WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Renée L. Gurney

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: May 7, 2012

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is May 7, 2012. This is Therese Strohmer. I am in Jackson Library in Greensboro, North Carolina, and conducting an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. Renée, could you state your name the way that you'd like it to read on your collection?

RG: Renée L. Gurley.

TS: Okay. Well, thank you, Renée, for seeing—coming on over here today. Why don't you start off by telling me about when and where you were born?

RG: I was born in High Point, North Carolina, May 19, 1952, and I was the oldest of four children.

TS: What kind of siblings do you have? How does that break down?

RG: I—Five years younger than me a sister, and five years younger than her a brother, and then fifteen months younger him another sister.

TS: Okay, so three girls and a boy.

RG: Yes.

TS: And what did your parents do when you were growing up?

RG: My dad was an upholsterer. His dad had been an upholsterer. My mom worked in graphic arts, doing the artwork in—for catalogs and that kind of thing—

TS: Oh, neat.

RG: —most of my growing up years.

TS: For the upholstery, was your dad connected to the furniture business in High Point, then?

RG: Yes, Thayer Coggins [Furniture] and I think later [Mc] Brayer [Furniture Company]; different places like that. Maybe—he might have started out in Burton[?] Upholstery.

TS: Yes. Now, what was it like growing in—in High Point?

RG: Actually, we were on Peace Avenue until I was about five and then we moved out to the country.

TS: Oh, you did?

RG: And—in Sophia. It's, kind of, right at the edge of Sophia and Trinity, and I loved living out there. We had a lot of freedom to run around and traipse through woods and take our dogs with us, and using our imagination and make tree—you know, little playhouses and things we'd line out on the ground and take our teddy bears and things like that, so we had—it was great.

TS: Lots of outside play?

RG: Yes.

TS: Now, do you live now close to where you grew up?

RG: Yes, my mom and dad still live there, and I live about five miles from them.

TS: Is that right? Do they still live at the same place you grew up in?

RG: Yes.

TS: Well, that's really neat.

RG: Yes.

TS: Yes. So, you're the oldest and—so when you're five you moved out there, so probably most of your memories from living out in that area?

RG: Yes.

TS: Did you have any kind of games that you liked to play?

RG: The main things I remember playing are just, you know, I had a—for my birthday when I was five I got a standard-size French poodle, and he had gotten snake-bitten right when he was a puppy and almost died, and from that time on he would kill snakes, and he would just grab the snake behind its neck and give it a shake and fling it out to the woods, so we always took him everywhere we went to keep us safe.

TS: Oh, wow!

RG: And our parents, you know, would let us go to the creek and go back in the woods behind the house and we'd think it was a mountain. It was really a big hill, but we'd think it was a mountain and we just explored. And I was in Girl Scouts, so you know, the—just the nature, the plants, and things like that I just loved.

TS: What kind of things did you do in Girl Scouts?

RG: I went to—I remember collections—making little collections of leaves and that kind of thing; working on all kinds of badges. Like I said, we lived out in the country and we only had one car, so I didn't—I mean, for a while we only had one car. And so I didn't do after-school activities as far as any kind of sports or anything like that, so my main outside activities were church, and then the—you know, the Girl Scouts. So, just different trips and camping trips, and day camp in the summer. We lived on the Girl Scout camp road, and so I bicycled to the Girl Scout camp for—

TS: Oh, you're real close to--

RG: —for day camp and that kind of thing. And so just—Girl Scouts was really special to me, too, and—I stayed in Girl Scouts until we ran out of leaders.

TS: Oh, really?

RG: I was in there until—I think I was probably a—probably a sophomore in high school, but we didn't have leaders anymore.

TS: So, were you like a cadet? Did you get to that?

RG: Yes. I don't think—I don't think I got to be a senior. I think I was in the later stages of cadets before—when we stopped.

TS: What kind of lessons do you think you learned from the Girl Scouts?

RG: Oh, I—well, one was that appreciation of nature, I think. One, too—and part of this may be from Girl Scouts later because I had my girl—my daughter in Girl Scouts, too, but you know, being a sister to every other Girl Scout. I mean, knowing that people were equal

and just appreciating differences in other people and those kinds of things. I loved crafts; any kind of crafts, and I think—I don't know if that started in Girl Scouts, but, I mean—but it did foster it, and those kinds of things. And the camping and all that, I really enjoyed.

TS: Did you get to do a lot of overnight camping?

RG: I—I did at the Girl Scout camp. We didn't go a lot of other places, I don't think, back then.

TS: But right down—down the road.

RG: Yes, yes.

TS: That's, kind of—get away.

RG: And the tents and the—they had little—you know, tents in some places and the platform things that they also put tents on.

TS: Right.

RG: And I guess they had some cabins, but those kind of things.

TS: Right, that's right. I forgot about those; the platform where they put the tent on top of it.

RG: Yes.

TS: For the rains and all that. That's neat.

RG: And when it was cold.

TS: Yes, that's true too. So, did you—with school, how did you—did you enjoy school growing up?

RG: I loved school.

TS: Yes?

RG: I mean, I don't remember why I liked it so much, but I—you know, back when I was little reading, writing, arithmetic; those were real important things. My mom would make us sit down at night and practice our handwriting, and I remember sitting and doing that. I remember my teacher being—always using my handwriting as an example. I mean, she had me teach a friend—a girl who must have had really poor handwriting—how to write, and that kind of thing. And spelling; I enjoyed that and spelling bees and things like that. I liked everything about school at that point in time. At some point I got shy—

TS: Oh, okay.

RG: —and bashful, and didn't like to do—talk in front of the class and things like that. I don't know when that started.

TS: But at some point?

RG: Because I remember in first grade being—standing in the corner almost every day for talking too much [both laugh]. So, I don't know when that changed.

TS: Is that something with being the oldest child, that—I don't know.

RG: It might have been.

TS: Well, did you—did you have a favorite subject; or teacher?

RG: Well, I liked my first grade teacher, Miss Davis; I really liked her a lot. And I don't—I remember one teacher I didn't like. I got my first C in her room, and I remember her paddling my hand for—there was a little boy in my class. It was politically incorrect, but he was called a midget at that point in time. And I remember him chasing me one day and I was trying to get away from him and so I was running and he was running and I got my hand paddled for it, so [both chuckle] I didn't end up liking her.

TS: No? I guess that paddling doesn't ever endear you to very many people sometimes.

RG: But I don't remember anything to do with reading and literature, things like that, I really enjoyed. I remember enjoying—in high school I enjoyed biology a lot; doing the dissecting and things like that.

TS: Yes?

RG: Like I said, I really liked most of it.

TS: What where the name of the schools you went to?

RG: Trinity—It was called Trinity Elementary now—I mean then, but I think now that school—what's on the site of that school is called Braxton Craven [Middle School], but it was the—the old school and it was a two-story building, and it was the site of the original—that was Duke, you know—that's the site where my school was. And then in seventh grade I went to Archdale—

TS: When you say Duke, what—

RG: —Elementary [School].

TS: The original Duke?

RG: Duke University originally started there in Trinity.

TS: Oh, okay.

RG: And the site, they had a little tower-type—I mean, a little gondola-type thing and it's got some kind of commemorative thing there.

TS: I see.

RG: But it started where my original elementary school was.

TS: Oh, alright. That's interesting. And then in high school?

RG: Back to that same little school, and it was called Trinity—I guess it was called Junior High then, and then I was in the first or second class of the—what is now Trinity Senior High School, and was the new Trinity then. It was built while, you know, I was in, like, the second class—or first or second class that went to school there after it was built.

TS: Did—Were your classes segregated?

RG: When I was in seventh grade—I'm pretty sure it's seventh grade—was when segregation started.

TS: When you mean integration started?

RG: Integration. I'm sorry, yes.

TS: So, in seventh grade; up until that point it had been separate schools?

RG: Yes.

TS: Did you—Do you have any memory of that at all?

RG: I just—I remember when integration started and it didn't—it didn't mean anything special to me. I mean, it wasn't anything different for me, as far as I knew.

TS: No?

RG: No. You know, it—I just—there were two or three—I don't remember for sure how many black kids started coming to our school, but there were two or three in my classes; maybe more.

TS: Out of how—how big was your class?

RG: I think when I graduated, I think we had, like—I think seventy-something.

TS: So, fairly small?

RG: Yes.

TS: Overall.

RG: Yes.

TS: And did—so you were—do you remember when John F. Kennedy [President John Fitzgerald Kennedy] was shot?

RG: I do remember. I can't—I don't remember for sure what grade I was in, but I mean, I remember that day. I remember we were—when we heard we were on—walking on the way to the gym or something, so it must have been play period or something, because I remember walking down the sidewalk and hearing that it had happened. And I didn't understand things then.

TS: Because you were—you were pretty little still?

RG: Right. And I thought it meant that Nixon—it seems like I thought it would make [President Richard Milhous] Nixon the president for some—for some reason [chuckles]. I just remember—

TS: Oh, because he had ran against him.

RG: Yeah.

TS: Sure.

RG: And so—

TS: He gets to take over.

RG: [laughing] I just remember thinking—

[speaking simultaneously]

TS: He just had to wait a little bit longer, I guess.

RG: Anyway. But, you know, that's—I just—I remember everybody was talking about it and all for a while.

TS: Like the whispering about it, but not—yes. Was it—did you do any of the Duck and Cover things in school for—like people had for preparation for, like, a nuclear war-type thing where they would cover their heads with their hands?

RG: I don't remember doing that.

TS: Nothing like that?

RG: I don't remember. There are certain things, you know, that I don't remember, but I don't remember doing that.

TS: Yeah, you might not have.

RG: Yeah.

TS: You might not have. So, when you're—so you're growing up as a little girl out in Trinity, and did you—and you're liking out in nature and outdoor things, and you start to like, you said, biology in high school. Did you have a sense of, like, what you were going to do—what your future might hold for you?

RG: No, I didn't. I remember, you know, when I got to high school, and I decided I wanted to do nursing, and I don't know why I did that, and I don't actually know why I took college prep-type courses, because no one in my family had ever gone to college. And so, I don't know why I did any of that, but I remember my mom wanted me to be a secretary or a teacher, and I didn't want to. And she really, really wanted me to be, and I really, really—I think she thought it was security, you know? And I really, really didn't want to be, and I remember I—you know, I loved languages; French—I was taking French. We didn't have Spanish in my school being in, and I was taking French and I just totally enjoyed the French classes. I just remember when I got to French three—I had signed up for French three and my mom made drop it to take typing two, and I hated everything about typing and shorthand and all that. So, I was so mad. But I did it.

TS: Right.

RG: But anyway, so I don't know how I decided to go into nursing.

TS: No? So—but—so in high school you're taking a college prep, but—so do you know at what point you decided to go towards nursing? Was it sciences, maybe, you were interested in?

RG: I don't know, I mean, because I don't remember sciences actually being my favorite thing. I mean, I always preferred art and literature and things like that.

TS: Yeah.

RG: Although I enjoyed the sciences. And I guess I—like I said, I pretty much enjoyed all of it, but I don't know why I chose nursing and, you know, my high school guidance counselors, I don't think actually they were very good at the time. We didn't have anybody particularly trained in that; they were teachers who were—had that as an additional duty kind of thing.

TS: Right.

RG: But I remember the lady trying to get me to go to East Carolina [University], and I wanted to come to UNCG [University of North Carolina at Greensboro], I think because it was closer to home, and she said, you know, it was a new school—talking about nursing—and East Carolina was a proven school, and that it would be better for me to go there. Anyway—and I just wasn't having it. So, I don't remember. I don't remember being strong-willed, but I didn't let her talk me into going there, and I came to UNCG.

