WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Marie S. Senzig

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: August 16, 2013

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is—What day is it?—August sixteenth—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MS: The sixteenth.

TS: —2013. I'm at the home of Marie Senzig in New Bern, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. Marie, how would you like your name to read on your collection?

MS: Probably with my rank—naval rank; Captain—

TS: Okay.

MS: —all capitalized; capital C, capital A, capital P, capital T, Marie S. Senzig.

TS: Okay, we probably—when they—when they put it on the collection they'll do the Marie S. Senzig for the collection name.

MS: Right.

TS: And then they'll have—we'll have your information in the biography like that.

MS: Okay, that's fine.

TS: Okay; alright. Well, Marie, thanks for letting me come and talk with you today. Why don't we start out by having you tell me when and where you were born?

MS: I was born in Baraboo, Wisconsin, December 31, 1957, and then resided in Lyndon Station. The hospital was thirty miles away, so.

TS: Okay. And so, do you have any brothers or sisters?

MS: I have seven brothers and five sisters.

TS: So you have a few.

MS: A few.

TS: Where do you fit in that hierarchy of siblings?

MS: Number six.

TS: Sixth oldest?

MS: Yes, so there's seven below me.

TS: How many boys and how many girls do you have?

MS: Seven boys, six girls.

TS: Is that right?

MS: Yes.

TS: So who ruled that—that family?

MS: My mother.

TS: [chuckling] There you go. Did your—Did your mom work with all those kids or—

MS: She—

TS: I mean, I know she worked.

MS: She had a fulltime job in her house.

TS: That's right.

MS: She said she liked being her own boss.

TS: That's right.

MS: She decided what day she did laundry, what day she did this, what day she did that. My dad was the breadwinner in the family and he worked away all week long and was only home on the weekends.

TS: What did he do?

MS: He worked for a construction company, working on high voltage lines.

TS: Oh my gosh.

MS: So if there would be a big ice storm he would be one of those people who went out with the bucket truck and didn't come home for a couple weeks until everybody had their electricity back.

TS: That's kind of a dangerous job, with all those kids.

MS: He did lose an eye.

TS: He did?

MS: Yes.

TS: Oh my goodness. That's—That's wild. Now, tell us what—So was it a rural area that you lived in; suburban? What—

MS: It was. It was a town of three hundred and fifty people.

TS: Okay.

MS: And it's now up to four hundred and seventy-four people. There's still not a stoplight in town.

TS: No?

MS: So—It's rural, south central Wisconsin; a lot of dairy farms and cornfields.

TS: Well, tell us a little bit about what it was like to grow up in such a large family. That's—Even for the time that would have been unusual for that many kids.

MS: A very Catholic family.

TS: Yeah?

MS: [chuckling] I—I think, honestly, that's one of the things that drew me to nursing.

TS: Okay.

MS: And especially obstetrical nursing. Every time I would go through labor with a woman—Because I practiced obstetrical nursing in a day when there weren't laboring epidurals, so everybody got to experience the joys of labor pains, and every time I watched somebody go through labor it increased the appreciation I had for my mother going through that experience thirteen times. So I—I couldn't imagine growing up in a small family, because whenever you wanted to do something there were always enough people to play badminton over the hedge, or get a game of softball together, or the boys with their basketball games, and there was always somebody to play Monopoly with, or to play Canasta; lots—lots of playmates all the time. And we got along pretty well that—it was a very orderly, German household. Everybody had their chores, and as long as everybody did what they were supposed to do, the household ran very smoothly, and you never showed up late for dinner if you wanted to get food.

TS: Because it would be gone, right? [chuckles]

MS: It would be gone.

TS: That's right. So what—what would be, like, some of the chores you got to do?

MS: The women did the inside work and the men did the outside work. It was a very segregated household, in those respects.

TS: Okay, gender segregated.

MS: Yes, it was. So the women, we did the dishes, and we once asked my mother if she'd get a dishwasher and she said no, she had six of them. Not thirteen, just six, so she didn't need a dishwasher. So it was setting the table for dinner and doing the dishes and putting the kitchen to rights afterwards; ironing; cleaning bathrooms. We had a two story house so my mother didn't go into the upstairs; she had two daughters who lived in the upstairs and it was our job to clean it every Thursday, and bring all the laundry down, and get the laundry and then take it back upstairs. And—And you grew up learning to cook, making cornbread and making cakes and watching her get a starch and a meat and a vegetable all on the table, hot, at the same time. So to me, the holidays are not the holidays unless I have a house full of people. So when I would be over in Sardinia or Iceland or Guam, I would always invite lots of people over for the holidays. And if I cooked the whole meal they were always amazed that everything got on the table, hot, at the same time, and I had many people ask me, "How do you do that?"

And I said, "Well, you just know how if you grow up doing it and watching your mother do it in the kitchen." We didn't grow up with casseroles. My dad didn't care for casseroles.

TS: Is that right? Oh my gosh.

MS: So it was always meat, potatoes, and a vegetable.

TS: Yeah?

MS: So you just grow up knowing how to do that.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: How to do that; when things were done and pulling it out.

MS: Right.

TS: Did you have a lot of bread—homemade bread or anything like that?

MS: Not homemade bread.

TS: But bread.

MS: Bread, yes.

TS: Did you—Did you play any sports or—

MS: I was never very good at sports. I—[chuckling] kind of—kind of klutzy. I was one of those girls that always got picked last at school for the teams, so my sports were always—I—I took up running when I was in the navy because you ran against your own time and it was a solitary sport that I didn't have to compete against anybody.

