

TS: Was there any, within the nursing corps, was there any, like—well, like sexism, you know, was there any, with the doctors and the nurses, because probably most of the doctors were male, right, and the nurses were female.

CD: Exactly.

TS: Was there any kind of sexual harassment, things like that going on?

CD: No, I don't remember any of that. Some of the doctors were hard to work with, but—my sister's a nurse, and I hear it, you know, she's still working, but I hear the same thing. You know, some of them, I mean, surgeons, some of them would have attitudes like, you know, they were above and they're like gods, and they have the lousy patient bedside manner. So in that aspect, I don't, I don't think that was, it was just their, you know, being a surgeon or being a doctor. But for the most part, most of them were really great to work with, overall.

TS: Did you have anybody that you would consider like a mentor?

CD: Like probably at each place I worked there was probably someone—

TS: Yeah?

CD: —that helped me, helped me out.

TS: Nobody that just sticks out, throughout your career?

CD: I would say this one nurse when I was in Washington, because I was totally changing from working on one of the wards to doing the staff education, and that was a totally—

TS: So doing more management-type things?

CD: —new thing. Yes, and also coordinating CPR classes and doing that kind of thing and updating, you know, for people, they always had to go for continuing education and doing that.

TS: So you're like a training coordinator?

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: For a lot of the other nurses and things like that?

CD: Exactly.

TS: So she kind of helped you through the ropes there?

CD: She did, yes, she did, very much.

TS: So you knew how to run the floor, of the ward, but—

CD: To do that part of it, and then to go and talk to charge nurses and tell them they needed, you know, their staff weren't up on this, or whatever, that was probably hard for me because I remember what it was like being a charge nurse and, you know, you're busy, and you know, it's like, "Well, I don't want to harass you." [laughs]

TS: So you don't have that kind of really dominating personality—

CD: Exactly, exactly.

TS: So how did you get your message across to them?

CD: I think there's probably—and I thought about that, it's like, because a lot of people tell me when they meet me, "I can't believe you were in the military, you're just like so nice, and you're just soft-spoken," and all this, and I thought, I guess they have, they have this idea of everybody's hard and find, you know, ranks, and so I just thought if you get out there—I know on the, when I was on the unit, and charge nurse even, if you get out there and work alongside people, and like I said to you earlier, I had a lot of good people that worked, worked with me, for me, so I was very blessed in that way. They were all excellent and very few would, you know, slough off and try to get away, then I'd, you know and then you'd use your NCO to [laughs] to whip them in shape.

TS: So use the enlisted to go ahead and whip them, alright, I see. So you keep the good white hat on.

CD: There you go, there you go.

TS: All right. Now I understand how it works.

CD: Well, there were a couple of nurses that challenged, but, somebody using drugs, and—

TS: Well, how did you deal with that?

CD: So that was very difficult. To have to—and then someone that I thought was alcoholic, because I smelled, you know, when she came on duty one day, and that was, but I had to,

you know I thought for the safety of the patients, I can't, so I had to go to the chief nurse regarding it, so. [background noises]

TS: And so how did that end up?

CD: The chief nurse brought her in, spoke to her, and--I don't know if she ever went to rehab, I don't remember, while we were there. But of course the chief nurse, she didn't know who, you know, reported her.

TS: Oh, I see.

CD: Because I was, you know, a peer at that time.

TS: Right.

CD: I was a staff nurse and she just happened to be coming in, following me.

TS: And that's when she smelled of—

CD: She worked the next shift.

TS: I see. What about the woman who had the drug problem?

CD: That was someone, a guy as a matter of fact, that we were finding things missing.

TS: Oh, was it was a man?

CD: Yes, and it was medications, you know, when you had to count and that. You'd realize it.

TS: Somebody was stealing the drugs?

CD: Somebody was—yes, that it was missing, so that was also tough, but reported that. So it's like, you could always take it above, because that had to come down, you know, I mean I spoke to the person but it had to follow, further follow up on it.

TS: So were they disciplined, then?

CD: Oh, yes.

TS: Yeah?

CD: Yeah.

TS: Did see much of—because some of the other--well especially in this timeframe that you're in, in the sixties, well, the seventies, especially, that there was a lot of drug use and—but also alcohol abuse. Did you—I mean, maybe not on duty so much, but did you see it?

CD: Oh, yeah—

TS: Was it—

CD: —at happy hour at the officers' club, and that it was, I always thought it was encouraged.

TS: By the military?

CD: Yeah, I mean, they'd have the happy hour and all that, and then yet on the other hand, they'd be having checks of DWI, you know, like the security police would be stopping people, and then they'd have drug and alcohol rehab, you know, it's like, "Wait a minute, this just doesn't seem [laughs]," it's kind of like, "Okay, you're promoting this and then yet—"

TS: Did you have the commander's calls where, you know, where you went to a function and the only thing there is alcohol?

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: And not even water or soda or something like that? Do you remember that?

CD: I'd bring—oh, wait a minute. Yes, pretty much. I forget. I forgot about that. Or kegs of beer, you'd be having some kind of function and now with those, where there's a picnic or something like that, they would usually have something else to drink because it was kind of families, families would come.

TS: But is that what you mean by like the alcoholism was kind of promoted?

CD: Yes, encouraged.

TS: Yeah.

CD: Well, I mean, or if you had that tendency—

TS: Accessible.

CD: —or you had that problem, it was kind of, I don't know about accepted, but it was, it was okay—

TS: Right.

CD: —If you will.

TS: And did that change over time while you were in?

CD: I think they became a little less promoting of it, you know, it's like not everything was focused around the happy hour or let's get a keg of beer.

TS: Right. Over time.

CD: Yes.

TS: So is there anything else you want to mention about your time at Hahn?

CD: Let me see, other things there. Oh, I had—how could I forget? I had Stacy there.

TS: Oh. [laughs]

CD: I was pregnant and had my first daughter there.

TS: Your first daughter, yeah.

CD: How can I forget that?

TS: So did you get married along the way somewhere?