TS: And you were able to go—

RG: And I went into nursing and I'm not—I can't remember why exactly, I just decided to do it.

TS: Well, that's alright. It could have been that the options that you—what other options did you have available to you for any kind of job careers at that time?

RG: Yeah, I don't know. You know, I had started in my—I had started when I was in—I guess when I—my first year in high school or whatever, I had volunteered with the Red Cross, and so then I think it was called candy stripers.

TS: Right.

RG: And so, I did that one year. In fact, I went to Salisbury and they sent me to physical therapy, so I remember helping Ashley[?]. There were Vietnam vets and that kind of thing there that were trying to regain better use of their hands—motor skills, and that kind of thing with their hands and all, and I—I'd volunteered that summer, going—you know, they would drive us back and forth to Salisbury to the VA [Veternan's Administration].

And so I did that, and then the next couple of summers I worked as—you know, as a nurse's aide in High Point at the hospital and then I think Williams Nursing Home and Gregson's Nursing Home, and so that was while I was in—getting into nursing school and when I was in nursing school.

TS: Yeah. When did—When'd you graduate from high school? What year was that?

RG: Seventy-four.

TS: Okay, you graduated from high school in '74?

RG: Is that right? Seventy. Sorry.

TS: Seventy. Okay.

RG: Yeah, '70.

TS: And then college—

RG: Yeah, nursing school was '74.

TS: So then you decided—so you decided somewhere in high school you were going to go to UNCG to nursing school—

RG: Yes.

TS: —and that's where you went. Where did you stay? Did you stay on campus?

RG: The first couple of years I was on campus, and it seems like it was Windsor—Windsor Hall, maybe? One of the times, and I can't remember the other one.

TS: One of the years?

RG: Yes. I may have only stayed part of the year the second year. I ended up getting married when I was a sophomore and so then I lived off campus and drove back and forth—

TS: Oh, okay.

RG: —everyday. But the first year, like I said, I think it was Windsor. I was down on the ground floor, on the corner, where the street curved around right there. So, we would hang out the window and wave and talk to the people as they came by. [chuckles] Anyway, it was fun.

TS: Do you remember any of your professors?

RG: Well, I for sure remember Dean [Eloise R.] Lewis; you know, she was the dean of our school, and I remember her, and—

TS: What do you remember about her?

RG: Just she was a very strong, prideful woman. I remember her telling us stories. I can't—it seemed—I can't remember now if it was—if she had been in the military and told us something about that, or if she just had been in some—like a hospital that she'd been training in or something, and she—I remember her telling us about coming out and in the morning trying to help the guys get ready for—for breakfast and all, having a basin of hot water and washcloths and putting all the washcloths in there and wringing them out and throwing them down the line to the beds [both chuckle], and she would tell us anyway. But I remember that, and it was funny.

I remember Dr. Tetcherow[?], she was my advisor for at least one or two years; Alice, I think her first name was. And I don't remember for sure what she taught, but she was more, kind of, an abstract thinker and a little bit harder to—for me to understand as far as testing and things like that, than some of the others.

TS: Wasn't all black-and-white?

RG: Yes, but I may have—well, actually I may have had her for psychiatry, that kind of thing; that might have been what I had her for. She was working on her doctorate at the time, I think. And I remember—I don't remember the name of the person, but somebody that I had for—for OB [obstetrics]. We had a small—part of my practicum was over at Moses [H.] Cone [Memorial Hospital], and at that time it was a private hospital, and so the OB part of it—obstetrical part, was not real busy at times, and I remember the first delivery that I was in on. I just—I thought they should not have done that to me, but a lady—things were a lot different then, and a lady had—they knew that her baby had already died, and so at that time, you know, they didn't just induce you right away, or whatever. So, she'd carried—had to carry the baby, like, an extra couple of weeks or something, so the delivery room was like a tomb. I mean, it was just—you could have heard a pin drop. It was, you know—there was no—nothing to look forward to and that kind of thing. It was really a sad thing.

And—But I remember not being the first one to jump to raise my hand to respond to every question. And so I got, kind of, in trouble for that. My—One of my OB ladies sent me to psychiatry to be evaluated because I was not assertive enough, and so when I went to him, he said, "I can't believe those women over at that nursing school! You go back; you're fine." [both laugh]

TS: Because you're not raising your hand. Okay.

RG: Anyway—I mean, I got it right and I was making As, you know, but—

TS: But you were still in that shy state, right?

RG: Well, I mean, it was just—say if there were five us in practical and, you know, the ones who were the loudest were going say they wanted to do it when anything came up, and so it was that kind of thing—

TS: Right.

RG: —more. Not that I didn't ever answer, but that—I didn't tackle other people to get to be the first one to answer. [laughs]

TS: So they wanted you evaluated for that. I see.

RG: Anyway, so I went on back and I was fine, but I do remember, you know, one thing that I've always had trouble with is procrastinating, and so I remember when we had papers and things like that I would have trouble trying—you know, trying to get them in—trying to get them done and in on time; that kind of thing.

TS: I don't think that's too unusual. [both laugh]

RG: And one thing I remember being a little bit of a problem in our dorm was that the nurses, the ones who were nursing students, were the only people who had early classes. And we were supposed to be on an honors system, where if people were loud and partying and that kind of thing, you were supposed to be able to ask them to tone it down and they were supposed to do it; you know, they were supposed to be on—kind of on their honor. And so we'd be trying to get ready for eight o'clock morning classes and other people would be loud when we're trying to go to sleep and things like that. And the honor system didn't work to try to ask people to tone it down a little bit; that didn't work, I remember. But—but other than that—

TS: So, it's like the '70s—the early '70s, and what was that—what was the culture like for that period of time? What kind of things were people doing for fun and when they weren't studying?

RG: I—Again, that's something I don't remember a whole lot about because I didn't do a lot of extra-curricular types things and all. I remember one of my friends, who had been very bashful, and took a—I don't remember now if it was like a taekwondo course or some kind of—what's another kind of thing that that's called?

TS: Karate?

RG: Karate; some kind of class like that, and she just totally turned around, and she—I mean, she was—she became very self-possessed and confident and—and, you know, I just remember that and how—how neat that was, and I remember her, kind of, on the days

they had their things on the quad; the—you know, what's—she'd—I think she dressed up as a clown, and she would do things like that.

But I didn't like sports and things like that, so I didn't get any of that kind of thing or anything. I just—I actually was dating somebody at that time, and he went to State [North Carolina State University], so part of my time I would be, you know, trying to get everything done to be sure to get to go home on the weekend to see him, and then—and every now and then, you know, I might get to—we might wrangle a ride to State or him to come down to see me, so.

TS: And then you said you got married when you were a sophomore, right?

RG: Yes.

TS: So, yeah.

RG: And I was married for—well, until 1989, so I was married in '72, so that's seventeen years.

TS: Well, I was going to ask you one thing when you were talking about the—your one friend who, kind of, took the class and was more empowered.

RG: Yes.

TS: But did the women's movement, like, you think, have an effect on the women you were around at that time?

RG: I don't know. That may have had something to do with it. I mean, that might have been what got her interested in taking that, you know, or it might have just been something that was available here at college that she had not had offered to her before.

TS: Right.

RG: I hung around with a girl from Star[?] or Bristow[?] who—her—she was phenomenal in French; I think she was doing a double major, and—but she wanted to sing like Tammy Wynette [American country music singer-songwriter], so we'd—we'd clown around and sing together and that kind of thing, but—so they were always more involved in those kinds of things. My one roommate and I were the only two who were nursing students that we really knew there in the dorm. See, I wasn't really real, real involved in the—in the nursing school, other than the classes, and it may have been because, you know, she and I were the only two that year, and then I lived off campus after that.

TS: Right.

RG: And so everything was, you know, getting home and—

TS: You're coming and going.

RG: That's right.

TS: Yeah, you're commuting and so it's a lot different.

RG: Yes.

TS: Well, at what point then did you—did you join the military after you graduated from UNCG, or did you sign up for anything during your—

RG: No, I'd signed up after. I do remember going to—they had a career day here, and I do remember going to that, and I do remember the air force person was there, but, you know, I was either already married or getting ready to be married at the time, and so I didn't think it applied to me in any way. So once I graduated from here, my ex-husband was a student at State, and he actually had gotten out and worked for a year and then decided he wasn't going to do what he had actually studied at the time, so he went back to school, and so I went to Wright Memorial [?] to work.

And it was right during—there was kind of an economy crunch-type thing during that time, and people were being laid off and they weren't rehiring, and so it was getting harder and harder. I mean, we'd had more and more patients and I just—I remember one night giving fifty pain shots on my shift—that's one eight-hour shift—and it just—we could never finish all our work in a shift and so it would be after the shift is over, trying to write any notes that you needed to write on people, and it just—my boss was like a little Napoleon; she was awful. I mean, I remember her cussing me out one time out in front of everybody for not punching out on time. She had told us to punch out on time, and then write our notes and things, and I wouldn't do it. If I was there and working I was going to be paid for it. And so, you know, I tried to hurry but I wasn't going to do that, and so after she did that I called the wage and earnings people at Raleigh and the hospital was investigated and she went to another hospital. But several people had quit during that time, you know, and it still was hard, so I was just hating nursing.

TS: Right.

RG: And I didn't know if I hated nursing itself or that hospital or what, but I—

TS: Or the people you were working for?

RG: I mean, that was my first year working. I didn't want to do that for the rest of my life, you know?

TS: Right.

RG: And so, I don't remember why exactly, but I decided to check out the air force. The lady who was in charge of North Carolina and South Carolina recruiting for nurses was in—I think she was in Raleigh. She might have been out of—

TS: Winston-Salem?

RG: No, Pope Air Force Base. Anyway, she took me down there. I can't remember if she was from Raleigh, and we just—she just took me there as a base tour—

TS: To look at Pope?

RG: —that kind of thing. But I talked her, and at that time you only had to sign up for two years. When you went in as a second lieutenant and stayed a second lieutenant for six months, then became first lieutenant, and you only actually had to sign up for two years. And so I thought, "I can do anything for two years, and I'm really not liking this, and so I'm going to do it."

TS: Was the pay the same?

RG: No, I actually—actually I would have—even as a second lieutenant I would have been making—I think it probably was about roughly equivalent, but after that six months I would already be making more, and then I would keep going up; as I advanced in rank I would go up. So—so I decided to do that. And, you know, my ex-husband and I, we decided together that I would do that, and Andrew[?]—we decided we'd follow my career for twenty years, then we'd do his career [chuckles], and so I went ahead and worked there, you know, until October when I actually went into the air force, and then—

TS: So, how was that—[unclear] —you know, you're going to have a husband that's going to follow your career. That would have been kind of unusual for that time.

RG: It was—I mean, we talked about it, of course, on and off for years, and it—but I would also—you know, when it was time to move to a different base, they would try to give you some things that might be open or coming open and you could, kind of, give them, like, your top three choices or something like that. And I usually ended up getting somewhere that I—that I—was in my top three choices or whatever. And so, I always asked for something where that would be—well, the first—when I was at San Antonio, at Lackland [Air Force Base], he went to airframe and powerplant school to become a mechanic on airplanes, and then got his private license, and things like that, while we were in San Antonio. And so—so that is—that line of work was what he always wanted to do, and to become a pilot. I mean, his big idea was—I mean, at one point he thought about coming into the air force but his eyesight was so bad at that point in time if you didn't have 20/20 vision when you came in, they wouldn't let you go into the—becoming a pilot, you know.

TS: Right.