TS: So you didn't do it until you were in the navy though?

MS: Correct.

TS: How neat; okay. Tell me—I know what I was going to ask you was; describe your house, because I'm just wondering, like, how many kids were in a room; that kind of—

MS: We had one, two, three bedrooms downstairs and really, technically, two bedrooms upstairs, but there was a large room as you walked through that had two beds in it and then a hallway ended up with a bed in it upstairs, and that was always a younger child who didn't require any privacy. And so, it was two people to a double bed, and we had bunk beds, and always a baby in a crib that was in somebody's bedroom. So—

TS: So were the girls responsible for taking care of the babies, too, as you got older?

MS: I ended up potty training my youngest brother.

TS: Yeah?

MS: My mother said he would have been in diapers till he was eighteen. She just ran out of the emotional oomph and stamina to do it one more time. And of course, it was easy for her. The child would come to her and need to have the diaper changed and she would just say, "Go see your sister." And so, I got tired of changing dirty diapers so I pulled out the potty chair and potty trained him.

TS: [chuckles] That's great. So you're—Now, where was your school, like your elementary school?

MS: The elementary school was the Catholic school directly across the street though grade four, and then that closed down so starting grade five we went—it was about twelve miles up the road, so rode the school bus up to the county seat which had a whopping, like, thirty-four hundred people at it, to the Mauston-area of schools. And so, I did fifth grade through twelfth grade in that school system, and then graduated from the—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: From that?

MS: —from Mauston-area high school.

TS: So if you were—let's see. As a young girl then, you're growing up in the sixties at a young age.

MS: Yes.

TS: Do you remember when the—President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy was shot?

MS: I do.

TS: And the Catholic family, too, so I would wonder—

MS: I do. I—I remember being home from school that day and sitting on the couch, and distinctly remember watching the caisson rolling down the street.

TS: But do you remember when he was actually shot?

MS: I don't remember that.

TS: No?

MS: But I do remember watching the funeral on TV.

TS: So you would have been about six years old.

MS: Correct.

TS: Yeah. Do you remember later when Martin Luther King, Jr. was—and Robert [Francis] Kennedy; that same year; ’68?

MS: Yes; yes; I do.

TS: What was your reaction to that?

MS: It was a shame that Robert Kennedy was shot while campaigning, and the same thing with Martin Luther King [Jr.]. I mean, all those great figures and—and standing for—for certain things that some people just don’t care for.

TS: Yeah? So you were, like, elementary, middle school when the—I would say, the height of the sixties were going on.

MS: Yes.

TS: Do you—Did—Was there any counter-culture in that—in the area that you lived in in Wisconsin?

MS: I—I wouldn’t say—The state capital, Madison, is very liberal, but my mother didn’t drive so we rode the school bus to school, and you rode the school bus back home. We only got one channel on TV so the TV was really never on, and so we didn’t get exposed to a whole lot. And my parents really didn’t talk—of course, my dad was only home on the weekends, and then he was so busy working to get extra money to feed his thirteen mouths, they didn’t really talk politics. So I was not exposed to a whole lot. I mean, listened to the Beatles music along with my oldest sister who was into the Beatles, and—

TS: Yeah. So maybe your older—some of your older siblings might have had a little bit more connection to that.

MS: Correct. Correct.

TS: Neat. Well, were you—What about school? Did you like school?

MS: I was always a good student; I was one of those geeky, nerdy kids who hung out in the chemistry lab.

TS: Is that right?

MS: And then I played trumpet in the school band, so—

TS: How long did you play?

MS: Through high school, and then I was actually the bugler and did "Taps" when I was in Guam for the military funerals there.

TS: Oh, that's really neat.

MS: And then I—I and my younger sister played—it's called "Echo Taps," for my dad's funeral because he was a World War II veteran.

TS: Oh, okay.

MS: When he passed away.

TS: That's really neat.

MS: Yeah.

TS: So you—Were you—Did you have any favorite teachers?

MS: I did, and they were probably the math and science teachers; Margaret Ann Steiner. Everybody called her Ma, for M-A; Margaret Ann, and she was my algebra teacher. And then Mr. Nathan Figi was my chemistry teacher. And Mr. Harlow Gerhardt was the biology teacher, and I had occasion last summer to actually go on a bus trip and Mr. Gerhardt was on the same bus trip. So I had a chance to go and tell him how—how I always admired his teaching style, and there are certain teachers that you remember their names and there are certain teachers you don't, so he was one of those that I always remembered.

TS: Where were you at on the bus trip?

MS: It went to New York City.

TS: Okay.

MS: Went with my mother and my sister and my niece.

TS: Very neat.

MS: Yes.

TS: So where—Did you—Did you always want to be a nurse or—

MS: I—Yeah, from earlier times on I—that was something that always interested me.

TS: Yeah? So when you were in school was there an expectation that you were going to go to college?

MS: College was never mentioned in our household. My dad made it through sixth grade, so his expectation was that you graduated from high school and that was—he was thrilled to have all high school graduates. The girls are the ones with college degrees. I think because it was a very male-dominate household, that was our ticket out. So my oldest sister has a PhD in clinical psychology. I have a master's. I have another sister who has a master's in education who's a teacher in Montana, and another sister who has a—an associates in art and is an executive secretary. And I have a sister who's a medical stenographer.

And my brothers—one year, at the technical school, one of them did carpentry and he has supported himself his whole life with that.

TS: Yeah.

MS: So he's really the only one who utilized a trade that he went and got further education for.