CD: Yes, [chuckling] I met my, her dad there.

TS: At Hahn?

CD: At Hahn, yes, and so—

TS: Was he in the military?

CD: He had been, he had just gotten out. He had been stationed at Hahn and got out and he drove Formula Fords and he really enjoyed that, so that area was really good to do that, so he's very different then I was—

TS: I guess so.

CD: That was like opposites attract, I guess. And talk about the hippie, he had the beard, and had grown his hair some, but, you know, because that was the first, you know, been in Vietnam and been in the military, so it was kind of like you get out and you're going to do this, that you haven't—

[speaking simultaneously]

TS: So had he been in Vietnam?

CD: Yes, yes, so gets out, and going to rebel a little. So yes, and then Stacy was born, and she, so yes, she's even gone back as adult now. She got to go to Europe and she went back to actually find, you know, to try and get to the hospital there to see it.

TS: At Hahn?

CD: Yes. But I don't think she ever made it there. She got close, but, I don't think she ever made it actually, because she was with some other people, so it's like a matter—

TS: Did she do that recently?

CD: That was probably—let me see, when did she go? Probably about eight years ago, or so.

TS: Because it's no longer a—

CD: Right, they closed it.

TS: It's a air, it's a air, what is it, airport.

CD: Okay. Oh, it is? Totally? Because see now, when I was back there during Desert Storm, it happened to—a friend of mine that I knew at previous assignment was then the chief nurse at the hospital there, and they were kind of winding down at that point. And that was back, what, '91.

TS: Yeah.

CD: So—

TS: It's no, it's—

CD: —how different it was.

TS: It's closed, as far as a military base goes.

CD: Okay, so they took it over, you know, the Germany.

TS: Yeah.

CD: Yeah, I knew it was winding down then, but that's interesting.

TS: So were did you go then after Germany, and did you put in for a place? I mean, did you—

CD: You know how you fill out your dream sheet, and you put down places you want to go? Well, I got to go somewhere that wasn't listed at all! [laughs]

TS: Oh, okay. Where was that?

CD: I got to go to Altus, Oklahoma. Altus is a very small town. It's probably about, at that time it was like 25,000 people, so the base was, you know, a lot of, probably supported the town a lot, and that was a different command, so that was different. It was—

TS: Was it Strategic Air Command or?

CD: No, that was the—Fairchild [Air Force Base, in Spokane, Washington], that was a SAC [Strategic Air Command—as of 2013, Altus is now a SAC base as well] base. The select military air lift, they had the C-140s—

TS: Oh, all right.

CD: —and 141s. And so that hospital was about the same size as Hahn was, so it was small, right, but there I was charge nurse.

TS: Oh, how was that?

CD: Of the general, the med-surg unit, you know, that would have all of that. So that was a totally new experience, my first time, but there I had great staff, wonderful nurses that were working for me, so they, they really did well. I had my first, very first inspection, that was nerve-wracking, because I had to have all the books up-to-date and all the things that—and we had a little, like a four-bed little unit that was special care unit, you know, it's not like an ICU or anything because it wasn't, you know, we're not large enough to have that, and we didn't have those serious cases. But, you know, people that maybe had a heart attack, that would be on monitors and all that. But the inspectors were hard on me, and I mean they were just like, "Okay, where's this? Where's that?" [laughs] It's like, "Okay." By the time they left, I didn't want to let anybody see me, but I was in tears.

TS: Aww. So how did you do?

CD: I was—we did well overall, but it's like, I guess I'm hard on myself, that I wanted do it, you know, to get the—

TS: Perfect score? Yeah.

CD: Can't ever get that, I don't think ever, very rare.

TS: Somebody wants told me, that I worked for, that if you're focusing on the perfect score you're not focusing on the work.

CD: Oh! That is true, isn't it.

TS: So, you're better to get in the nineties and do your job well, then to get a hundred and forget about the job completely.

CD: Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

CD: And what's really important, you're right.

TS: Well, she was right.

CD: And all that paperwork, it's like, rather be taking care of the patients.

TS: That's right.

CD: So that was the part I really learned as charge nurse, it was like more paperwork, but fortunately it was small enough to where I could get out there with the folks and take care of patients.

TS: So you got to have some patient care too?

CD: Yes, yes, so that was best.

TS: So what was it like for you to evaluate others then?

CD: Boy, that was, that was—but like I said, it was not real hard because I had some excellent, excellent people, so it's like—

TS: Was it nerve-racking maybe to—

CD: Yes, yes, to have—

TS: —go through?

CD: —that responsibility and that could affect, you know, their promotions or that. But I never—so they all were, I mean, pretty high on their ratings, yeah. And back then it was probably, I mean, they always talked about them being inflated, so it was hard to every mark anybody even one square below.

TS: Right, because that would have a tremendous impact on their promotion.

CD: Yeah, yeah, and it's like, because some people are more outstanding than others, it's not to say that they're not doing a good job, but certain areas—

TS: Right.

CD: —they're just a little bit less.

TS: Now had you thought about staying in, making it a career yet?

CD: At that point, I probably was thinking pretty seriously about it. Because by that time I had, you know, several years, several years in, so I thought, "Hey, this is, I'm enjoying it."

TS: And now you have a family.

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: Now was your husband in this small town able to find a job very easily?

CD: He ended up going to school at the time. No, it was hard, to answer your first—it was hard to find a job, that was the problem, so he ended up going to school up in Tulsa, so it was like he'd be there during the week going to school, and he went to get his A&P license, to—aircraft mechanic, and so he'd be up there during the week and then either I'd go up there on the weekends or he'd come down to Altus. So that was a hard time, because having my daughter, and so she was having to go to day care, and from a young, well, she was, like, probably fifteen months, maybe.

TS: Oh, yeah?

CD: Yeah, yeah. So it was, it's always hard. Any mom, I think. [laughs]

TS: Yeah.

CD: You know, they're crying, you're crying, or they're fine, but then I'd get there and she's busy playing, having a good time.

TS: And you're like, "Oh, why didn't she miss me? She didn't miss me at all!"