RG: And so, I always asked for places that were near some kind of—something where he could get some kind of work in air—

TS: I see, so you were looking for—

[speaking simultaneously]

RG: —in the—in airplanes; that kind of thing.

TS: —an assignment that would also accommodate his work—

RG: Right.

TS: —as well. And you were able to do that for a period of time?

RG: Pretty much. Now, like, when I went to Germany, there was—Ramstein [Air Base] had a—an aero club, but it already had a manager; it already—I mean, he could work part-time as a mechanic there, but it wasn't full-time, you know. And so, he wanted something more than that. So he worked downtown, I think, at the army canteen in something to do with computers for maybe three months or something, and then—then he found something at the German—I think it was at Mainz; a German airfield.

TS: Oh, okay.

RG: Civilian airfield. [unclear]

TS: [unclear] through the—

[unclear—speaking simultaneously]

RG: —mechanic. They had "N" registered aircraft, so they were United States registry aircraft at that field, and he became their mechanic and worked there for a year or something; maybe two. And then the last couple years we were in Germany he became the manager of the air club at Ramstein.

TS: Okay. So he finally was able to get—

RG: Right. The lady who were there PCS'd [Permanent Change of Station] back to the States, and he did that.

TS: That's the thing; there's always a rotation usually, so something will come up. Right. Well, what did your family thing about you joining the air force?

RG: They were proud. Daddy had been in the Marines, and, you know, I look now when my kids are, say, in Texas or in Denver or somewhere like that, and I think about how it must have been for them to have us so far away, like in Germany or Texas or California, and not get to see the grandkids often and that kind of thing. But they were always proud that I had done that, and they were supportive. They were always, you know, real supportive.

TS: Both of your parents?

RG: Yes.

TS: And your friends too?

RG: Yeah. I didn't keep up with a lot of people from here. You know, a couple—three or four friends, probably, but my best friend from high school, who was also my first roommate here at UNCG, she ended up only coming to college for one semester and then started working and didn't come back to college. But she ended up marrying my youngest uncle, so I've always been able to keep up with her. I don't—I'm not a person who has a lot of close friends. And so I, you know—there are a lot of people that I haven't kept up with over the years.

TS: Sure. Sure, and then when, you know, you go off and you're not around where you grew up, it's a lot harder to do that.

RG: Well, and it's—I mean, to come back here, and they'll have a reunion, and they had one very soon after I came back. I got out of the air force and so that was really fun, but I mean, you know, most of them I hadn't seen in twenty years.

TS: Yeah. Well, tell me a little bit, then, about when you went in the air force. Was it what you expected?

RG: I don't know what I expected, but I liked it. I mean, I enjoyed it. The—I remember—you know that two-week training that I told you we had at Shepherd [Air Force Base] for medical people? You know, that's not a whole lot of background for somebody to be an officer. So there may be—have been a little—you know, people who had gone to officers' school—officer training school or things like that, I mean, who'd been there for months, you know, they had a lot more background as—so, I mean, if you think about only two weeks, we barely—you learn the customs and courtesies; who you're—who you

salute to and who has to salute you and all those things, and the very, very basics of how to march and all that.

But, it was—I remember as I went through the military, and many, many years, hearing things like—I would hear comments like people maybe felt they weren't part of the real air force and that kind of thing. And that would always irritate me that—I mean, it was like they thought they were medical and so they weren't part of the real rules and all for the air force and all. And that made me angry. I mean, I always thought we had to do everything we were supposed to do for all of it, you know, and that customs and courtesies were important, and, I mean, in that—in other words, some of them might, say, go out of their way to not go somewhere where you had to be outside, and so you'd have to be saluting people and things like that, and I just always thought those things were silly, and—

TS: I've heard some people say to me that while they're on duty, they really didn't feel like they were part of the military in the medical field, but when they walked outside the hospital or wherever they were working, then they had to put their military, you know, face on or whatever.

RG: Yes.

TS: So that's—that's things you said you saw, but wasn't—didn't set well with you.

RG: Right.

TS: I see.

RG: And when I came in, you know, we had to have a hat on at all times. I mean, we had—we either had on our nursing cap, you know, when we were inside, or as soon as we walked outside we had have on our—either our beret or the service cap. And so that was really interesting. I think finally a few years later, maybe, you didn't have to have on the nursing cap if you were in—

TS: Indoors?

RG: —pants, maybe.

TS: Oh, in pants?

RG: Maybe. That doesn't make sense and I'm not sure that's right, but it seems to me that that might have been—

TS: But there was some combination where you didn't have to have the cap on? Yeah.

RG: Yeah, and finally they got out of that. I mean, people started having little bald spots, you know, from trying to keep their caps on. [both chuckle]

TS: You don't see people wearing caps too much in nursing anymore, do you?

RG: No, you don't, no. And of course our one from UNCG was always fining[?].

TS: You had to wear it?

RG: No, it was—have you seen it? Had you ever seen the actual nursing one from back in the day?

TS: No, I don't think so.

RG: Well, it's a tiny little tricornered thing. It was only about an inch high and it was tricornered, and so the sides were white and the little indentations where it came together was gold.

TS: Okay.

RG: Like a dull gold.

TS: Like at the front and back? Okay.

RG: Yes, and that was the same color; that apron; the over-apron type thing that we had to have with our uniforms was that same dull gold. But it was way different from any other nursing hat I ever saw anywhere.

TS: Did you like it?

RG: It was—I didn't mind it, you know. It was—it was a lot different from when I did go into the air force, and the one that we wore there was like that tall and, you know, your two-fold or—

TS: Krispy Kreme type.

RG: That's right.

TS: Sides—lines, I mean.

RG: Yes.

TS: Okay. Well—So, you're not really sure what drew you to the military, but—like, a little economics, maybe it's a little bit of background, seeing the recruiters at some time, but—

RG: Yes. And, I think, thinking that it would—there would be change. I wouldn't be, like—I mean, if I went out of school here and I went to a hospital here and started working, I mean, somebody might be in the same hospital for thirty years. So I knew that jobs would change in the air force. I mean, I'd probably have a job for, you know, two years or four years or something—

TS: How did you know that?

RG: I just—I knew bases changed. I mean, you know, you got assignments, and so if nothing else you'd go to a new base. And it would—now people—I would not move as often as people who were not married. They generally moved like every two years or something. If we were—if you were married it was more like every three years. But—so I knew I could stand most things for that long.

TS: Where you interested in anything about traveling or some of the other, you know—

RG: I think I thought that would be—I would enjoy that, too, yes.

TS: And you'd had your education so had you thought about any of the benefits from—

RG: Well, I wish I had thought about it before I finished, because back at that point in time, you know, if you—if you signed up to go into the air force they would pay for your schooling. You would get a stipend or something like that. I mean, they paid for your books and a certain amount of your, like—I don't how much it was at the time, but they would pay for you to be here in school, and then you only owed them—I can't remember if you owed them two years for every one year or something once you went in. So if I had ever dreamed I would go into the air force I would have done that, because—

TS: But it came after though.

RG: I mean, because I had student loans, in other words, to pay back, and I was able to put them off because I was in the military, but I had—ten years later I was paying off student loans, you know.

TS: So, they didn't have any kind of system to help forgive that? Because I think they do now for some people.

RG: No, it—I think, if you were in the military the interest was only one percent, or something like that, and you could put it off and start paying it later.

TS: I see.

RG: Or something like that, and I put it off.

TS: Not such a good—

RG: But yes, that would have been—looking back, it would have been smart to do that.

TS: Well, hindsight, it's 20/20.

RG: That's right.

TS: So, you joined in '70—'75?

RG: Yes.

TS: Seventy-five, okay. And had you been—had you gone off away from home before at all? I mean, I know you're married.

RG: Just—I mean, I had cousins who lived in Houston and things like that, so with family we would go visit, like, every other summer or something.

TS: Oh, okay.

RG: We'd go down to Houston to visit my cousins and—or to El Paso to visit them, and you know, to the beach and places like that.

TS: So, you had been out and about?

RG: But not—not lots of other places.

TS: Well, when you went through that two-week training you said it wasn't much, but did you enjoy any of that, like the drill or any of that sort of training that you did? Do you remember?

RG: I don't remember. I mean, I—

TS: Two weeks wasn't much.

RG: I just—I mean, in other words, I didn't hate it, but it was not the most fun thing I'd ever done. But, you know, I mean, it was part of what I had to do to get where I was going, so. [chuckles]

TS: So then you went to Lackland [Air Force Base]; that was your first assignment?

RG: Yes.

TS: How did you like Lackland? What did you do there?

RG: I ended up really enjoying it. I—I remember the first thing they wanted to do was to send me to pediatrics, and that had been one of the two things I never wanted to do.

TS: What was the other one?

RG: The other one was neuro; neurology. I didn't—you know, I could just imagine doing things with people's heads and, you know, how critical everything would be, and that kind of thing, and I just didn't want to see sick kids for pediatrics. That's where they sent me, and I remember going and asking, "Please don't do this to me."

And they said, "You know, we really need you there, and try for like—for six months and if you really hate it—we're not going to promise you anything, but if you really don't like it, we'll try to move you somewhere else."

And I ended up—Lackland is—was the largest air force hospital, it was a thousand-bed hospital, so they had—it was the referral center from all over the world for unusual things; things that were problems and all. And so, we had a lot of things that you didn't see other places, and it was a big teaching hospital. So—And we had a medical side and a surgical side, and so I think they would have you work maybe three months on the medical side, and then three months on the surgical side, and so I think because they did that I ended up loving it.

In other words, on the medical side you might have children that you knew were going to die. I mean, they had—they had severe illnesses that were not curable, and, you know—and you'd get really attached to the children and that kind of thing. But you were there three months and then you were on the surgical side. And on the surgical side I saw how fast kids bounce back from everything. I mean, they'd have open-heart surgery, and they would just be—you know, they would just—I just remember having to convince a child they needed something for pain, and giving them something. They would be up and active and that kind of thing, rather than, in civilian life I had worked on a unit that, where people would be calling me way before it was time for their next pain medicine, and things like that; talking about the adults. And so, it was just so refreshing to see how fast they bounced back and that kind of thing that, I think, because I rotated between those, I just loved it. I really, really enjoyed pediatrics.

And so that, I think, kind of, set part of my whole career. I mean, I went to—I ended up—I decided to have my son, you know, while I was there, and I ended up—when I was having—delivering him and all, the nurse who was the director of my division asked if I wanted to go to the OB/GYN clinic to work, and she had somebody who was retiring there, and so I went out there and took over for that person, and then trained the next person who was coming, you know, once—like a year later, or whatever.

But—so those kinds of things got me heading towards that type of nursing. I mean, I—

TS: Which was something you hadn't considered before?

RG: No, and—but—like when I went to—to Germany I did lots of different things. I mean, I did the emergency room there for a while, but it was not—I mean, we—anything major

we sent to the hospital, you know, seven miles away. We didn't—in other words, it was a clinic. But—And then the OB/GYN clinic, and the family practice clinic; things like that I did there. But then when I came back stateside, that still—they still sent me—they sent me to a unit that was just re-opening in maternal/child. I mean, it was a nursery, post-partum delivery unit. And then from there they did it again, and again, so I kind of stayed in those kinds of things—

TS: For most of your career?

RG: —for the rest of my career, yes.

TS: Oh, and all because you had this different experience than what you expected to.

RG: Yes. So, it was—it was different, and I enjoyed it, and I enjoyed that kind of nursing. I think the thing that I did—well, that I always did that I enjoyed the most was teaching. When I was in Germany they needed somebody to teach childbirth classes, and so I took the Red Cross course and started teaching the childbirth classes and parenting classes and those kinds of things there. And then I did that again, you know, when I came stateside in Florida.