TS: [unclear] the school.

MS: They're all blue-collar jobs for the men. The women went out and got higher education and got the better paying jobs.

TS: I see. So what—At what point do—were you thinking about the military?

MS: My senior year in college, when it was time to start thinking about, "What do I want to do with my nursing degree?" —I knew I was a very shy, introverted person, and I had worked the entire time I was in college at our little local county hospital as a nursing assistant, so if I went back there I just had this vision of myself at age fifty, still being single, still working at that little hospital, still living in my parents' house, and that mental image scared the heck out of me. So I did something very uncharacteristic and got out of my comfort zone, and remember vividly walking through a large snow bank to get to the navy recruiter's office—because I always liked being around the water and I grew up landlocked in Wisconsin—and walked into the navy recruiter's office and, like, the next week he had me up in Minneapolis [Minnesota] for a physical, and when I called my mother and told her I was thinking about joining the navy she had a very shocked response. She said, "You, of all my children, I thought would never leave me."

And I said, "That's why I thought I better do something drastic." And then she wanted me to get stationed at—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Did you tell her that at that time?

MS: I did.

TS: Yeah.

MS: And then she wanted me to get stationed at [Naval Station] Great Lakes, Illinois, because it was only three and a half hours away, and I said, "No, I joined the navy to get away from home, not to be stationed close to home." So that—that was a very drastic step for me, the—and the navy certainly has helped me bloom and develop. People who know me now can't believe that I was ever shy and introverted. But I still do test out introvert on a Meyers-Briggs [Type Indicator], because interacting with people exhausts me, and then I need to have my alone time to recharge the batteries, and that's the—the hallmark of a true introvert. An extrovert is energized by interactions with people.

TS: Right. I think that's great that you talked about that because I think a lot of people have a misconception about the difference between those. It's not that you don't want to be around people, it's just like you say; you're energy doesn't come from that.

MS: Correct.

TS: It comes from other things; your alone time and things; yeah.

MS: Right; right.

TS: That's really neat. So you're—you've joined the navy.

MS: Yes.

TS: What did your dad think?

MS: I had to, kind of, corner him to ask him, and he was—he thought it was a good decision. He thought it was a—it was a sound decision; I could make a good living. So that was—He never—He never told me to my face he was proud of me. He told other people around the town that he was proud of me. My father was—was a—was a very—a stoic German. He never—He never showed a lot of emotion. He did with my mother. I have vivid memories—I mean, she would be cooking a meal at the stove and he would come up behind her and say, "Could I have a kuss?" He never said kiss; it was kuss; must be German for kiss. And she would turn around, they'd do a little smooch on the lips, he'd say, "I love you," and he'd walk away.

TS: Sweet.

MS: Most men, I don't think, do that, but my father did that routinely. And so—And obviously they were demonstrative in the bedroom with thirteen children.

TS: [chuckles] Yes.

MS: But he didn't show a lot of emotion with his children. So I—He thought it was a good decision to join the navy.

TS: What about the rest of your siblings?

MS: I never really asked.

TS: No?

MS: Now that I'm retired and—and some of them came to my retirement ceremony, so they understood the rank that I had achieved. While I was in the navy I don't think they really had an understanding, because the only person in the family besides my father who served was my youngest brother who was in the navy as well and was enlisted. And so, he understood about my rank and he had told me that when I retired he was going to make sure he came to my retirement ceremony, and he did. And my mother thought it was going to be this little five minute ceremony, because she came to my promotion ceremonies for commander and captain, and they're—you stand on the quarterdeck and you raise your hand and then you have cake. And I had kind of a big whoopty party when I made O-6, which is quite an achievement. So—And quite a bit of my family came up. But it was still only a five minute ceremony, and then we had a nice party afterwards. But the retirement ceremony was an hour long, and she said afterwards she had no idea that it was that big a deal. So I never really got much from them. Now, since I'm retired, and the ones who came to the ceremony are impressed.

TS: [chuckles]

MS: But usually when I go home I'm just someone who's young enough to get down on my hands and knees and scrub the floors and cook meals and help my mother, so—

TS: Well, there you go; very good. So—So when you went—you went in the navy—let's see—1980.

MS: Yes.

TS: And did you have any, kind of, like—You had officer training then or were you—because you would have, like, just been commissioned.

MS: Correct.

TS: Did you have to go through any, kind of—

MS: I went through six weeks of officer indoctrination school in Newport, Rhode Island [Officer Development School, Officer Training Command [OTC] Newport]—

TS: Okay.

MS: —when I first joined. So my sister Marcy—who's a year younger than I—she and I did a little road trip in my brand new car; the first one I had ever had. I went all the way through college with my two feet for my transportation; didn't have a bicycle; didn't have a car. So I did buy a—a stripped down model of Pontiac Phoenix; never driven a stick shift in my life, and that's what I got so—[chuckles] I—I rolled through a lot of stop signs at the beginning when I was afraid I wouldn't get it started again without stalling. But—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: I can relate to that.

MS: —she and I drove out together to Newport, Rhode Island, and then I think Providence was maybe where she caught a little puddle-jumper jet and prop-plane to the bigger airport, and then she flew back home.

TS: Very neat.

MS: Yeah.

TS: So was it after your—after your officer training, then where were you stationed?

MS: Millington, Tennessee.

TS: Now, did you put in for that assignment? Do you have a dream sheet, as—in the navy, for things like that?