CD: Or she's crying and then you're all sad and upset driving to work, and then the day care workers tell you, "Oh, yeah, she quit not long after you left."

TS: [laughs] Well, did you feel like the military had adequate, the air force had adequate care for dependents at this time?

CD: Yes, they had the—It's not as good as it is later, as I got later in, but a lot of times what I ended up finding when I got to Washington, was they ended up having—the wives sometimes would take care of children that lived on the, you know, they'd live on the base and it was very convenient.

TS: So they did their own day care?

CD: Yes, yes, in their own homes, and you know, they had children so that was a way for them to make some extra income.

TS: So before you got to Washington you just kept them in the daycare on base?

CD: Before that—Yes, and I--no, not on the base. There was a Christian day care and it wasn't far from where I lived, so—

TS: Oh, okay, so it was private?

CD: I'd—yes, yes.

TS: I see.

CD: And I liked that, so—

TS: Having that kind of environment for her to have.

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: So what did you learn about your job in—what's it called?

CD: In Altus.

TS: Altus, there we go.

CD: That was a whole new experience of being a manager and being supervising others, so I learned, you know, learned that aspect of it, which was very different, more management things. And then also at Altus, after I was on the unit for a while and charge nurse, then they moved me to the family practice clinic. I was in charge of the family practice clinic, so that was a whole new experience, you know, as outpatient, you know, patients that were coming to be seen, you know, a whole different—

TS: Did you have a lot more dependents there too then?

CD: Yes, yes, than overseas.

TS: I see.

CD: Yes. And retirees, you know, that lived—

TS: Oh, in the family practice?

CD: —In the area, that would come.

TS: Now, what's your rank, about now?

CD: Ah, that, at that point I was still a captain, but, yes, I was. I was still a captain at that time.

TS: And how long did you stay here at this?

CD: I was in Altus like four years.

TS: Oh, okay.

CD: So that was a little longer, so I had those two different assignments basically there. Two areas that I worked in.

TS: So then when did you go to Washington?

CD: That was in 1982.

TS: Okay. So you went to Altus '77 through '82, then, something like that?

CD: Yes.

TS: And, so, did you ask for the assignment at Fairchild? Is that one that was on your dream sheet?

CD: That was one of them, yes, that was on my dream sheet.

TS: Why did you want to go there?

CD: Just a different area of the country, and a different—well, I didn't necessarily want to get in to SAC, Strategic Air Command, because I've heard all these things about they're the last ones to get funding, you know, for the hospital or for anything else and it's like—

TS: Just through the grapevine you hear this?

CD: Yes, through the grapevine, oh yeah, and through the grapevine you hear, as you know, places, you know, are better to go, or, boy at this base it was so much better, you know, it's like you always hear that from different people—okay, the base you left was always so much better. [both laugh] Heard different complaints, and I found each one was different but each one afforded a different opportunity, because, like at Altus, I was able to—I did it by correspondence, but to do officers' [pause]—I forget the names of it, I think it was—It's like an officers' training, thing, a course that you had to do like more officers' training kind of thing.

TS: For your career?

CD: For promotion.

TS: Like to punch your ticket in a certain—

CD: Yes, that's exactly right.

TS: Okay.

CD: So I got to do that there, and then at, then moving to Fairchild, I was charge nurse but of a, you know, bigger unit. Oh no, I'm sorry. When I went there, that's when I moving from doing clinic to doing education staff development.

TS: Oh, okay.

CD: So that's what I did there. For a couple of those years—

TS: So you weren't on a ward at all?

CD: No.

TS: Okay.

CD: No, it was mostly, you know, staff and doing the education part of it and coordinating all that, and getting the doc—certain doctors would teach certain things. I did the—coordinate the EMT, emergency training for the technicians. That course, and Fairchild had the survival school, so some of those folks would come to the EMT class, so when they had, you know, like the pilots and those people out on survival training, if something happened they could kind of do some, you know training for, I mean take care of them out there.

TS: Did you do any of the—teach any of the classes?

CD: Yes. I did. I taught some of them.

TS: I see. So you coordinated them as well as taught.

CD: And then we taught certain parts of it, but then the doctors would teach the other sections.

TS: Did you enjoy doing that class?

CD: Oh, I did.

TS: Yeah?

CD: I really enjoyed that.

TS: Yeah.

CD: And I had contact with the other people, and—

TS: Now how about with your spouse, did he move with you and get—how was it for him to—

CD: He did move up there, and he ended up staying home with the kid, my daughter at that time. And then I had my second, our second daughter there.

TS: In Washington?

CD: So yes, so he ended up being the Mr. Mom.

TS: Okay.

CD: Kind of a new thing at the time, you know, kind of like first.

TS: So how did that work out?

CD: I mean, that was kind of early on. That worked pretty well. He was really good with the kids and I could—In the air force, at that point, I was at a rank, yeah, because when I went to Fairchild I ended up—not too long into it, I was promoted to major, and so my salary was better, you know, then what the jobs that were available there that he could get, so it worked out for us.

TS: So how did you like living in Washington?

CD: Oh, I like it. I enjoyed it.

TS: What did you like about it?

CD: It was a nice area, probably coming from the desert of Oklahoma, I mean it was really—cotton fields and tumbleweed and just really barren, you know, I mean, no trees, and I always loved green. So it was like, to go to that, it was really stark. So then to go up there and there's green again, you know the pine trees and all that, different kind than here, of course, but I enjoyed the area. Snow, you know, four seasons again, where it's not a hundred and some degrees, I mean, we had a—while I was there, I think in 1980, in

Oklahoma it had hit a record of the number of days that it was above a hundred degrees, that summer, and so they [made?] us have t-shirts that said, “I survived the summer of 1980” or something like that, so. But, yes, Washington, I enjoyed that.

I got to--while I was there I got to go to school and get my master’s degree in health promotion education and so that was tough, that was a difficult couple of years.

TS: Where did you get that?

CD: At Whitworth College [now Whitworth University]—

TS: Okay.