TS: Where did you first start doing it?

RG: In Germany.

TS: In Germany.

RG: I was at the clinic at Ramstein. And—So, I have my Red Cross nurse pin, and, you know, I don't even know—so I have a number, I mean that number's supposed to be yours for your life, so I will have to find my pin sometime—

TS: Yes, there you go.

RG: —and find out what my number is—

TS: That's a good idea.

RG: —for Red Cross nursing.

TS: Yeah.

RG: Yeah. So, in several different places I did that kind of teaching and—well, on one of my last assignments I was in staff development, and so we had—again I was back at Wilford Hall and it was a thousand people in nursing between enlisted and officers, and so ten of

us did the training for all those people, and so I really—that was my favorite thing I think I've ever done.

TS: Was that, like, a full-time job when you were doing that?

RG: Yes.

TS: It would have to be for a thousand people, right?

RG: Well, and the thing's for preparing for the JCHO [JCAHO, Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, now The Joint Commission]—the big inspections for hospitals and all—we did for the whole hospital.

TS: What's JCHO?

RG: Oh, let me think. Joint Commission Accreditation Committee for Hospitals.

TS: Okay.

RG: I think that's what it stands for.

TS: It was an accreditation aspect of it?

RG: Yes. So, those—that was the thing that I had the most fun doing, I think.

TS: Now, how was the housing that you lived in when you were at the—I mean, you can describe it wherever you went. How was housing?

RG: I lived—sometimes—well, like at Wilford Hall I was on base at Medina, which is right off the base, but it was base housing, and it always felt safe, you know, to live in base housing because they were usually gated, and so people couldn't come on base without showing their IDs and things like that.

And so, that was, you know, my first years, and then at Ramstein they didn't—actually I went there for a month and a half or something before my husband and son got to come over. And that was really hard. I mean, I remember—you know, we didn't have cell phones and things back then and I remember having a three-hundred, almost four-hundred dollar phone bill that month that they were here, and when my son got there he didn't come to me if he hurt[?] anything, and I just remember him, like, in the airport, in the stroller, just staring at me the whole time. I mean, he didn't take his eyes off me the whole time, like, "Are you going to leave me again?"

TS: How old was he?

RG: He was eighteen months.

TS: Okay.

RG: I think he was sixteen months when I went over and eighteen months when he got there. And so—and then he just started to kind of trust me again and come to me if he had boo-boos and things like that, and I had to go TY [TDY][?][temporary duty] for a week for some—a conference in Berlin. And so, you know, we had to do the trust thing again. But that—that was—I don't know if I would say stressful, or that was the thing that kind of clutches at your heart, you know, when your child—and I don't know how it would be for parents who were separated from the children for so much longer times during, you know, the different wars and things that have happened that didn't happen to me.

TS: Was it hard to juggle that; motherhood and, you know, the military career?

RG: It was some, and I—you know, because I was always doing things. For instance, at Ramstein I was one of only three nurses. And so, we would have to write all the policies and protocols and things, or—and get our sections ready for inspections and things, and there're always inspections going on. I mean, if they weren't the accrediting-type things, they were the things—the military-type things, you know, the—and so there was something like that going on very often. And they'd be twelve-hour shifts and things like that, and being called in at two o'clock in the morning or something and having to go in. And so, you have to have child care arranged that would accommodate that. And then being on—I was always on an air-transportable hospital, which was like the M*A*S*H unit in the army, where everything had to be ready; you know, your wheels had to be ready, your—your mobility-type papers and things written out and arranged for who would take your child to your family or whatever, to—you know, if you had to leave.

TS: Right.

RG: And so, you know, there was always that kind of uncertainty and all. And—So, it—there were times that it was hard; but in other words, there were always the positive and the negative things about it.

TS: Sure.

RG: I had a fantastic babysitter in Germany that—she and her husband were kind of more like a brother and sister. They—he ended up being in the same squadron—overall squadron, you know. I was medical, but we were both under the same group and so when he would—you know, we would know that when they heard—the babysitter knew if she heard—they would have a truck go through with a bullhorn kind of thing, announcing when the people who lived on base at Ramstein had to go in for recalls and that kind of thing, and so she would know that I would be coming with Christopher, because, I mean, I lived at Beaubaway[?], which was like seven miles or something away, but she would know that he was—he was going to be coming because I was going to be recalled, too, if

her husband was. So, that kind of thing, you know—it was really great when I had somebody like that that I could trust, no matter what time I had to be in or got off or anything, that—that that would work.

TS: Do you think that helped because she was associated—you know, with her husband being in the military?

RG: Definitely.

TS: That helped? She was acclimated to this different hours and things?

RG: Because I had—when I was in Florida, I had—day care was more of a problem then. I had a lady who—she didn't like my son a lot, and I think it was just because she had two girls, and I—so she liked my daughter, and she wouldn't try to correct her, wouldn't make her mind, or anything, because she was all precious and, you know, could do no wrong. But my son, she would have her husband call me at home at night to tell me that my son had peed on the floor; meaning he missed the side of the commode or something. But she didn't have the guts to tell me about it; she'd have her husband call me at home to tell me about it. Things like that. And I just—the last straw was one day when I took my son in the morning to her, and evidently he and her daughter had to walk like a yard away or something to catch the bus, and he must have kept walking, and she called him to come back or something and he didn't and she just let him go. I mean—so I think he walked like another house or two away to that bus stop, but she didn't call me and tell me. I mean, he could have been gone, he could have been kidnapped, he could have been dead, and I wouldn't have known. I didn't find out until that night that that had happened, and that was it. But so, after that, I started taking them to Les Petits[?].

TS: What's that?

RG: It's a day care. It was, at that time, kind of more a Montessori-type day care than a lot of others, but—and they gave you real good feedback on how the kids were doing and all. But that's—I didn't have private ones any more like that after—after that lady. And of course, there were lots of things in the news and all then about day care and people molesting kids and different things like that. I think we're kind of starting about that same time. And so, I ended up having him after that in the—in like—Les Petits; a couple different states, but again, it's not like family but I could trust that they were—they were being disciplined but they were being cared for and were safe, and that kind of thing.

TS: In a professional way?

RG: Yes.

TS: Was there any place in—any place—let's see, you were stationed in Germany at Ramstein, and Tyndall [Air Force Base], Panama City, Florida; that's the place you were just talking about this—where this happened, right?

RG: Yes.

TS: Travis Air Force Base [California], and then you went back to Florida again; Fort Walton Beach—Eglin [Air Force Base].

RG: Yes.

TS: Was that it?

RG: Eglin; E-G-L-I-N.

TS: Eglin, okay—

RG: Yes, that was [unclear]

TS: —air force base, and then back to Lackland [Air Force Base, Texas]. Did you have a favorite place that you were stationed? Either just—Not necessarily work-wise, but you know, for whatever reason.

RG: Well, I enjoyed them all for different reasons, but my favorite was probably Germany, just because—you know, at Ramstein, because it was Germany and you get to see some of the countryside and all. And I didn't take as much advantage of it as some people did, because it seemed like I was always getting ready for an inspection, or else my husband was at the aero-club, or something like that; something was always going on. But we did take a few trips, and you know, get to see several places. We went to Holland and France and—and you know, went to Austria several times, and those kinds of things, so our—Germany was just so beautiful.

TS: And you were in Germany in the late seventies, early eighties?

RG: Yes.

TS: Was it—was there any kind of tension going on then for the Cold War?

RG: Well, what I—you know I mentioned I went to Berlin for that one temporary duty—I mean, a conference, and that was really, kind of, an eerie-type thing. We had to have flag orders, which would allow me to travel from—on the train from, I think, Frankfurt to Berlin and back. And every—I just remember that everything had to be exactly—I mean, to the period right on—and match the passport, and that—in order for you to get to go. And so, my husband got to go with me, and I just—I remember—I remember, for instance, there were a lot of army—it was an army conference and I remember a lot of army nurses being there, and I remember them talking about—it sounded like, to me, a

big difference in the army and the air force at that time. The army—evidently people didn't have to read real well; I mean, your regular foot soldier, your person on the line, you know, guard duty and that kind of thing.

TS: So, the education level in the army as far as in the—

RG: Right.

TS: —compared to the air force was a little different?

RG: Right, and—but they talked about—for—and I don't remember the overall topic of the conference, but they were talking about teaching and about, you know—for instance, teaching somebody about how to care for the feet and not got frostbitten, and that kind of thing. And talking about the difficulty in having—in being able to do that if people—if certain people couldn't read. I just remember being so shocked that anybody could be in the military and not be able to read. You know, it just had never dawned on me that that could be the case. And of course in later, later—much later years, they started having remedial reading training, I know, for the army and they may have—as far as I know that was not a problem in the air force. I mean, they did testing and all before you came in and there was not the same level of it. But that just was one of the main things that struck me then.

And another time I went to Berlin and took my family. My mom and dad came, and brothers and sisters, and we drove my van and there was—I don't remember where it was exactly, but there was Checkpoint Alpha and Checkpoint Bravo, and then Checkpoint Charlie was the one at—between East Berlin and West Berlin. And we had to be—stop at Checkpoint Alpha and get briefings and all, and watch a video, and it told you that you had to do a certain speed limit all the way through there and if you got there too fast then you'd get a ticket, and if you got there too slow they'd investigate you because they'd think you'd taken side trips or something. And so, it was really, kind of, a scary feeling to drive through, you know, that part that was a part of West Germany—

TS: What if you had a flat tire or something?

[speaking simultaneously]

RG: —I mean, East Germany. Yes. And so, then when we got to Checkpoint Bravo, we had to—it was kind of like being debriefed. I mean, they had look at how long you'd taken and all that stuff. And then they—there in Berlin, the person who was the military person, we had to wear our uniform, and we could not wear our name tag because theoretically they could take pictures of you and use it for propaganda or anything if you're name tag was on. But you had to wear the uniform. And you were not supposed to change your money ahead of time; you know, the Deutsche Marks and—into the—I guess the East—

TS: East German currency?

RG: Right. But the rate was so much better other places, so everybody did it anyway, you know. So, if anybody had any money, it had to be the military person because they theoretically couldn't search you or anything like that. So I had some—not a lot, but some money on me, and then the other thing was that people—they stared. I mean, there would be these, I guess, Russian soldiers and—and the East German—I don't know what it was exactly, but I just felt like everywhere we walked when we were there—and you could only be there for, like—say you were going to be there two hours.

TS: Where in particular would you be?

RG: In East Berlin.

TS: Oh, okay. Like at a shop or something?

RG: In the country; Tyrol[?].

TS: Okay.

RG: You had to be back at the Checkpoint Charlie by the—before that time was up—

TS: Okay.

RG: —or you were—there was trouble. [chuckles]

TS: Okay.

RG: And so, I just remember being on tenderhooks the whole time I was there; that at first I was being stared at and I didn't know if I was being stared at because I was an officer or because—and female—

TS: Right.

RG: —or just that they were going to stare at everybody who was military—you know, American, or somehow they knew I had some money [both laugh] or what; it was just—it was just scary.

TS: Yeah?

RG: It was just really—and I just remember, at that point, you know, the wall was still up, and any cars that were there were real—there weren't many at all, first of all, and if there were, they were like little square, ugly—

TS: Like the [unclear], I think they were called?

RG: Well I remember, you know, back in Vietnam, what was it, Citroens, or something like that; the little—kind of square, but a little pointy in front? Well, these were just very tiny and dull; you know, no—no pretty colors or anything like that. And we didn't stay long enough to get to actually go into any of the museums or anything like that over there that I would have liked to have really had more time to do. But anyway, it was really eerie feeling.