MS: We did, and when the recruiter came to my house to swear me in, you had three choices. I really didn't know. I had put a couple down and I couldn't think of a third one and he said, "Well, I'll just put Millington, Tennessee down," and that's where I ended up. And it's fine. My whole career, I can't say I had a bad duty station, because you quickly learn it's what you make of it. Even if it wasn't someplace you asked to go, there are always new people to meet, new friends to make, and they all turned out to be wonderful experiences. If you go expecting to have a bad experience, maybe that's what happens. But I always went with an open mind and made lots of friends.

TS: How—Was it—Was it easy for you to, like, pick up—because how many moves did you make? You made—

MS: Oh, I think probably about ten of them.

TS: Ten, in the—in the twenty[-eight – MS corrected later] years.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MS: Well, you get very—you get very good at it.

TS: Every two and three years.

MS: Right. And one of my friends—I think I had just gotten, maybe, here—someplace, and she came over to my house two weeks after my—I got my shipment of my household goods. And she walked in and said, "Looks like you've been here forever. You already have pictures on the wall."

I said, "Well, I—I can't live with the boxes. And so what I learned to do is open up all the boxes and put everything on the floor in the rooms."

TS: In the rooms they belong in.

MS: And then you just—I hated to see the clutter so it forced me—And if you just have boxes neatly stacked up, some people never get to their boxes. They just move the closed boxes from place to place. And I always opened up every single box and put everything in it's rightful place, and then I could—I could live, because I—

TS: Otherwise, it would have been difficult.

MS: It would have been stressful to me—

TS: I see.

MS: —to do it any other way, so I got very good at it.

TS: [chuckles] That's neat. So what—At this first duty—So it's your first duty assignment. Well, what was it like to actually—to, like, put on the uniform for the first time? How was—How did that feel?

MS: Well, luckily we did a lot of putting on the uniform in Newport, Rhode Island.

TS: Yeah?

MS: So—

TS: That's where I mean.

MS: Oh, okay. Well, like I said, I hadn't really been exposed to any military things, so the first thing—and growing up in a family of thirteen children and being poor, the first thing that really made an impression was they gave me three hundred dollars for a uniform allowance, and then promptly forced me to buy six hundred dollars-worth of uniforms, which created some stress in my life because now I was three hundred dollars in debt. So—Because you had a sea bag; you had to purchase certain things, and you had a uniform fitting and all that.

TS: You had a checklist of things to get, right?

MS: Correct. Right. And when I joined we were still wearing nursing uniforms with white hose and white shoes and a nursing cap with your stripe, on the nursing cap. So—And it snapped on, so as you changed rank you just changed the stripe and kept the same nursing cap.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Is that right? Interesting; okay.

MS: Yes. Yes.

TS: What—Was there anything about officer training that was difficult, hard, challenging?

MS: I think the transition. It was funny, because in my mind I thought it was rather a rough transition. In fact, when I—some of the folks in our little Charlie Company—there were four companies; Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta; I was in Charlie—took me out to the officer's club and got me a little inebriated because I was not—

TS: Green? [chuckles]

MS: Well, I was a little stressed.

TS: Oh, okay.

MS: It was funny because at the end our company commander complimented me on what an easy, smooth transition, in his eyes, I had made to the military. And I kind of looked at him and thought, "Boy, you don't have a clue. I almost jumped out of the window one day I was so—"

TS: [chuckles]

MS: But it—it was a nice group, and I have occasionally run into people. It's funny because one of my closest friends, turns out, was an officer in indoctrination school at the same time I was, she was just in Delta Company and I was in Charlie Company. Oh, she was in Alpha. But—

TS: Real close together.

MS: Well, we were there at the same time.

TS: And you never knew it until many years later?

MS: Correct. When she saw the picture on the wall in my—and said, "I have that same picture on my wall. When did you go to OIS?" And we discovered we were there at the same time.

TS: That's interesting. There you go.

MS: Yeah.

TS: How was your first duty station?

MS: I really enjoyed it, and looking back I think I got there shortly before Thanksgiving. One of the first things that happened was—and I think she was a lieutenant commander—some navy nurse invited me over to her house for Thanksgiving dinner with her family. That's just the way navy nurses are; very nurturing; they take people in; they make them feel welcome. And—And then she promptly had me do some house-sitting for her to watch her house; big beautiful house. Because I lived in the BOQ [Bachelor Officers' Quarters] for two years, so people would use me as their house-sitter. Two things: it put somebody in their house and it got me out of the BOQ for a little bit. But—And I think that warm, welcoming approach taught me that's what you do when you have new navy nurses come onboard. You make sure that they feel welcome and that they feel taken care of, because over the years people told me that was something I did well, and I think it all stemmed back to the person that did that for me when I went to my first duty station.

TS: Do you think in that way, in the navy, maybe in the military in general, that it's not just what you're doing at work, it—the off duty people are looking out for each other; especially the leadership, is making sure that the junior ranking are looked after?

MS: And that's very true. And that's especially true when you're overseas, and you know that some of these kids are there for the first time, far away from their parents, they're starting a new family, and you make sure that there's somebody there that you're—you become their surrogate parent, and making sure that there's food in the house, that they aren't

feeling melancholy around the holidays. And that was one of the reasons why I always cooked big meals and invited everybody over, to make sure if somebody was single that they had someplace to go. And it—A lot of the married people would invite the single sailors over to their house, but I, as a single sailor, always felt a little bit like I was crashing their family holiday. And so, when I would send out the invitations I would always say, "From one orphan to another, I'm single. You're not crashing any family holiday. Please come over so I don't have to make this big turkey dinner for Thanksgiving and eat it all myself." And—And then we would spend hours playing Trivial Pursuit or whatever the latest board game was. We always had a lot of fun, and it was a mix of guys and gals, enlisted and officers, sometimes people from outside of the command; like in Iceland, the other people who lived in my building.