CD: —there in Spokane.

TS: Oh, neat.

CD: And, well, that was—

TS: Taking night classes and—

CD: —you know, working full-time, working in the air force and then taking couple of classes at night, was—and then trying to study when, how little my daughter was, my youngest was probably, I think she was a little more than a year old when I started.

TS: Oh my.

CD: And so it was—I was feeling guilty, I mean, a lot of guilt, guilty about, I want to spend time with them, and then it’s a matter of fitting work and school and so yeah, it was a pretty stressful two years.

TS: Yeah. Well did you find that you had to get your master’s to continue on in your career? Was that like a requirement?

CD: It helped. It would help a lot.

TS: It would help?

CD: Yeah, it helps a lot.

TS: So is that part of the incentive is why you wanted to do it too?

CD: Yes, and then I was interested in that area of health promotion too. Because I'd see, you know, you'd see people that are in the hospital and stuff that, there are so many diseases that are preventable, you know, and so that was an area of interest. And then when I went to March [Air Force Base] I got to utilize it because I was able to be the health promotion coordinator for the base there.

TS: Oh when you got there?

CD: Yeah.

TS: Well talk about that. So then was that your last assignment?

CD: Yes, it was.

TS: At March Air Force Base?

CD: And I was there a long time, I was there like seven years.

TS: And so when did you get there?

CD: In 1986.

TS: Nineteen eighty-six. And you were there through, and then you retired there in '93 right?

CD: In '93, yes.

TS: So you were four years at Fairchild, then?

CD: Yes.

TS: Okay. And so—If we can talk a little bit about what's happening in the world at this time, too. So you've gone through, you've been in the air force through the presidencies of, well, Nixon, the end of Nixon—

CD: Carter.

TS: Well, even, you've got Ford—

CD: Yes.

TS: Carter, Reagan. So what are you thinking about what's happening at this time, like, especially like speaking about the Iranian hostage crisis happened when you were in Oklahoma [background noise]

CD: Yes, that was in the eighties. Yeah, hearing all that and it's like, it didn't—we were—of course we weren't too involved but it's like, that whole thing, the tension of all of that and being aware, and to think back that that's been that long ago, that Iran's— [continued background noise]

TS: Back in the news again, yeah.

CD: Very much so.

TS: Well did you have—were you—did you have any like feeling towards any of our leaders, you know, our presidents at all.

CD: Yes.

TS: How did you feel—

CD: But of course you're not allowed to say. [laughs]

TS: Well you can say it now, though.

CD: [laughs] No, but I mean you couldn't say.

TS: At the time.

CD: Yeah, back then, you kind of knew the ones that really supported the military, and—

TS: Which ones did you think did?

CD: Oh, and there was a downsizing, too, there was up or out during the seventies, after Vietnam.

TS: Oh, okay.

CD: That a lot of folks—I forgot about that—that people were being let go, if you will. And if they didn't, of course if they didn't make rank, and that's still in effect probably now but I don't how, I don't know how it is more currently, you know, right now. So that, it was downsized and then Reagan of course, you know, increased it again because we really, to the Cold War and all of that going on, and really felt he supported, you know, supported the military, and so that was a big difference. You can't say anything about the commander-in-chief, but you could think, and I guess we talked about it among ourselves, but not with anyone else hearing it or whatever.

TS: So you're mostly in—well, you're partly in Washington and then California for his time? Was there anybody else that you thought of, like that you looked up to as a role model or a model?

CD: During that time?

TS: In any of these times.

[long pause]

CD: I'd have to—no one comes to me, you know, like right away. There's probably people, but I'd have to think, think about it.

TS: Yeah, okay. That's fine. Well, do you—you talked a little bit about your promotions, you felt like you were treated fairly, was that—do you feel that way all the way through your career?

CD: I was, when I got to March, I was passed over the first time for lieutenant colonel. So I was sad, of course, that was disappointing about that, but after—I thought, "I don't know why," you know, and—

TS: You didn't know why you were passed over?

CD: Yeah. And then my chief nurse, she was going through my record and when we had an inspection and the chief nurse, you know, that came and did the inspection, she was talking to me and she said something about, she said, “Well, who didn’t like you back whenever?” And I thought, “Well, I didn’t know anybody—” [laughs]

TS: Right.

CD: She said, “Well, this one supervisor you had wrote this,” you know, I mean, marked me down, I guess on something because—I know what it was, it was when I was at Altus, and David was gone in school, and I had my daughter and I was, and I wasn’t, I guess they offered me an opportunity to go to a school, but I just didn’t—

TS: Couldn’t do it?

CD: —my family—

TS: Right.

CD: —you know, I had to put my daughter first, so I didn’t think that little comment in there, I mean, she didn’t say it like I wouldn’t--

TS: But somebody read into it?

CD: Yes, whatever the way it was written, somebody took it—

TS: Declined to go?

CD: Yes. Somebody took it—

TS: Declined to take it, opportunity of educational, or something like that.

CD: However they put it, I forget how it was worded, but the promotion board must have looked at that unfavorably.

TS: Like you don’t really necessarily want to be a career—

CD: Yes, yes. But then a chief nurse said, “You know, we’ll do what we can because your record and all this,” so the next time—

TS: You made it.

CD: The next year I was up again, so I made that second time.

TS: So what you were—you were taking about at March Air Force Base at Riverside, California, you did, you continued on with training, helping the training?

CD: Yes. I did staff development and that same job that I was doing at Fairchild previously. And that was where they had the opening, you know, that I was transferred there for. There we had the nursing internship program, so I had another nurse working with me or under me, really, I hate to say somebody works under you, but—and had a couple of enlisted folks that helped as well, you know, for training for the enlisted people. And that was a very different experience. It was really nice because you get, they had started this program. They didn't have it when I first came in, but what they do is the new nurses coming in would have like a six-week training program. They would be on the unit and then they would have some extra classes, and kind of like helping to adjust and to get into, because they're new, brand new nurses, too, like right out of school.

TS: Right.