And then when I—when we left and came back and came back through Checkpoint—I don't remember now whether it was Bravo or Alpha—but the Russian soldiers were trying to talk to us, and I didn't know what it was about at the time, but it turns out they were trying to trade something, you know. They evidently liked to trade, like, blue jeans or Playboys or—I mean, to get something from that—

[speaking simultaneously]

TS: Little black market.

RG: —for you for like their buttons off their uniform, or things like that. But I didn't know what it was about and I didn't do anything; I was scared to death. And you know—and so, we just got out of there as fast as we could, but it was—it was really eerie feeling.

And going through there was a—I don't remember now what it was called, but there at Checkpoint Charlie was a museum that was about when—you know, when the wall—during the time the wall had been up and people could try to escape, and things like that, and it was—it was just fascinating, and to see, like, a bend in the river and the little—where people had been shot trying to escape, you know, across there, and things like that, it was—it was really—it was really interesting, when the wall came down that—to think of the difference there for people.

TS: Right; when you had been there—

RG: Yes.

TS —it would have been—

RG: Well, and there was—

[speaking simultaneously]

TS: —ten years earlier; more than that?

RG: There was a radio station—I think it was radio—or TV station that was supposed to be there and they called it—I can't remember now if they called it God's Revenge or what it was, but it was a big ball and I guess it was made out of glass, and tall, and when the sun would hit it, it would look like a cross. And they—people would, you know—would always point that out; that, you know—that they didn't want anything to do with God there, but that was—that cross was there all the time when the sun shined.

TS: That's interesting. I haven't heard of that one before.
Well, did you—how were your relations with your—the people that you worked with, like, your superiors and your peers, and did you ever supervise anyone?

RG: Yes, that was probably the thing I liked least. [chuckles]

TS: Which part of that?

RG: The supervising.

TS: Oh really?

RG: Yeah, I don't enjoy having to counsel people and having to write their performance appraisals and things like that, and I had to do that most of my career. So, as far as working and getting along with people and things like that, I always got along with and enjoyed all the people, I think, except—I mean, I had one nurse—chief nurse that I really didn't like, and she didn't like me. And—But out of all that time I think she was really the only one, but I didn't think she was professional.

TS: In what way?

RG: And—she would—it was at the—I just won't name places and things.

TS: That's fine. I understand that you're [unclear].

RG: [both laugh] She might even be dead now; I don't know. But it was, you know, one of the places that I was saying that we had re-opened—were re-opening the unit for obstetrical, that kind of thing.

TS: Right.

RG: And I just—I remember one thing she would do was try to trap me in my office and smoke in there. In other words, get between me and the door, and smoke.

TS: Why?

RG: And—I don't know. I think because she could. I don't know, I just—First of all, I think it's highly insulting to go anywhere and smoke in somebody's office. I mean, it's different if you're smoking in your office and they come to you and they can leave if they want to or not. But to come to my office and smoke in my office when you know I don't smoke, to me, is the height of arrogance and just—

TS: Rudeness.

RG: It's unnecessary. That's right. And so that's one thing she would do. But she would—she come up there to the unit, and I remember one day her standing outside the—the nursery windows looking in and talking—I had this female sergeant and she said, "Look at her. She's just fat. She's got to lose—you know, she's on that weight program," and things like that. But this was—

TS: Who was she talking about, the sergeant?

RG: One of—yes, one of my enlisted people who were in there—in there working. And it was out in the hall; I mean, other people could hear her. You know, that's not professional. If you're going to talk to somebody, you know, you go into a closed room and you talk to them with the door shut. You don't do something like that out there in front of people. And just similar things to that; just a lot of things like that that were just—I just didn't consider professional, and I think the things like—I think she could sense it when I was irritated about the things like being trapped in smoke and things like that. I mean, because to me, you know you don't have staff meetings and things like that and smoke there. Because—

TS: Not everybody smokes.

RG: No, and of course, in later, later, years, they stopped having smoking.

TS: There was certainly a lot of smoking going on though, I remember, in the eighties.

RG: Well, that's right. Well, you know what part of that was? The—I found out—I think I found out from my son. He went through basic and they only got to take a break if they smoked.

TS: In basic training?

RG: In basic training. They—everybody else had to stand there, kind of, semi-attention or whatever, but if you smoked you got to fall out for ten minutes and smoke. So many, many people smoked. And another thing about the military that was wrong, and they later corrected, but at squadron parties and things like that they would provide a keg, but not sodas and things like that. And so eventually that stopped too, you know, but—

TS: So you think that promoted, like, alcoholism?

RG: Well, I mean, I just think—right, and I mean there's not an alternative. I mean, you either have to bring your own sodas or whatever.

TS: Or you don't drink anything.

RG: Or—yes, or water. So, that was just sending the wrong message. And another one was that, I felt like people could be—not officers so much, but enlisted people could always be rehabilitated for drugs and that kind of thing, and not as much officers. I think they would tend to kick officers out more if they found out something like that. But I felt like they almost thought that was not as bad as being overweight. I was always really close to the weight limit, or on the weight program, and—not always; I'm talking about in my later years after I had my two kids and stuff.

TS: Sure.

RG: And, I mean, I remember one time when I was getting ready to leave Ramstein—actually the first sergeant let me know that I was going to be weighed on Monday. My whole stairwell was having a going away party for us, a barbecue kind of thing, and he let me know on Friday before I left that I was going to be weighed on Monday morning. So I'm all crying and things because I can't eat that weekend and stuff, you know, and having—anyway, things like that. But for being ten pounds overweight you could get kicked out of the air force, and somebody on alcohol—an alcoholic would be rehabilitated. I just felt like that was kind of skewed. I mean, if I was still able to meet my yearly annual requirements for physical ed-type testing and all—

TS: But you have somebody else who's in some cases breaking the law with the drugs and things like that.

RG: Anyway. Yes. So, those were just some of the things that I feel were a little skewed.

TS: Did you feel like you were treated pretty fairly throughout your career or not? Were there instances?

RG: I did. Now, that—well, like I said, that one chief nurse was—she actually wrote NOPR[?], which is a performance appraisal kind of thing, and said something—they were very inflated at the time, so I don't remember if she actually said something negative or if the way she worded it was just not quite good enough. But she was trying to make sure it didn't go for a general's endorsement, and—but luckily the person who had taken over as commander of the hospital was actually one of the obstetricians, so he worked with me all the time and he knew me, and he knew how I worked and all. So, he, kind of, made a comment that kind of negated what she said, and sent it for the general's

endorsement. But, I mean, that might have made me not go further than major. You know, I don't know.

The other thing, you make some personal choices as far as air command and staff and things like that, and I didn't go do that in residence, which is more military training. But by that time in—for instance, when I got divorced I got a letter from the—I don't remember now if it was the base commander or the hospital commander—about dropping my membership at the officers' club. And I—

TS: You mean that you did drop it?

RG: Right.

TS: Okay.

RG: And I sent them a letter and told them, you know, it was really more important to me at the time to pay my bills than—than to be a member. So, a couple of things like that—

TS: So, that's why—

RG: —is why I didn't go past major.

TS: So, the politics of social [unclear] to do with that; getting promoted; things like that.

[speaking simultaneously]

RG: Lot of politics.

TS: Especially for officers?

RG: A lot of politics, yes.

TS: Going to the right party and meeting the right people and being on the right—having to—what do they call that, checking your things off?

RG: That's right.

TS: What is that called? The list of things—like, you said the education things—

RG: I know what you're talking about; the air command and staff, and—

TS: Yeah.

RG: —the different things like that, yes.

TS: So that if you didn't—

RG: I mean, I went to one thing in residence where I was there, like, six weeks, one time at Shepherd. But—So, I did some of them, but once I was divorced and I had my two kids and I got a lot of the bills—when we split up, you know, my ex-husband had—

TS: You had responsibilities.

RG: —kind of, quit his job and become a student and—

[unclear—speaking simultaneously]

TS: Made it look like there wasn't a lot of income coming in.

RG: Right.

TS: I see.

RG: So, I got a lot of the bills, and that kind of thing, and so I just—I mean, I dropped—I didn't get the newspaper, I didn't magazines, you know, I mean, I just started paying off bills and things like that, so—so I made my choices and I was happy with what I did, and I was fine with being a major—

TS: So do you think it's—

RG: —and not going further.

TS: But it's interesting how you talk about that. I mean, because there's different career paths that you can have within a career, right?

RG: Yes.

TS: And you can be the go-getter that wants to get promoted as high up the line and follow that route.

RG: Right.

TS: Or you can follow different routes to just stay in the job you're in. Like you say, you liked the job you did with pediatrics and if you had maybe gone to maybe different fields

and things like that, you would have checked off different things on that list that—is that true?

RG: That's true.

TS: Yeah. But did you feel like you had some semblance of control over your choices and careers that you—that you made while you were in?

RG: Yes.

TS: Yeah?

RG: Because, you know, I remember, for instance, being at a—I came—I went over to—Randolph Air Force Base [Texas] was where personnel was for all of air force in the whole—for all of air force.

TS: Right.

RG: And I went over there one day to review my records, and I was in the office reviewing my records and I heard somebody say my name over a couple of offices away—not offices, but, you know, cubicles away.

TS: Right.

RG: And so, it was time for me to PCS, or to go to another assignment. And they—let's see. I was supposed to be going to Spain, so that's why I was there to review my records, it was right before—in fact, I think the movers were coming, like, on Monday, and this was like the Thursday or Friday before, and I was there reviewing my records. And I heard them mention me and so—

TS: They're talking about you, not talking to you?

RG: Right.

TS: Okay.

RG: But we—and assignments. And so—and at that point in time people had told me how great Spain would be; that, you know, you can travel, you can do all this stuff. Well really, later I found it was kind of down there—it's a little hard to get out from there to travel, but—so what it turned out they were asking—talking about, was the assignment that was coming up in Germany. And so, they asked me right there did I want to go to Germany instead of Spain, and I talked—I told them, you know, I'd call them back, like, the next day or whatever. Anyway, I—or I'd call my husband or something. Anyway, I said, "How about this?" and we just said, "Yes, we'll do that." So, everything had to be going from my whole household goods were going to Spain to like twenty-three hundred

pounds or something to go to Germany over that weekend, you know. I mean, we had to change—

TS: You had to change everything?

RG: Yes, everything.

TS: Oh my gosh.

RG: And so—

TS: Like that [snaps fingers].

RG: Yes.

TS: Wow.

RG: But things like that, kind of, happened. I felt like—

TS: Interesting.

RG: I mean—and I did get assignments that we could find something at—you know, for my husband to do, and I did mainly want to stay, kind of, in the Southern tier, not the North and that kind of thing, and so I got—

TS: There's trade-offs.

RG: That's right.

TS: Yeah. Well, what about serving in the air force as a woman during this time? Did you see any changes over time?

RG: The—Some of the main changes that I—you know, that I remember, one is before I had come in, anybody who got pregnant was automatically kicked out of the air force. By the time I came in and by—I was in for a couple of years or so before we decided to have my son. At that point in time, you had to apply to get out, and you may or may not be accepted to get out. And so, I mean, I remember hearing tales of somebody actually having been catheterized and having somebody else's urine put in in order to try to get out, that wanted to get out at that point in time; I mean, things like that. But I wanted to stay in and—and I did. But I mean—so that was one big change that happened just right about the time that I went in. And then later on I didn't—I didn't ever have things happen like harassment or anything like that.

TS: Sexual harassment?