TS: So you had a good crowd? Yeah, actually.

MS: Yes.

TS: Now, I heard—I don't remember if this is on tape before or we started the tape, but you had talked about Canasta. I think you did say that.

MS: Yes.

TS: Now, did you teach very many people to play Canasta? Do you guys play Euchre in Wisconsin?

MS: Oh yes, we play Euchre.

[Canasta and Euchre are card games]

TS: Okay.

MS: And Canasta, I've actually found people when I cruise who play Canasta.

TS: Oh, did you?

MS: And I have taught one of my friends to play Canasta. I teach more people how to play Cribbage.

TS: Oh, Cribbage, right.

MS: And that's a big game in Wisconsin as well.

TS: Yeah?

MS: And Sheepshead is a big Wisconsin card game that very people—few people know. It's a German—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: That one I have not heard of. I have not heard of that one.

MS: It's a German card game, so.

TS: Yeah, I know, in being from a wintery state, you're used to playing a lot more board games and—

MS: Correct.

TS: —keeping yourself occupied during the winter months when you're inside, so yeah.

MS: Correct. Correct.

TS: Now, was this, like, the first time you'd been away from home for a long time, except for, I mean, being in college?

MS: It was. It was.

TS: Was that difficult?

MS: I don't remember it being particularly difficult, I think because during college I only went home—since I didn't have a car, I only went home when there was a holiday school break. So I was away from home, basically, the whole semester, and would just go home at the semester break.

TS: Yeah. But now you're out on your own and—

MS: It—I would go home occasionally because Memphis was about a twelve and a half hour drive.

TS: Not too bad.

MS: It was pretty straight, south to north, up [Interstate]-57 and around Chicago and home.

TS: How did you like your job?

MS: I did. I started out—There were three of us who checked in at the same time, and the director of nursing, we were all in her office together, and she said, "Well, I need

somebody to go to the med[ical]/surg[ical] ward, I need somebody to go to the obstetrics ward," and "Who wants to go to obstetrics?" And nobody raised their hand and my hand shot right up in the air. "Well, that was an easy one. Okay, Ensign Senzig, you—you go to obstetrics," and I had some great civilian teachers.

TS: Did you?

MS: Civilian nurses who were teachers, yeah.

TS: What was it that they helped you with?

MS: Learning to be an obstetrical nurse.

TS: Just the whole nine yards?

MS: Yeah; yes. And I—Like I said, back in the day before there were laboring epidurals, one of them, we called her Admiral.

TS: Even though she was a civilian?

MS: Right.

TS: Okay.

MS: Because she told the doctors what to write and they wrote the orders, because she had been a nurse for years. And I was coaching one of the labor patients and she said—pulled me out of the room and she said, "Now, I'm going to tell you, this is the time when you lie. If they look you in the face and say, 'You don't know what you're talking about. Have you ever had any children?' you look them square in the eye and you say, 'Yes.'"

TS: [chuckling]

MS: "Otherwise, they're not going to do what you tell them to do."

TS: And so did you stick with that advice?

MS: I don't think anybody really ever asked me.

TS: Okay. It never came—

MS: Because if you act like you know what you're doing and you obviously know how to coach them, that's not really something they ask.

TS: And they're not thinking about that.

MS: No.

TS: They're thinking about other things, right?

MS: Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

MS: And they're some very interesting stories from labor and delivery.

TS: Well, tell me one.

MS: Well, the one—I think I was working the night shift and there was—a very young gal came in. She must have been thirteen; very, very young. And she was in labor and there was nobody in the room with her. Her parents were probably out in the waiting room. And she was screaming all the time, and I'd go in and say, "Are you in pain? Do you need me to get you some Demerol; some pain medicine?"

"No, I'm okay."

And you'd go out and she'd be hooping and hollering again. And I'd go in and she would—never said she needed anything. And finally one of the times I went in I said, "Well, if you don't need pain medicine, why are you yelling so loud? Why are you screaming?"

And she said, "Well, my mother told me the baby comes out of my mouth, and I have to open my mouth up wide enough for the baby to come through."

And I said, "Oh, I hate to tell you, the baby's not coming from there."

TS: Oh, goodness.

MS: "You remember where that boy put that thing to plant that little seed in your tummy?" I said, "That's where the baby is coming out." And her eyes got really big.

TS: [chuckling] Oh my gosh. How old was she?

MS: I think she was probably twelve or thirteen.

TS: Oh, Lord.

MS: She was very young.

TS: Wow.

MS: We had some very young teens in Tennessee.

TS: So was it—it was a civilian hospital or—

MS: No, no, it was a military hospital and the parent—

TS: Was in the—I see. But just a young girl—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MS: Either was retired military or was active duty.

TS: I see.

MS: And if their child got pregnant, the child was eligible for care.

TS: I see.

MS: Now, the baby got an initial six-week checkup, and then the baby was not eligible for care unless the parents adopted the baby.

TS: Did that happen?

MS: Not usually.

TS: No?

MS: They went and found civilian healthcare for the baby.

TS: I see.

MS: Yeah.

TS: Now, so why were there civilians nurses?

MS: Because there weren't enough navy nurses.

TS: Oh.

MS: There's never enough navy nurses.

TS: There's not?