CD: So it was [background noise] kind of to adjust to that whole new thing and going from school to—

TS: To working?

CD: —to working on the unit.

TS: Well, talk a little bit about that. Talk about how, like, nursing had changed in this period. Or had it?

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: From the seventies, you know, up through, you know, the late eighties.

CD: From the seventies, of course there's a lot more, a lot more mechanical, unfortunately, you know, like monitors—

TS: Technological type—

CD: Yes, there you go.

TS: Okay.

CD: I'm sorry, think of the right word. More of that and it was, and nowhere near where it is now, as to compare it to--

TS: Even more technology that you have to pay attention to?

CD: Oh, yes, today, because I go and visit people in the hospital and it's like, "Oh my gosh, I wouldn't know—" [laughs] I guess you could learn it pretty quick, but.

TS: Yeah.

CD: So, it changed from that, and it changed—I think in terms of, maybe it was the individuals, but I saw more paperwork, you know, like it seemed like more paperwork and that was more time consuming, so you almost as a charge nurse definitely you're not working with the patients much. [background noise] Or less contact with them. And also, more male nurses then it was when I first started.

TS: Are you getting any more female doctors?

CD: Yes, that was another thing, and exposure to more doctors it seemed like, too, from foreign countries—

TS: Oh, okay.

CD: —that had been through medical school and so that was a different experience.

TS: So the diversity within the nursing corps is changing too.

CD: Was growing, yes. What other areas—

TS: So there's a lot—oh, go ahead.

CD: Of course, treatments, you know, and that kind of stuff of course is advancing all that time, and different—

TS: Is there anything that you really miss?

CD: As far that part of it?

TS: Yeah.

CD: The more patient contact, as the technology comes in, really missed that part of it, because that's, that's more what I went in—you know, when you think about helping people and that.

TS: That's why you became a nurse?

CD: Yes, exactly.

TS: You didn't become a nurse to fill out paperwork?

CD: Exactly, exactly.

TS: Yeah.

CD: And now I think it's—nowadays it's even more so, because there are so many, you have to this inspection, you have to—because legally, I mean, a lot of that—

TS: You're covering—

CD: I mean, there's more, more suits and all this that's—but I don't—see that wasn't as much in the military, because—

TS: You're following the regulations?

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: It's pretty strict.

CD: But we still had all the inspections, you know, the joint hospital accreditation and we went through—of course, in the military inspection, which was additional to, and so yeah, we had a couple of different inspections that we went through.

TS: So how are you feeling about how, what the changes are being made within, you know, the air force environment during this? Not necessarily just nursing, but just the military. We talked a little bit about some of the diversity classes, and—what else is changing?

CD: Yes, yes. Women's roles in the military and how there are women getting into aircraft mechanics, and they started women pilots, that women were becoming pilots and that was very, very at the beginning stages. And how those women were getting into the male careers if you will.

TS: The male-dominated careers?

CD: Yes, yes. And they were definitely challenged a lot.

TS: Those women?

CD: Yes, they were. It's kind of like any time you're the first or you're the pioneer in something. That they were really challenged, it's almost like they had to be better at whatever they were doing to prove if you will, prove themselves. And then there was friction because a lot of times, the women, when they're out there on the flight line, that they couldn't physically, that the guys wanted to help them and being, the chivalry, they would want to help them lift their heavy toolboxes, you know, and stuff. So that was a little bit, I think they had to adjust to that.

TS: Right.

CD: The language that was used out there, you know, on the flight lines.

TS: What do you mean?

CD: When it was just the guys, I mean the way they would talk, the—

TS: As in, oh okay.

CD: —course—do you see what I'm saying? So that—

TS: More vulgar language?

CD: Yes, yes, and I think at first they tried to—I think they probably were trying to be a little more aware of that, because women back then when it was first starting, they were—but nowadays, I don't know. I hear some of the women using language that would keep right up with those, the guys. So, yeah, that was very exciting, when the first woman pilot—

TS: Yeah? What did you think about that personally?

CD: I thought, that's great, because I thought, you know, women can do those kinds of things.

TS: Do you think that there's anything that women should not be doing in the military?

CD: I still have mixed feelings about the combat part of it. Because I really, I really think that's being, being sensitive, emotional, a mom, I don't think that's a place that women should have to—or they don't have to be, but, I don't know. And women are maybe trying to prove something, but I've learned over the years that, hey, you are who you are and God made us man and woman and made us physically different for a reason, and we don't have to try and be something we're not, you know, it doesn't mean that you're not—In God's eyes we're all equal, it's not a matter of—but somehow with this, a whole cultural and societal thing with like—I guess it started with the sexual revolution and women trying to think that, you know, they were equal to men and so it came out in all kinds of different ways. [background noise]

TS: Yeah. Are they?

CD: Are they equal? I mean, I think as far as—I think they've gone a wrong way, unfortunately. I think they've done a disservice to women because it's almost like now for, it's very difficult for women that want to stay home and raise their children. And I think that's probably the most important job that—not to say that other jobs aren't important, but from personal experience I know if you're trying to work and have a career and be a mom, you know, they're trying to promote it back then as, oh you can have it all. Something suffers. A lot probably suffers.

TS: It's interesting that you say this, Carolyn, with the, you know, that your husband helped take care of the kids when they were younger, so that's an interesting perspective that you have on it.

CD: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I had a really hard time after my second daughter was born and I just, going back to work.

TS: Yeah. Would you have liked to have been able to stay home?

CD: “Oh, I wanted to stay home!”, you know.

TS: Yeah.

CD: So, yes.

TS: But you had the good job and the good money.

CD: That’s right.

TS: Did you feel a little bit of pressure because of that, maybe?

CD: [pause] Not a whole lot, because I thought at least one of us, you know, one of the parents could be there for them.

TS: Yeah.

CD: Because it makes a difference, I think.

TS: Well, another part of that sexual revolution had to do with gay rights, and that the big thing, you know, last year, was the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” What did you think about that?