RG: Right. I don't think—I don't know if that's because of who I worked with, or, you know, you send out certain vibes of disinterest. It's just like, you know, once I was divorced I decided I wasn't dating anybody because I didn't want my kids to have to deal with lots of different people. And I knew I wanted to come back to North Carolina. I mean, I didn't want anything to stop that. I didn't want us to end up in some other part of the world. My family was here and I was coming back to North Carolina. So I really didn't date or anything because I just didn't want to lose sight of coming back here, you know, or getting my mind changed.

TS: Right.

RG: So—so I didn't send out those signs that I was interested in—I mean, you know—I mean, I remember being asked, you know, for a date or something and not, but—in other words, some people can show they're more interested than others, and I'm not saying that people who are harassed deserve to be harassed or anything like that, but I'm saying—

TS: No, but they're more open to people talking to them about—along those lines of—

RG: Yes, and so I never had that problem, anywhere.

TS: Did you have—I'm curious—this is maybe a [unclear] question, but when you close that door, right, a little bit, did you have any—because of the—not even "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," but, like, the anti-homosexual thing. Did anybody ever accuse you of that because you said, "No," or anything like that?

RG: No, no, because—actually, I think, you know, the persons that I'm actually remembering that asked me that were not even military.

TS: Oh, somebody did though ask you?

RG: Yes.

TS: But they weren't in the military?

RG: No, like—say, maybe somewhere that I moved and it was somebody doing the cable or something like that, you know, but—so—

TS: Because you're [unclear].

RG: I don't ever have that kind of—because I don't think I sent out that vibe either.

TS: Right, right.

RG: But—And that is an interesting topic, though, because I did have people that were friends that I think, looking back, you know, were homosexual, but never—as far as I know, never got kicked out because of it. Never—

TS: Never talked to you about it openly?

RG: No, no. And never—I don't know that anything ever happened, you know, but—

TS: What do you think about that whole, I guess, issue?

RG: At the time I just remember thinking it's just one of the rules. I mean, you know, the rule is, like, my hair can't be longer than touching the top of my uniform collar. If my hair can't be further out here—like, if you take a credit card—it was back in the time of 'fros [Afros, hairstyle popular during the 1960s and 1970s]. If you take a credit card and hold it here at your ear, it can't be further out than the credit card. I mean, they had rules, and when I signed up for it I knew what the rules were. And so, I felt like that was the rule as far as homosexuality and that kind of thing went. I mean, it was a rule. If the rule was in place when you came in and you signed up for it, you agreed to it. And if not, you don't stay in. But, I mean—so at that point in time, that's what I thought about it; that the rules were kind of already in place.

TS: Right. Did—

RG: And [unclear] we knew that.

TS: Did that feeling change over time?

RG: I don't think that does. I mean, in other words, maybe the rules shouldn't be there, and maybe the rule should be changed, but if it's a rule that's already there when you sign up for it, then I felt like you know what you're in for, and you signed up for that. But maybe the rules weren't the right rules to begin with. I don't know. I think they felt there would be lots of problems that—

TS: With the repeal?

RG: —that they would have to deal with that—well, I mean, that if there was a lot of homosexuality there would be lots of problems that they wouldn't have to deal with otherwise.

TS: Yeah.

RG: I mean, I don't—who knows why they made the rules, but— [both chuckle]

TS: Well, it seems like there might be some problems with heterosexuality, with the sexual harassment and things like that too.

RG: Right, that's true. No matter how you go, there's going to be.

TS: Well did you—so you said you didn't really—you didn't have that kind of sexual harassment from any direction.

RG: Right.

TS: But did you—did you know of any women that were subject to that?

RG: I don't really know of any. If I had seen it happening, I would have stopped it. I mean, I would have told them that's—I mean, I remember doing that and I don't even remember if it was military. It might have been since I've been out of the military that I've told people that they're not allowed to make comments like that in the workplace. So if I had seen it happening, I would have made kind of that comment.

TS: Right away.

RG: And I would have reported it if it continued to happen. So, I don't—I don't remember that kind of thing happening where I saw it.

TS: Yeah? What about, like, post-traumatic stress disorder? Did you ever see any of that?

RG: I don't—I didn't, that I know of. And it may have been because I was in maternal-child so much.

TS: Right, right, so you're not—you're not—you're caring less for soldiers and airmen, than children.

RG: Yeah.

TS: Yeah, that's true; that makes a good point.

RG: I mean—now, since I've gotten out of the air force, you know, I've been in behavioral health for the last sixteen years, so of course I've seen some kind—some of that kind of thing.

TS: Since you were out?

RG: Since I've been out of the air force. But, in looking back, I don't remember seeing any of that while I was actually in.

TS: You had mentioned the one chief nurse that you weren't—maybe not in your top ten, but did you have any mentors that you really respected and appreciated during the time you were in?

RG: I had—one of my—I think I enjoyed all of them for different reasons, other than—you know, I had one—first one when I actually originally went to Germany, she was a very good and efficient person but she played favorites. Which I didn't think was right. And, in other words, there was one sergeant, and it was professional, I mean, and I'm not saying it wasn't, as far—I don't mean she—I don't mean she—you know, there was any kind of sexual-type favoritism or anything like that, I just mean I think she was a little bit of a brown-noser, so she would ask him to do things, and he would get the extra praise for doing things, and things like that.

TS: I see.

RG: So, I determined then I wanted to be fair to everybody and treat everybody equally and not have favorites. And so, you know—so other than that, she was excellent, and I don't think she would have ever in a hundred years have thought that she was doing that, you know, but it was obvious.

And then the next chief nurse that I had there, she was probably, actually my favorite as far as just really good and professional but personable and would bring you along and teaching you things, you know, so I really liked her. I had another one that I didn't particularly like at—probably my—like, my next-to-last assignment, but she was very good at what she did, but I didn't like the way she did it. We were so totally opposite, and, you know, I'm a person when I go to a new job, you know, I want to, kind of, look and see how things are done and see how things work. I really like to see how different people do different things and which way works best, but she had very strong opinions about everything and so her way was right about everything. So when she came in and I oriented her and she took over for me, everything was like changed immediately, you know, I mean before I could even get out of there, you know, so that was hard to deal with—

TS: Sure.

RG: —you know, in a way.

TS: Everything you're leaving behind is being changed, that's really a difficult place to—

RG: Yes. But, you know—but she was very type-A, you know, and I don't even—I don't know how to explain it. I'm a little more laid back, and—but anyway, so that was a little bit hard, but other than that, I—well, I actually—my last boss was a real perfectionist, and very strict on timelines, and I told you I'm a little bit of a procrastinator, so we—I had to work very hard to make sure I met all the deadlines and things with her. But other

than that, I mean, we worked very well together, it just—I had to change, kind of, who I was in some ways for us to be able to work well together.

TS: But you recognized that you had to do that, too. That's interesting, yes.

RG: Yes. And you know—so it was—

TS: Well, did you find this—I think you had said earlier how you were are that when you went in that you wouldn't have to, like, be in the same place.

RG: Yes.

TS: Did that help, then, knowing that you were going to be leaving if you had a situation where, you know, maybe someone was more difficult to deal with than somebody else, that you're like, "Well, I only have to deal with them for another ten months and I'm out of here."

RG: Yes.

TS: Did that help?

RG: It was great. I really enjoyed that. You know, just knowing—and sometimes at a place, you know, they may change your job in-house, too. I mean, it wasn't even necessarily that you were going to be doing the same thing the whole time that you were assigned at that base, or anything. So I did really enjoy that.

TS: And did you feel like the air force challenged you in your job?

RG: I did. And the air force was ahead a lot of times. For instance, in—I mean, back from the very beginning, as I remember, we had to have a certain amount of continuing education credits per year, and that kind of thing, which, you know, North Carolina didn't start doing until not that many years ago. But we always had to—in fact, I think we had to have thirty continuing education contact hours per year—per year in the air force, I mean, from the time I went in practically. And that was like there priority; in other words, if they required you to do it, they sent you to it.

TS: Right.

RG: I mean, it could be something at your own base sometimes, or it could be something somewhere else, but they made sure you got to do it.

TS: What's that correspondence courses things? Could you do it that way, too, or did you have to—

RG: There weren't as many of those then, I don't think, but, I mean, we could have.

TS: I mean, now you have online—

RG: Right.

TS: —but you didn't have that, of course, then.

RG: Right. But—So, that was—I felt like in a lot of things, you know, they were ahead. Like, for instance, when I was at Wilford Hall working the pediatrics and all there, the guy who developed the—it was called the baby bird—but they had—they had respirators already for adults, but they didn't have them for neonates, and the guy who developed the one for neonates was stationed there at Wilford Hall with me—I mean, he was one of the doctors I worked with. And so, I always felt like they were ahead of the time.

TS: Cutting edge?

RG: Oh, yeah. I mean, for instance, when I got out of the air force back in 1995, we'd already been using computers for charting at probably at least two bases. And the doctors were already putting in the prescriptions and all in the computer at that point in time. And, I mean, that's just started happening the last four or five years, for instance, at the hospital in High Point[?]. I mean, and we're still not to the point that doctors are putting in their prescriptions yet.

TS: So, like fifteen years later; twenty, maybe, even. Yes.

RG: Yes. I mean, just way, way different.

TS: Is that, do you think, because the military has to be more efficient in some ways?

RG: That could be part of it, and then back in the day there was probably more money, you know. I mean now, as time goes along, you know, they're cutting the military budget, cutting the budget, cutting the budget; that kind of thing. And back then maybe there was more money than there was in—

TS: To be able to try these new things?

RG: Yes. [unclear] I don't know.

TS: That's an interesting point. That—that—I can see how that would be. Now, did you get any special award or decoration that you're especially proud of?

RG: This is awful, but I don't remember. I remember I got my marksmanship ribbon. [laughs]

TS: That's something to be proud of, no doubt!

RG: And I think I got—I think I got that a couple of times, and the commendation medal, and I think I had maybe three ugly busters[?] for that. I don't remember what else.

TS: Well, that's alright. Well, did you—

RG: I'd have to look at the ribbons and try to remember.

[speaking simultaneously]

TS: Yeah, look at your DD [Form] 214.

[DD Form 214 is a document of the United States Department of Defense, issued upon a military service member's retirement, separation, or discharge from active-duty military]

RG: Yes.

TS: Well, did you have—do you have any particular memorable experience from the air force that you'd like to share? Either, like, work or something that you got to do that was neat?

RG: One thing that we did that I really enjoyed at the time, I mentioned the air-transportable hospital when I was assigned in Germany, but we tested the hard-sided and the soft-sided—they were, kind of, like a Quonset hut kind of thing going—

TS: Right.

RG: —thing for their air-transportable hospital, and, I mean—well, at one point we went—changed up our unit from a twelve-bed to a twenty-four-bed air-transportable hospital, so—making sure all the supplies were there and things like that and all to update it to—you know, to a larger one, but then that— testing that as a—the hard-sided unit and the soft-sided unit, and then we did something and it was testing it for whether or not it could keep out gases and things like that.

TS: Oh, okay.

RG: You know, something about—for NATO[?] [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. You know, in other words, we did several testing like that. Now, before I got there they had deployed to Norway and things like that, and we didn't do any of that while I was there, but we did it, you know, at Landstuhl, or there at Ramstein, or—and we ended up—the last couple of years I was there, we'd have to set up their transportable hospital so often, and they would bus the poor—the poor people from sick call out there. I mean, they had

to go from Ramstein to Landstuhl, or wherever we were in the air-transportable hospital, for us to see sick call and then take them back there. [laughs]

TS: That's the joy of being in the military, isn't it? [both laugh]

RG: That's right.