MS: So you supplement with civilian staff.

TS: Okay.

MS: Plus, it gives some continuity. As your navy nurses are moving in and out—your navy corpsmen—you've got some stability.

TS: In a particular place.

MS: Right.

TS: Okay. Well, we're going—I'm going to go through some of the places that you were at and—but I would like to know—Now, you said every assignment is what you make it, right?

MS: Yes.

TS: And you went there with—so it's [unclear] a good experience everywhere, but if there was, like, a place you never wanted to leave—Was—Was there one like that? Like, the best assignment, for whatever reason?

MS: Well, it's interesting because there were cities I really liked, and then there were duty assignments I really liked.

TS: Well, let's talk about the cities you really liked.

MS: I really enjoyed Charleston, South Carolina; gorgeous city. My mother always thought I would go there to retire, so she was kind of surprised I didn't. And I said, "Well, the state of North Carolina doesn't tax my military retirement pay. The state of South Carolina does. Charleston's close enough I can go and visit."

So I enjoyed—I guess I—I really enjoyed Puerto Rico as well. As far as the people I worked with, Guam was one of my more favorite duty stations. I loved the climate. I made some—two really, really good friends there who remain dear friends of mine to this day.

And the camaraderie in Iceland. The weather was terrible. I don't need to go back there and live again. I got two winters and one summer in my nineteen months there. But the camaraderie. Since the weather was so horrible the warmth of the people made up for it, and we had a very small hospital. And I was the chief nurse there and there were only fifteen navy nurses, and our commanding officer was a very warm, gracious man and he—he was an excellent leader.

So—And we were always doing potlucks, so there's always cooking to be done, and I love to cook so I got ample opportunity to cook. So I would say probably—and you're probably noticing this trend—Puerto Rico, Guam, and Iceland.

TS: So your overseas?

MS: Overseas duty stations.

TS: Yeah. And so, you got to do that three—three times out of your—

MS: Four times.

TS: Four times?

MS: Sardinia was also a—

TS: How was that?

MS: That was probably my most interesting, challenging duty—

TS: Now, where's Sardinia?

MS: It's a little island off—Maddalena was a little archipelago of islands off the northern coast of Sardinia. Sardinia is the main island, but I was on a little island off the main island, which then sat off the coast of Italy. So I always told people I was on an island off an island off the coast of Italy.

TS: Okay.

MS: So you—And it was about a twelve square mile island. You could bicycle around it in about an hour and a half.

TS: It's like [unclear] Island.

MS: Yes. And so, I was the officer in charge of the clinic, so logistics were always a challenge, as far as just getting things to our little branch medical clinic. And it was before the days of computers on everybody's desk. We had an admin[istrative] office that had, like, three computers. I, as the officer in charge of the clinic, did not have a computer in my office, and I had no air conditioning in my office. I was on the third floor and it was 107 degrees sometimes down there. And so, you had a ceiling fan, and I had my own balcony with French glass doors, so you'd open up the wind—open up the French doors, have the ceiling fan on, and you would put a rock to hold the papers down in your inbox so they wouldn't blow all over your office. And if I needed something typed I took it over to the admin office and they did it and then they brought it back, and then I proofed it, made changes, and sent it back over for them to do again.

But it was very entrusting and I had a—the commanding officer of the naval support activity, who was a line officer, who was a mustang—People who are military understand that. It means he was enlisted first and came up through the ranks and then got a degree and became an officer. And he and I would go running at lunch time, and he would say, "Well, what problems are you having today? Is there anything I can help you with?" And we would discuss things while we were doing our lunchtime run, and he was a great support for me because my bosses were over in Naples, Italy; we were a branch clinic of Naples. And if I didn't tell him, they didn't know what was going on. I was at the pointy end of the spear, so to speak. And we had a fax machine, and that's what we

lived and died by, was the fax machine. And if we ran out of fax paper it was an emergency. [both chuckle]

TS: Yeah, I can see.

MS: And it was the old thermal paper fax machine and it—

TS: With the purple color and—

MS: Yes, and it was down in the basement of the clinic, down in the dental offices, and our supplies were up in the attic. And so, when the supplies came in somebody would get on the 1MC [1 Main Circuit; public address circuits on U.S. Navy vessels] or the intercom and they would say, "Supply truck is out front. Supply truck is out front," and that means—meant all available hands muster downstairs, and everybody would unload the truck, including the officer in charge, and you would schlep—And you couldn't drink the water. It had heavy minerals in it, and—which would leech into your brain and cause problems, so bottled water for everything. So you had to lug so—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: They didn't have a purifying system or anything?

MS: No.

TS: No? Wouldn't work?

MS: —so much bottled water up those stairs, all the way up to the fourth floor, basically to the attic, so many, many trips. And we didn't have an elevator. And the doctors' offices were on the second floor, so when the pregnant women came in—

TS: Oh, goodness.

MS: —they had to take the stairs as well. So—And the pregnant women got sent to Naples, Italy, when they reached thirty-six weeks to something called the stork's nest, and it was basically, kind of, a—a hotel or bed and breakfast, and the women would sit there and just wait to go into labor, because we were a little tiny island and there was a little local hospital but it was kind of 1950s and this was 1990s.

TS: So you were like a clinic, then?

MS: We were a clinic.

TS: Clinic, okay.