CD: I think that can probably cause a lot of difficulties. [pause] That’s a whole—that’s a whole area, that’s like—I mean, I have, I have nothing against—because of my faith, it’s like Jesus would say love, love the sinner but not the sin. So, you know, I have no problem with the individual, but when that behavior is going on and it’s openly, I think—You know, when they have showers for the guys—you know, I mean, how the military is and if you’re out in the field and you’re—I mean, you’re in those environments, that’s very different. I mean, even when we would do training, we would go out and train like kind of a M*A*S*H unit when we were in the hospital--

TS: Right.

CD: We'd have to go out each year and do that kind of training, and at that point they had separate tents for the men and women. But, you know, just little things like trying to get dressed, and, I mean, I just, at least have some privacy.

TS: Yeah. Did you—were you aware of anybody that was homosexual while you were in the military?

CD: I had someone come on to me one time. I was so young, I didn't, naive—

TS: Yeah.

CD: [laughs] —then thinking about it afterwards, it was like, yeah. So, yeah, there was. I mean, it wasn't real obvious, but—

TS: Right, like flirting or something along those lines?

CD: Yeah, but, I mean, because this was outside of work.

TS: I see.

CD: So, yeah.

TS: So, but other than that, you weren't aware of—

CD: There were probably some people you could think that maybe they were.

TS: Yeah. So as far as the work environment goes, it wasn't—

CD: No, it didn't affect.

TS: Yeah. Well did you, did you ever experience any kind of discrimination, on or off the job?

CD: [pause] There was this one situation, where when I was doing the health promotion for the base, and so that was a very different role, because then I worked, rather than working for the chief nurse of the hospital, I was under the hospital commander. And the nursing

department, the one chief nurse was okay with it, but she left and another chief nurse came in. She did not like that idea at all, that I was working for the hospital commander. She wanted all of the nurses to work—

TS: Under her?

CD: Under her. And so I felt kind of uneasy with that whole thing, and I very much enjoyed what I was doing on the base and doing things that I felt like it was helping people, you know, doing things like quit smoking and exercising and all the things that—checking blood pressure, cholesterol, and things that people could change their habits and prevent some of the things later on in their lives. So I was really enjoying it, and then it ended up after a while, she, after I went to Desert Storm, I came back and she put me somewhere else.

TS: Oh, okay.

CD: So that was, that wasn't really a male/female thing, it was just the—

TS: Two female, I mean, it was a female, right, that transferred you to a different place?

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: Rather than a male.

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: So that was more like a power thing, right?

CD: Yes, it was, I guess, more so.

TS: So, discriminating against you because she wanted to have you under her?

CD: Yes, that part under my—under her charge.

TS: Yeah. Well, tell me a little bit about then the Gulf War. How did that affect you and what you had to do for your work.

CD: I left—so I was doing health promotion at that time. So pretty much that was—nobody filled that, it was just, you know, so many people on the base were going, being deployed. They—our hospital was one of several hospitals that sent certain number of people and certain ranks, so I was the, a lieutenant colonel that they felt, because I had that job, that they could let me go.

TS: Right.

CD: Because it wasn't anything that was critical, you know, it's not like the hospital, the chief nurse of the hospital or anything. So I went to that and that was a very different experience.

TS: Where did you go?

CD: To Landstuhl.

TS: Landstuhl?

CD: That was it, and—

TS: In Germany?

CD: Yes, in Germany, and we—there was a hospital that used to be a German hospital, and it was a contingency hospital, so what they did is they had a lot of equipment, beds and all that stuff, that was just stored there, and it wasn't used, all—how many, every year since they put it all there--so we had some pretty antique [laughs], antique equipment and stuff, so. The folks from Carswell Air Force Base, they were the major ones that went in and did this, we were kind of supplementing them. So they had gotten there ahead of us, and they had pretty much set it up, so we were kind of there to staff the different units and fortunately there weren't many casualties.

TS: Was there a fear that there would be heavy casualties?

CD: Yes, yes, there were, there was, because they weren't sure about chemical weapons, and—

TS: I see.

CD: —all that stuff when they first went in there, and you know, Saddam [Hussein] was, you know, thought that he was, had this big army, the way he talked, and from here and from the few folks that we did get come to the hospital, they were saying they were going in and people were on the, raising white flags before they even were, you know, confronted pretty much.

TS: So how did you feel about that particular war?

CD: I thought that was defending—I thought it was just. Because Kuwait was that small country and couldn't defend, really couldn't defend itself against Iraq moving in and taking it over, and because of all the oil, of course, the oil supply, and that was definitely a concern to the country.

TS: So what did you think about President George H. W. Bush?

CD: He was supportive of us, and that was, that was good. We all knew our mission and we kind of did that.

TS: Did any of the other military—was there any air force leader that you, at that time, that was admired at all?

CD: I'd have to say the army, you know—

TS: The army?

CD: —Schwarzen—um, not Schwarzenegger—Schwarzkopf, wasn't it?

TS: Yes, you're right.

CD: General Schwarzkopf.

TS: And Colin Powell?

CD: Yes, those folks. But they were admirable, and that they wanted to go ahead and continue on because it was such a clear path once they got across the border there. And looking back on it, too bad they didn't.

TS: Yeah, hindsight's 20/20.

CD: Because here we are back, you know, here we were back again after they—

TS: That's right.

CD: So, yes, I admired them. Admired all the younger military, too, the ones—because we'd see them before, I mean, there at March they would come up from Camp Pendleton, the marines, and they would be flown from March over there, and they're just, I mean, they're kids. They have seen them and they're going through the hangars and you'd go over there, and—my mom and dad happened to be out there visiting me at the time, so I said—

TS: Where were they at?

CD: They came to visit me in California—

TS: Oh, okay.

CD: —and during that time when I said, “Mom, why don't you”—you know they were looking for something to do while I was at work, so I said, “Why don't you go out there? You know, I mean, they're looking for people to help out, you just,”—and they were just amazed. My dad, especially, he loved meeting them and seeing how, how professional they were and how they were babies. [laughs]

TS: Yeah. Well I'm going to backtrack just a little because I forgot to ask you a couple of things about some of the other cultural things that were going on. But we talked about when JFK was shot, but do you remember when Ronald Reagan was shot?