TS: Feeling good today? We got a job for you.

RG: And so—anyway, so we saw sick call, you know, for—but anyway—so I enjoyed those kind of things. I mean—and we had times, you know, when we had to—you know, certain people would be assigned to, you know, guard all the tents and everything at night; like, two people on there while—while everybody else got to home for the night and things like that, but I kind of enjoyed doing the different things like that.

TS: Yeah? Did you—were you part of the [Exercise] Reforger at all, when they had the return of forces to Germany where then they had the different training exercises?

[Exercise Reforger was an annual exercise conducted by NATO that was intended to ensure they had the ability to quickly deploy forces to West Germany in the event of a conflict with the Warsaw Pact]

RG: No.

TS: No? Might not have made it—

RG: We had exercises—like I said, when I first got to Germany, they had not done well on some inspection, not very long before I got there, and so about every, almost—it seemed like once a month, we'd have recalls, and we'd have times when we had to put on our gas masks in the clinic and, like, you get down under desks and things like that, and so there were lots of twelve-hour shifts and putting on those unless you were in direct—seeing a patient right at that moment, and things like that, so. And then as we did better and better on inspections and things they, kind of, you know, went further apart to maybe finally they were only once every three months or something like that.

TS: Instead of more common and things like that, yeah. Was there anything in particular that was difficult for you to do in the air force; physically or emotionally?

RG: There towards the end the main—the main thing was the physical—phys. ed. kind of things, I mean, where you have to either run or walk. It was almost impossible to walk the—I think you had to walk five miles or run one mile, I can't remember for sure, but it was almost impossible to do the walking one in the amount of time you had to do it in. Whereas, you know, the run—but I didn't ever want to run, I mean, I just—my knees are

not built for running, and so—but—so anyway, those kinds of things toward the latter time that I was in there were a little bit harder for me to do, but—but other than that, there wasn't anything.

TS: As far as working on your job and things like that?

RG: No.

TS: Did you have any particular heroes at that time? [President Ronald Wilson] Reagan would have been president before [President James Earl "Jimmy"] Carter then Reagan then [President George H. W.] Bush and then [President William Jefferson "Bill"] Clinton. You were in for a little bit of all of those.

RG: Well, I didn't particularly like Clinton and I remember being disappointed that his was the name on my thing when I retired. [laughs]

TS: Oh, is that right?

RG: I think that's right, but—

TS: Well, were any of the presidents—did you—so you were there during the Gulf War, for the first George Bush. What did you think of that?

RG: Well, actually, that turned some things in my life, actually, because of—we—I was at—I think I was stationed at Eglin [Air Force Base] and two enlisted women in our—in medical squadron had become Girl Scout leaders during that year and they were—my daughter and the lady across the street from me—they were our Girl Scout—our daughters' leaders, and they got sent—got deployed. And so—so, my next door neighbor and I became the Girl Scout leaders, you know, because they left.

TS: To replace them?

RG: Right. So, I was put on twelve-hour shifts and I, again, was part of the air-transportable hospital, but they actually called up more of the reservists who actually were assigned there at the base, who actually were deployed, then us. So I didn't go, but I was on the twelve-hour shifts and all. And—But I ended up becoming Girl Scout leader and taking the training and things because of that happening. So forever after, after that, you know, I was a Girl Scout leader in one of my—so I don't know if I would have done that, had that no happened.

TS: Had that not happened.

RG: So it—yeah.

TS: So, you came back into Girl Scouts, then, after all these years.

RG: Yes, that's right. And that was fun.

TS: What—Did you have any—did your duties change during the Desert Storm and those—that time?

RG: Well, we always had to get, you know, all the immunizations and things like that, and again, the [unclear] and the—you know, making sure—and by that time, I was divorced and so I had to have it set up where I had somebody arranged—you know, somebody there—

TS: For your children?

RG: —arranged that would get my children to my family.

TS: And how old were they then?

RG: They were—I think my daughter was probably—well, that would have been what—I can't think what year it was.

TS: Ninety, ninety-one?

RG: So, she would have been ten.

TS: Oh, okay.

RG: And my son would have been thirteen. So—and I don't remember what your question was.

TS: Oh, just—I was just wondering, like—so you had talked before about how you had to make sure you had to make plans for your children if you were deployed.

RG: Right.

TS: And so at this time you were—was it difficult to make those plans?

RG: No, I just—I had somebody that I had given a power of attorney and all to, to have them, you know, for hours until my parents could get there.

TS: I see.

RG: Or my ex-husband.

TS: So, you had somebody to get there temporarily, and then—

[speaking simultaneously]

RG: Or something like that. Yes.

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

RG: And I had—you know, we talked about base housing and all. I lived in base housing then also, and that was really good that—because I lived half a mile from the hospital, not even that, and so—and we had next door neighbors across the street that had kids, you know, my daughters' age and that kind of thing, that I knew that—they knew they could call me if they had a problem and I could be there quickly if there was a problem. And so, it just—it was a really safe feeling, and they could be out and ride bicycles and things, and not be afraid that something was going to happen to them and all. So that was really, you know—relieved stress.

TS: Right, good—and nice to have a support system like that too. Did it feel like that? Because a lot of times people say the military's like a family. Did it seem like it?

RG: It is in a lot of ways. It's a—I mean, it's a lot different, you know. You have—there's always, you know, a gym, and there's an arts-and-crafts type center, there's usually a movie theater or the base exchange or, like, a department store, and the place for shopping for food, and—you know, there all those things on base. Plus, you know, you may—you're almost always going to run into somebody that you've been assigned—you know, at another base.

I had—for instance, when I went to Germany, not real long after I was there, I met a couple. You know I talked about working on pediatrics and the medical side, and their daughter was one of the ones that I took care of that—she had cerebral palsy and paralysis and a lot of problems; was in and out of the hospital fairly often. And she died while I was in the hospital having my son. And, you know, I remember her parents coming to see me and they were looking for good homes for her—her little stuffed animals, because she always had—like, she had a little koala bear who guarded her IV [intravenous] pole and different things like that. And they brought me the koala bear for—you know, for my son. And when I got to Germany, I was over at the little pizza place eating pizza one day, and there came, you know, the dad and mom, and they ended up—you know, when you get there you got to find a car, and things like that, so they ended up buying—buying a car from me that I'd had just, you know, until my car could get there from the States and things. So that—going from base to base and running into somebody, you know, you knew before, that was always nice.

TS: Yeah.

RG: And it was—it is community-like. It is very different, you know, when—like even now, I've lived where I live for sixteen years, and I have talked to the neighbor on one side two or three times, and the neighbor across the street, you now, just a few times, but I don't know any of them, really, except to wave at or something.

TS: Right.

RG: And I would have known the people in the air force a little bit more.

TS: Yeah.

RG: Yah.

TS: It's not as isolating, I guess, in some sense, yeah.

RG: Well, and when you're away, and you don't have family and you don't have friends and all, you know, you tend to—you know, to be a little more open and talk to people more.

TS: Right; lean on them.

RG: Learn a little more about them and things.

TS: Yeah. Well, did you—there's a couple of things here that I was going to—kind of skipped over, but do you remember when Ronald Reagan was shot?

RG: I remember it. I don't remember, you know, what I was doing and things like that—

TS: No?

RG: —like I did—

TS: No? Not like with JFK; stuff like that? What about the Challenger explosion?

RG: I remember that. I think—What year was that?

TS: Eighty-six. So, you would have been—

RG: I'm trying to remember if I was still down in Florida.

TS: Yeah, it looks like you might have been in Florida or gone to—going to California; somewhere in there.

RG: I left—I went to California in July.

TS: I think that was in the spring of—

RG: So, I think I was still in Florida then.

TS: Yeah.

RG: And we had been down to Cape Canaveral and, you know, seen where they launched the space shuttles from and everything—

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

[speaking simultaneously]

RG: —one of the times while we were down there. And so, I remember that being pretty devastating.

TS: Well, you had—when we first started talking you said, "Well, you know, I tried this air force thing for a couple of years." And at what point did you decide that maybe you might make it longer than a couple years?

RG: I just—Well, I could have applied to get out at different times, and I went career reserve. I mentioned I didn't make regular. Regular would have meant I could have stayed for longer than twenty years. I think the most you can stay then is until thirty years or something. But career reserve can stay till twenty years. And—But you have to be selected for that, too, and so I did become career reserve and sign up to do that. And so that, you know—I mean, I knew at that point that I could stay as long as twenty years. And I just—I just continued to like it and I continued to like that it changed every few years and that I knew, you know, even if I didn't particularly like something a lot, it would be over eventually, you know. I enjoyed that.

TS: [chuckling] Yeah?

RG: You know, and I—in nursing now, in my hospital for instance, I see people get really upset if they have more than one preceptor, meaning somebody who's going to orient them and show them—you know, say on one unit they have a person who is their preceptor, who teaches, who orients them to that—to the shift and to the duties and things like that. I never liked having only one preceptor, because I only got to see one way and that's just their opinion. I don't know if they're doing it the right way.

TS: Okay.

RG: You know? I like to have different people see different ways and then choose my way; how I thought it was—

TS: How it fits best for you.

RG: —most efficient and all. And so, that's something that now they consider that they've been done wrong if they more than one preceptor, and I mean, I hear in staff development them thinking that it's bad if—and I think they're thinking continuity, certain things could be forgotten or missed or, you know, lost along the wayside or something if they don't have one person that's being sure that everything gets done. I mean, you know, so there's positives and negatives to both, but I kind of like—felt like that about the air force, too. I enjoyed seeing different things and doing different things and not doing the same thing all the time.

TS: Yeah. Well, that makes sense too. Well—so then, why did you decide to leave? Was that because your twenty years was up?

RG: My twenty years were up. And actually, I was ready by that time. My—You know, my kids were—my son was just graduating high school, and my daughter was just going into high school, and so she was hoping to get somewhere and do all her high school years at the same place, and not be having—it bothered them a little bit more in our latter years having to move—

TS: The moves?

RG: —and change friends.

TS: Making new friends, sure.

RG: I mean, it had never bothered them when they were young, but in the high school years it had started. Like my son had quit school, and immediately he went and got his GED [General Education Development], but he just had—when I first got to the—to that base, you now, it had looked like we were going to get to move on base, like, right away and so I got him in the schools on base. And then I found out—well, we'd not move in two months, and so I went ahead and bought a house off base. And so—and I made sure I got in the part of town that had the good schools, and things like that. But when he started going there, he hated it. I mean, he had friends on base, and we were close enough that he could get back to base on weekends. I mean, he could catch a bus and go there if he had to or I could take him, or whatever, you know. But he didn't have to go ahead and try to make friends at the other place. And I guess they were real cliquish and that kind of thing, and so he hated it and he quit. I mean, I went through the court system having to get counseling and things because he—and there they considered you had—if you had to

sit through classes with your child for that day, that was your responsibility rather than your job.

TS: Where was that at?

RG: To make sure your kid—San Antonio.

TS: Okay.

RG: To make sure your—in other words, if you just dropped your child off at the door—front door, he could have gone on through the back door. And so, it was your responsibility to be there with your child if you had to. So anyway, we went through all these things for Christopher[?] for his school. [laughing]

TS: Oh my.

RG: But anyway, he did finish; he did. And then later went back and here finished the high school thing; you know, through in off and on, because he realized he wasn't going to get anywhere without doing that, but, you know at the time you can't tell—

[speaking simultaneously]

TS: But at the time it's all about friends, right?

RG: That's right, that's right. So, that became more important, and so it was a good time for me to get out.