MS: We had two family medicine doctors, and two nurses, and about fifteen corpsmen. And so, when medical emergencies came in—We got to deliver a baby in the middle of the night in the clinic one night. [chuckles] So at—to me—And the family medicine doc, he loved obstetrics. The only job [unclear] him on this tour was he didn't get to do obstetrics and deliver babies. And I was an obstetrics nurse so, to us, it was no big deal to just, kind of, catch this baby. And—But the executive officer—the naval support activity—thought it was big news because I went down—Once a week we met and all the officers in charge of, what were called, tenant[?] commands—you would get together and the executive officer would relay all the news and any things coming up, and then you would go through and tell them all the news from your command; "We have a health fair coming up," or "We have an inspection," or this and that, or "Doctor So-and-so is going to be in leave so there'll be a different doctor coming in," or "The optometrist will be over for a week from Naples so if you want to schedule appointments our books are open"; those kinds of things.

And so, I had given my little blurb of what was going on and she said to me, "Well, Commander Senzig, you didn't tell is the most exciting thing."

And I looked at her and I said, "Ma'am, what are you talking about?"

She said, "Well, you have a big pink stork on the door of your clinic."

I said, "Oh, yeah, we delivered a baby in the middle of the night."

She said, "Well—"

I said, "Well, look, I'm an obstetrics nurse. It's no big deal." But they all thought—And then all the pregnant ladies wanted to know why they still had to go to Naples; why couldn't they just stay here and deliver their baby in the clinic in the middle of the night.

TS: [chuckles]

MS: So we had to explain that was not really how we did things, but—

TS: Right, that was an unusual circumstance.

MS: It was. It was.

TS: Yeah.

MS: And then it was a challenge when we would have deaths, trying to get the bodies off the island because, if you remember I said, it was an island so we had to go by the ferry's schedule, and then the ferry took you to just the other side—from this little island to the very northern part of Sardinia, an island, then it was an hour and a half through curvy, mountainous roads to get to the airport in Olbia, and then the military would fly a plane in to take the body in the casket—the pinewood box—and then fly them to Naples to then embalm them.

So if it's summertime and it's 107 degrees, and you're sitting on the tarmac in an air conditioned ambulance, yes, but it's only air conditioned—

TS: For a short period of time?

MS: No, for hours sometimes.

TS: Oh, okay.

MS: So they learned to ask us when the next ferry was so they could bring the plane in shortly after we arrive there. So we had to use the produce truck—the refrigerated produce truck. We started using that to transport the bodies in the coffins to Olbia.

TS: To keep it refrigerated.

MS: Right. And—And the—the buyer for the navy exchange, who was a gal, said to me, "Please don't ever tell the workers that we used this truck for that or they will never put produce in it again."

TS: Right.

MS: So I mean, it was a—it was challenges. And then we had a—we had a naval—a submarine tender that was homeported there, which is why we were there; to support the submarine tender. And women could serve onboard the ship, but of course you don't put pregnant women onboard the ship; they get screened out.

Well, somebody fell through the cracks and delivered a baby very prematurely onboard the ship, so we get this frantic call. And then you're trying to get a doctor with a—with a little preemie isolette and some corpsmen, so we had to use the commodore's boat to take them out to the ship. And of course the ship doesn't have endotracheal tubes for a little twenty-eight week old baby, so the baby didn't make it. But then the whole investigation—how did a pregnant woman—and it was her third baby, so how do you—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Did she know she was pregnant?

MS: —not know you're pregnant with a third baby? I don't know, but—

TS: She said she didn't know, though?

MS: Right. She said she didn't know. But—So it was just—And then trying to get the baby off. So we had to—And then the gal who delivered in the clinic, we had to go down to the town square and we had registered the baby in the town books as a—as a live birth and then the baby had dual residency; Italy and—and the United States. And so, it was very interesting tour.

TS: Yeah, it does—it sounds like it was.

MS: It was.

TS: And how long was that tour?

MS: That was two years.

TS: That was two years? And that was—let me see on my list here.

MS: That was 1993 to 1995.

TS: Okay, ’93 to ’95.

MS: I was a lieutenant commander and that was where I—I got selected for commander; found out I had been selected for commander while I was there.

TS: Oh, neat. Okay. Well, let’s talk a little bit about your promotions and things like that. So having become a captain, do you feel that you were treated fairly throughout your career for promotions?

MS: Oh, absolutely.

TS: Yeah?

MS: Yeah. If there was any bias it was not with me being a woman; it was single versus married.

TS: Why is that?

MS: When I was in Iceland, I was the only single, and coincidentally the only female, O-6, but it nothing to do with me being female. But with me being single, I was not allowed to live in the O-6 quarters.

TS: Why not?

MS: Because I wasn’t married. Those were married quarters. But they could have taken any of those quarters and the commanding officer of the base could have designated it a bachelor officers’ quarters, had he been so inclined. He was not so inclined, so I would—

TS: Is that how that works at other places too?

MS: Generally, if you are single, there’s not a lot—if you’re a single officer, a lot of the bachelor officer quarters are only transient; they’re not for people to—

TS: Live in permanently.

MS: —permanent residency.

TS: Same for men and women?

MS: Right. And so, if you're a single officer, you, more times than not, end up living off base. Where if you were a married officer, there would be more on base housing. Dislocation allowance was given to married people but not to single people. I guess it—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: What's dislocation allowance?

MS: They gave you—When you're moving you can't move any of your dangerous kitchen chemical. You can't move the—the Pledge, the toilet bowl cleaner, the this, the that. You don't want to take your dirty broom and your dirty mop to another place, so a lot of that stuff has to get thrown out and you have to buy new wherever you go.