CD: Yes, yes.

TS: So tell me about that.

CD: Well that was, that was very, you know, sad, too, and the fact that he was joking [laughs], that he's in there and joking with the doctors, I thought that was something, you know, but that's who he was. I was so very happy that he got through that okay.

TS: Yeah. There's a couple of—

CD: That was very surprise, I mean—

TS: Surprising?

CD: —not expected at all, well just like with JFK. Who would have thought?

TS: Sure. And then there was a couple of—while he was president, we had the Beirut bombing.

CD: The barracks, yes.

[Transcriber's note: Beirut bombing refers to the October 1983 suicide bombing of the barracks of U.S. Marines and that of France's 1st Parachute Chasseur Regiment, with a significant death toll.]

TS: Yeah. I was trying to—

CD: Yes, that's right.

TS: —see where you were when that happened, and—you would have been at Fairchild.

CD: Yes.

TS: When that happened.

CD: Yes.

TS: And the same thing with the invasion of Grenada and Panama, those were things--

[Refers to Operation Urgent Fury, a United States-led invasion of the Caribbean island of Grenada with a duration of October to December of 1983.]

CD: Yes. And there was a small group from the base that flew, you know, that flew over there.

TS: To which one?

CD: To Grenada.

TS: To Grenada?

CD: Yes.

TS: And did they—were they involved in Panama too at all?

CD: I don't remember. The base I was at at the time, I don't remember any of the folks from that base going. But, yeah, Grenada, and that, you know, some of those went really well and quick, so that was nice.

TS: Yeah, that's true.

CD: That's always—they're very happy, of course, when that happens.

TS: And then we had the Challenger explosion?

CD: Oh, yeah.

TS: Do you remember that too?

CD: Yes, it was like, "Whoa."

TS: So you had a nice, long career, and so, at what point did you decide that you were going to retire?

CD: I had a few things when I was in Washington, one of the trainings and that was when I only had thirteen years, but it's like, my kids still remember it to this day. Because I was sitting on the—they had gone somewhere with their dad, and I had gotten back to the house and I'm sitting on the front step when they got home, and I was sitting there crying, and I was telling my husband, "You know, David," I said, "I don't think I can do this anymore." Because you know what they had? They had—since we were at Fairchild and they had the survival school there, you know, these instructors that do that, they interrogate, you know, I mean, they give them a really hard time because in case they were captured. Well, they kind of did that with us, and it's like, "Oh my gosh."

TS: What do you mean they did it with you?

CD: We were out on our, that M*A*S*H, whatever M*A*S*H kind of training, like we were in tents and having to take care of patients and all that, and we go through, like, if people were exposed to chemical warfare and that kind of thing.

TS: Okay.

CD: But anyway, they decided they were going to have the instructors from the survival school since we were right there, come and see like if we were captured.

TS: I see.

CD: You know, how we would respond and all that. Well, this happened like at five—we were sleeping, it was five o'clock in the morning and I think they come and scream, "Get up! Get up! Get up!" They had guns and they're, you know, I mean, they're right in your face and screaming at you. I'm not too good at being screamed at. [laughs]

TS: Right. Not many people are.

CD: And then screaming this stuff and, you know, telling you questions, calling your mother names, and, I mean, it was like, "Oh my," and I'm there shaking and like, and I also, I realized later I was extra emotional because I had my period [laughs] and I was like PMSing, and— [laughs]

TS: Not the best experience.

CD: No, not at all. So it's like I was home from that, and my kids—

TS: So that's when you were sitting on the porch, after this had happened.

CD: Yes, after that weekend.

TS: So you're pretty traumatized, I guess.

CD: Oh, yes.

TS: Okay.

CD: So I really had some thoughts about getting out then, but then after I thought, “Well, you know, what are the chances that that would—” I guess I started questioning myself, would I be able to handle that if and, if ever that happened, you know?

TS: Right.

CD: And I wasn’t so, you know I knew I probably couldn’t, after that experience, so—but then talking with some other people, it’s like, you know, the chances in the air force, and you know, in the hospital—

TS: Of you ever being put in this kind of position.

CD: Since—No. No. You know, like we had to go through—firing the M-16 and all that, and you know as officers in the hospital it’s rare that, I mean, I can’t imagine that we would ever have—and we’re supposed to be peace—[laughs] I mean, they have the cross, right, we’re supposed to not be combatants.

TS: Right. So, but you did decide to stay in?

CD: Yes, I did, I did.

TS: So what tilted you the other direction?

CD: I guess because of the number of years I had in, and at that time—

TS: Only seven more to go, sort of?

CD: Yes, yes, and also at that time, I was in school, you know, that was the time I was in my master’s program, and I definitely wanted to finish that up, and so it was, those were the kind of factors that influenced me.

TS: Yeah. So then—

CD: Once I got over the initial trauma.

TS: After that weekend?

CD: Yes, yes, it was much better.

TS: So in—you went through the Gulf War in Germany, but you didn't have a lot of people come to the—Landstuhl?

CD: To that hospital, no. And we, they'd send—there were a couple other contingency hospitals in the area, and they would try and divide up the patients so we each have a little bit of experience.

TS: Oh, okay.

CD: But mostly what was coming like were people that—one person had appendicitis, and, you know, maybe injuries—

TS: A lot of accidents and illnesses, sort of?

CD: Broken hands, accidents—yes, yes.

TS: Not from combatant?

CD: No.

TS: I see.

CD: No, so that was, that was all we got, thank god.

TS: Well, so when—then you went back to March but then you're re-assigned to a different place, did that start to make you feel like, "Well, maybe I don't, you know, maybe this is a good time to get out"?

CD: By that point, I was just two years from retiring, so definitely didn't.

TS: But you were planning—

CD: So that—oh, you mean as far as retiring?

TS: Yes.