TS: Well, was it—did you have any difficulty in adjusting to the civilian life, either, like, work-wise or otherwise?

RG: No, I don't think so. I didn't. I mean, I was from this area, you know, and I—I first went to work at a labor and delivery—childbirth [unclear], and I ended up that not being a good fit. The phenomenal amount of things you had to do every fifteen minutes when somebody was in the act of labor, I just didn't—I just couldn't seem to get it done and take care of the person at the same time; you know, all the charting and all that stuff.

TS: Right.

RG: And so, we had to decided that I was not smiling as much as when I got there [both chuckle] and they were used to me smiling all the time. So, I ended up switching and going to behavioral health, and I enjoyed that.

TS: You enjoyed that, yeah. Well, did you ever consider yourself a trailblazer at all, at the time you were in, because there weren't that many women in the military, you know, in the seventies?

RG: Yes. I don't remember thinking of it in that terms exactly, but I mean, I did enjoy it, and I mean, I was aware there weren't lots of women doing it at the time, and so—and I enjoyed that.

TS: Yeah. Do you think there's any like—now, like we were talking about before, like, women couldn't even be in if they were pregnant. Now you've got women flying jets, and they're going to put them on submarines. Do you think there's anything—any kind of restrictions there should be for what women can do in the military?

RG: I don't know. I think—I think people should just be real aware of what their capabilities are, and they shouldn't try to do things if they—if they aren't capable, and if they get there and they find out they aren't, they should get out of it, but other than that I don't—I don't think there particularly should be things that women should not be allowed to do.

TS: So, if they're capable then, it's fine?

RG: Yes.

TS: Do you think that your life has been any different because you went in the military?

RG: I think it's been a lot different. And part of it is just the—you know, going to different places and that kind of thing, it's—just—even just as simple as being exposed to different religions and that kind of thing. You know, when I was growing up I remember I only knew one Catholic family; you know, one of my good friends in school. Her—She had a really large family and they were Catholic. But I remember, you know, my first assignment was down in San Antonio. There were lots of Catholic people there. First of all, the Spanish—all the Hispanic people that I knew, whether they were civilians that I worked with or military, and then a lot of the people that I met from up north were, you know. So, just different things like that; just differences.

But I always find that fascinating, so I really enjoyed, you know, being exposed to all the different things. And I'd get together with—one of the women was from Worcestershire, and she was—you know, we got together and baked bread one time, and all these different kinds of Portuguese sweet bread and all these different kinds of things, and just doing different things like that with different people and different personalities and—I just loved that. And I never would have done that if I'd not been in the military.

TS: So, you mean you're, like, exposed to different cultures and different regions who have like—you know, like you say, even just different type of culinary tastes?

RG: Yes.

TS: Yeah.

RG: Well, and even accents and things. I mean, people—there are still people here, you know, who've never been anywhere except here, and so, you know, you might hear them tell somebody they've got an accent and you think, "And to that person you've got the accent!" You know, so it's just—I mean, it's just like—like sweet tea. If they went up north or if they went out to California or maybe even Texas, they would have—be surprised to find you get tea with—it's not sweetened, you know? [laughs]

TS: Right. You have to sweeten it yourself.

RG: That's right. So, just different little things like that that are just really different, you know, that people who've never been anywhere else have no idea.

For instance, that was brought home—I mentioned the Girl Scouts. When my daughter was a senior, we were in a Girl Scout troop that have saved for years and done all kinds of fundraisers and things to go to Europe. And they were going to go to Pax Lodge, which is in London, to the [World Association of Girl Guides and] Girl Scouts World Centre. Well, five of us got a Eurail Pass and went to several different countries while we were there. And—But I remember one of the women from here at one of the youth hostels we stayed at—I was so humiliated, but she taught them to make sweet tea, and I thought, "Here is this woman, and—" so they can remember it the next time, you know, Americans came, and I thought, this—again, just the height of arrogance that somebody from North Carolina is going to teach the English to make tea, you know. It was just flabbergasting, and she was serious, you know? And—

TS: It's a little funny, Renée. [chuckles]

RG: I know. It's just—

TS: I mean, the irony of the British and American, that's true.

RG: I know, but—and she seriously didn't think they knew how to do it right. So, that kind of thing is just—

TS: Well, it's almost even Ameri-centric, kind of.

RG: Yes.

TS: You know, not even North Carolina, but just the idea of the American way.

RG: Yes.

TS: Do you think your worldview, then, expanded?

RG: Definitely.

TS: Yeah?

RG: And that's part of what I enjoyed so much about it. And it changed even—for instance, my daughter, from being at different bases and in the Girl Scouts—you know, she ended up going on a Girl Scout—they have wider opportunities, they're called. But they—she went to one in Iceland and met—they camped next to a Boy Scout troop from—that was from Virginia. And she has ended up—years later, you know, corresponded with one of those guys every now and then. So, she ended up marrying him, but one of the things that's so neat for them, is that they both have, kind of, the same worldview, you know? His dad was air force and he had been to different bases, and then he joined the air force and was at different bases, and you know—and so they've been to Greece and New Zealand and Australia and, you know, if either one of them had married somebody who had never been anywhere, you know—you don't have the same—the commonalities, you know, that—that strengthen things.

TS: Right.

RG: If you've—if—the worldview is so totally different.

TS: Interesting, yeah, well, that's very interesting. So, if your—did any of your kids ever go into the military?

RG: My son did for a while. He ended up actually only being in for a little bit less than a year, and decided it was really not for him, but his—he had a child and the child's mother was murdered right at the same time, and so, you know, I got her then, but he ended up having already started trying to get out right at the same time—

TS: Like, a hardship—

RG: —and so he was able to get out and have her, you know, so it all worked out.

TS: Yeah?

RG: I mean, had he wanted to be in and been in for years, he would have difficulty with trying to raise her and stuff, so, you know, things happen for a purpose, I guess.

TS: Well, that's sad.

RG: Yes.

TS: Well, did you—do you think there's anything in particular that maybe civilians might not understand about people who've been in, or the military itself; like the military culture?

RG: I don't think they can understand. Maybe a little bit more now than they used to, but I don't think that they can understand how—how hard it is as far as separations and things like that. And I wasn't exposed to that a whole lot, as far as long separations and things like that, but I did—in working labor and delivery and all, one of the main ones I realized pretty soon was maybe that, you know, if a guy was there to get the lady pregnant, he was probably not going to be there for the delivery. Because they would be at sea for so much time and then on land for so much time, and then at sea for so much time, and you know—at least back in that timeframe. And so, you know, the women had to become—I mean, they had to be the one in the charge of the family and pay all the bills and do everything. I mean, manage everything when their husbands were gone. And then the husbands would come back and be ready to take over things again, you know. And so I think, you know, divorce rates and things like that—I think there were—I don't know think civilians could have any inkling how hard that could be.

TS: Yeah, that's an interesting dynamic, right, to have to change; for both of them, too, I guess, in some sense. That's interesting.

RG: And I don't know for sure if that happens as much now. I don't know, but—

TS: A lot more deployments going on too.

RG: Yes.

TS: Well, what does patriotism mean to you?

RG: Just—I have a strong pride in America and was honored, you know, to serve in the air force for those years, and I just think we have a responsibility to be good. In other words, not be the ugly American, to be honorable and to be—I don't know how to express it exactly, but just—I do have pride in America and I want America to continue to be a place that you can have pride in, and be reasonable for doing that—

[speaking simultaneously]

TS: A good model for other people to look to at in a positive way?

RG: Right.

TS: Yeah.

RG: And that doesn't always mean that we have to have our way, or be the one who gets to say how everything is done, but—

TS: Well, you sure covered a lot. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you'd like to talk about?

RG: Let me think for a minute.

TS: Okay. Let me do a little segue.

RG: Okay.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Let me do a little segue.

RG: Okay.

TS: Okay, we took a little short break; Renée was thinking for a little bit. And you were—we were talking a little bit at the beginning, too, about how your husband was going to follow your career for twenty years and then you were going to do his. But it didn't quite work out that way.

RG: Right.

TS: What happens then?

RG: When I was in California, I think he, kind of—he said there was a difference in California. There was a California lifestyle or mentality, and—that he liked, but—anyway, we did separate, and so I kept the children. There were little questions about whether that would happen or not, but—so my name for—when I first—my last couple of years here at nursing school and for the first several years I was in the military, was Davis, and then I took my maiden name of Gurley back. But as it turned out, the—back in that day, of course, there were less—there were still women who were not working outside the home some and that kind of thing then, and I didn't realize that it was a problem at the time, but later, you know, it was mentioned that—you know, that it was kind of difficult that I made more money, and that my career did take precedence, you know? I did make sure that I chose assignments that had—my ex-husband was in air—being a pilot or mechanic on aircraft and that kind of thing, so I always chose assignments that had those kinds of things available, or close, and—but it still—having to start over every time we got to a new place, and not being able to build on a career and

that kind of thing, I think became stressors, you know, in my marriage that ended up, you know, kind of eating away at it.

And so, like I said, we did end up breaking up and divorcing back in 18—1989. And so, it was kind of bad at first, and negative, and the fights and that kind of thing, but, you know, within a—within four or five years we became more amicable and, you know, realizing that you have to deal with each other because of the children and that kind of thing. And so, by the time my daughter got married in 1995, you know, my—the—my son-in-law, Stanley, mentioned that they had never seen a wedding with the two families getting along as well and being friends and just trying to make the day special for the bride and groom and, you know, not any backbiting or that kind of thing. So, we felt good about that, and we still—you know, my granddaughter's had to have some surgery and things like that, and we've been there together for things like that, so, you know, we're friends now and so that's made things a lot easier, I guess.

TS: Not a road that you knew that you were going to travel, but seem to have worked out okay.

RG: Right.

TS: Yeah.

RG: Yeah, in the—in the long run it all worked out for the best for everybody, so.

TS: Yeah. Do you—do you have any last words about the air force itself?

RG: Just I enjoyed it, and I would do it again in the same timeframe and all. I don't know for sure if I would in today's world, and I don't what the rules are now; how long you do have to sign up for and that kind of thing. So, I don't know for sure that I would do it again this day and time.

I can say that, you know, when—when my brother thought about joining one time—and I think I'm probably the one who talked him out of it. He's not a person who likes to take orders, and if he—if, say, a superior gave him an order that sounded stupid to him, he would have a very hard time in doing it. Or, you know, without arguing about it or that kind of thing. So that was just the kind of thing I mentioned to him at the time; that it would be really good and it would be security for you, and, you know, you would enjoy a lot of it, but at that point in time he would have been enlisted, and so I said, "There are going to be people who you're going to run into that, you know, once you've worked in a field for a certain few years, you know, maybe you know more than you think they know, and they're going to be the boss, so are you going to be able to do that?"

So, I may have talked a couple people out of joining [chuckles], that might have done it otherwise, but I enjoyed it and I—it's a very positive thing in my life. I was glad to do it, I was glad to—that I stayed in for the amount of time that I did, and then I was glad—ready to retire, you know, when it was time to retire, but I have a special place in my heart for having been in the air force, and—and I don't know that I would have had that had I not done nursing in the air force, too, so.

TS: Right. So, you think it's not necessarily for everyone?

RG: Right.

TS: Yeah.

RG: Definitely.

TS: Yeah. Well, I appreciate you coming to talk with me today.

RG: Well, I enjoyed it and I appreciate your interest and what you're doing.

TS: Yeah.

RG: It's special that some people might want to know.

TS: I think so too. Well, thank you, Renée. Anything else you'd like to add?

RG: No, I don't think so, but I thank you, Therese.

TS: Alright. Well, thank you.

[End of Interview]