CD: Yes, it did, it did, because it got to a point where I don't, you know, it was such short notice that you have to pick up and go, and you don't, I mean, when we left, we had no idea how long we were going to be gone. And to not have a say in that, and my girls were, you know, I'm trying to remember how old they were, I think my youngest was probably eight, nine? Nine. My other daughter was a teenager, so she was—but, so they were with their dad, but still it was, it was hard. You know, you try to call back and talk to them and they just didn't quite understand.

TS: So this deployment was tough on you, too.

CD: Yeah.

TS: How long were you gone?

CD: Only two months, but, I mean, we just never, we didn't know, we left—

TS: You didn't know how long it was going to last?

CD: Yes, we left not knowing.

TS: Yeah.

CD: Didn't know where we were going or how long.

TS: Well, do you consider yourself a trailblazer in any way? Especially in the time that you went in, you know, in '73? Weren't a lot of women in the military at that time.

CD: No. I guess I don't really consider myself that because nursing has had women in the military probably, what, back from, I don't know, World War II, probably before that, World War I? Yeah, yeah. So I didn't think of myself as a trailblazer then. But it was interesting, that was the thing that I had thought of earlier and couldn't remember, was when I first would tell people—not my family, so much, but other people that I knew—that I was going to go in the air force back, you know, when I was—

TS: In the seventies.

CD: —thinking about it in '72? They were saying, you know, they had this thing about, well, women in the military are either gay or they're out looking for a man. So it's like—

TS: Would they actually say that to you?

CD: Yeah, they did.

TS: How did you respond to that?

CD: I'd say, "Well, I'm, you know, neither, so." [laughs] Well, I mean, maybe if I met a guy that would be okay. [laughs]

TS: But that wasn't what you were—

CD: No, that's not why I was going in.

TS: —your intention, yeah.

CD: So that, that shows the time and how things have changed.

TS: Yeah. Would you—so you got two daughters, would you, if they had wanted to join the military, would have encouraged them, or?

CD: Sure.

TS: Yeah?

CD: Yeah, I would have. Neither of them wanted it.

TS: No?

CD: And they told me, "I'm never going to." And I think it was that incident--

TS: The deployment?

CD: —where I was sitting there on—

TS: Oh, on the stairs?

CD: That and the deployment.

TS: I see.

CD: The two. [background noise] They said, “No way.”

TS: Well did you—have you ever used any of your GI benefits?

CD: Yes.

TS: What did you use it for?

CD: I used my GI benefit, that paid for my master’s degree.

TS: Oh, okay.

CD: And also I had the GI benefit for when I bought my house.

TS: Your housing?

CD: Yes.

TS: Yeah.

CD: We bought a house in Oklahoma and then bought one in Washington and California.

TS: Oh, okay, so you’ve used it several times.

CD: Yes.

TS: Very nice.

CD: Yeah, so that was a big plus.

TS: Have you ever had any experience with the VA [Veterans Administration] at all?

CD: I went to the VA in California, and, because they have—I had some dermatology problems, and it’s, it first showed up when I was gone in Germany and then was back

after that two months, and so I went to the VA out in California. Had a very good experience. They were very, very good care.

TS: Have you ever dealt with anybody who's had the post-traumatic stress disorder?

CD: No, I haven't.

TS: Not in nursing or in the—

CD: No.

TS: Outside that?

CD: No.

TS: Is that something that's in the news a lot.

CD: Yeah, that's something that's really—my friend, Sheila, that's here? Her husband, her ex-husband was in Vietnam, just for—

TS: Suffered from that? But your husband didn't suffer from that?

CD: No.

TS: Do you think your life has been different at all because you decided to join the air force?

CD: I think it's been broader, I mean, I have broader experiences. I've learned a lot of things that I probably never would have learned, and I'm not a risk-taker normally, so it kind of helped me to kind of—

TS: Push the—

CD: —push me out a little there, to try some things that I never would have thought of. Ended up being places I never would have thought to live.

TS: Yeah.

CD: So all of that's been, been great. Meeting some great people, some that I still, after all these years, still keep in touch with.

TS: Is there anything that you think civilians don't understand about the military or the air force or nursing in the military that they maybe have misconceptions about?

CD: I think civilians, unless they have family members or someone that they've known that's been in the military, they truly don't understand what it's like, and I think of that more—that was brought to my mind when Desert Storm. I mean, we were kind of glued, like that December, the first folks were gone in August of '90, and then they were start talking about at the hospital that in December, we might have to go. And so you're watching and you're glued to CNN and watching what's going on there. And people, I mean, they're kind of oblivious in a way.

TS: Outside the military?

CD: Yeah, they didn't really realize what we're doing [background noise] and even nowadays, I don't think people—and I've heard, I read an article, I guess, where some of the folks coming back from Iraq or Afghanistan, and they're going through the airport, and they think, they're looking and it's like people are just going about their daily lives and they don't, they don't connect at all. And it's kind of like—

[speaking simultaneously]

TS: So there's a disconnect between—

CD: —what they would want it to be, because that's what they were doing over there, that's why they're—and but still, it's—

TS: But not oblivious to what's happening.

CD: Yeah, and that they would want them to at least recognize—

TS: Acknowledge.

CD: —or be aware, yeah. So, yeah, I don't think people really have a concept, and how much sacrifice the families, you know, I didn't have a whole lot, but these people that have

been deployed four or five times over there? And the families, and they have children and, you know, just struggling with all that. I just can't imagine, you know.

TS: So what does patriotism mean to you?

CD: Boy. It means standing up for what you believe in, and standing for this country and our freedoms, because if we don't, I just see them, like, being taken from us, the freedoms and liberty that we have. And so, yeah, I see it as that.

TS: I don't have any more formal questions. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you wanted to talk about or mention?

CD: I don't think so. We had a good, I think we've covered pretty much all of it.

TS: Well, I don't know if we covered all of it. [laughs]

CD: Well, I mean, did a good job.

TS: Yeah. Well thank you so much, and we'll go ahead and turn it off.

CD: Okay.

[End of Interview]