TS: Okay, so the—so you get an allowance for those kinds of things?

MS: Correct.

TS: I see.

MS: Correct. And they didn't give it to the single people who moved into the same type of quarters as the married. I still moved into an apartment that had three bedrooms, and I had to clean and I had to go out and buy all those things just like the married person did. They got reimbursed for it; I did not. So if there was any bias it was not—I didn't encounter gender bias, I encountered—It was more beneficial to go in and be married and have a spouse than it was to be single.

TS: Did you find assignments went that way too?

MS: No, not really.

TS: No?

MS: No.

TS: Just where the slot was available?

MS: Right; right. They didn't—Now, the only place would be—some of these places, if they're remote, if you have a child or spouse who has health problems, they could not go. They'd have to stay back behind. Where if they had a different place they could send you where the services were available for them, then they would send you there, but—

TS: The serviceperson or the—

MS: Correct.

TS: Okay.

MS: Right.

TS: So the—

MS: But with me being single, I never had to worry about, "Were there services for my child, for my spouse?" So it really opened more things up for me, being single.

TS: How?

MS: Because I didn't have to worry about taking the family along, and were there services for them or not. Now, when I first joined the navy they didn't allow women onboard ship, and so that's why so many overseas duty stations makes you competitive, just like shipboard duty makes you competitive. And partway through they did open up shipboard assignments to women, but by then I was an obstetrical nurse. They still don't allow pregnant sailors onboard ship, so that—

TS: So that would mean—

MS: Right.

TS: I see. I thought that they opened up some ships to women in the seventies. Maybe it was just a—

MS: For line officers, I think.

TS: I see; okay.

MS: Yeah.

TS: So you're—I'm just going to ask you, then, about your— [phone rings] What was that? Do you need to get that? I think—Okay.

So we talk about your twenty[-eight – MS corrected later] years that you were in, from 1980 through 2008.

MS: Yes.

TS: The time—That period of time for women underwent a lot of change, not only in the military but in the civilian world too. Did you—Were you cognizant of those changes as they were happening, or sitting back and reflecting on it, in the navy? Can you—Can you talk about that at all?

MS: I guess maybe it's more sitting back and reflecting, because when I was in there—the one change that I do remember was when I came in, probably my second duty station, was when women were finally allowed to stay on active duty if they got pregnant. So the navy nurses, there were no pregnancy uniforms. At first, they had to go out and buy civilian pregnancy nursing uniforms, and then the military did come out with maternity uniforms for pregnant sailors, but that was one of the things that changed. And then when I first came in, once they did allow women to stay on active duty if they got pregnant, then it was—you could still, no strings attached, say, "I'd rather get out," and they let you out of your contract. Then they quickly discovered a lot of young kids who weren't adjusting, or didn't like the rules and the rigors of military life, were getting pregnant just to get out of their contract; kind of a long term solution to a short term problem. So they changed the rules to make it not quite so easy to get out if you got pregnant.

Then when they allowed women onboard ship, and women were routinely assigned to shipboard duty, the same thing was happening. Women were getting pregnant to get out of shipboard duty. So it used to be if they got pregnant they would take them off the ship, cut them a whole new set of orders, and send them to another duty station. So then they got wind, and got a little savvier, that girls were getting pregnant just to get off the ship. Again, long term solution to a short term problem.

So then, what they instituted was, "Okay, you come off the ship while you're pregnant, but four months after delivery you resume your shipboard duty on that same ship." Now, not only are you onboard ship, but you've got to leave your baby with somebody else, and find somebody to take care of your baby. So once they instituted that and word got out to these gals that you were still going to complete your shipboard duty, the reasons for girls getting pregnant kind of went away. And we still do have some "ooops," because when you put eighteen year old hormones together with males and females onboard ship in tight quarters, they find all kinds of little spaces to have fun, and sometimes birth control fails or they don't always exercise it, and girls still do get pregnant but not in the numbers they did when they were first assigned shipboard duty.

TS: So it was like a learning curve for the navy to figure out—

MS: Right.

TS: —the balance.

MS: Right, and then the tail follows once they figure out what's going on, and then they can bring in the—the regulations to fix that.

TS: I see; very interesting.

MS: Yes.

TS: Now, did you see changes for nursing as you were—over that twenty[-eight – MS corrected later] years? I'm sure you did.

MS: Changes in the [U.S.] Navy Nurse Corps. When I first came in we had one admiral in the navy nurse corps. Navy nurses, the most you could achieve was to be a director of nursing at a hospital. That was the pinnacle of your career, other than the one person who was the admiral of the Navy Nurse Corps. Now, navy nurses are commanding officers of hospitals, they're executive officers of hospitals. We have more than one admiral. We have a three star admiral, we have a two star admiral, we have one star admiral.

TS: So were the—the executive officers of—commanding officers, were they doctors at the hospitals or what—

MS: It used to be it was always the physician who was the commanding officer.

TS: Okay.

MS: Now they usually try to have either the executive officer or the commanding officer be a physician. And now it might be either a physician or a navy nurse. A lot of times, one of them will be a Medical Service Corps officer.

TS: Okay.

MS: Because they have the admin side of the house.

TS: Did you see any changes in actually nursing techniques; things like that?

MS: Well, in labor and delivery, laboring epidurals are now the norm—

TS: Right.

MS: —which they weren't way back when. Now they Skype deliveries.

TS: They do?

MS: So—

TS: How do they do that?

MS: Well—

TS: How do they Skype a delivery?

MS: Well, somebody's there with the—the—the computer, with a video camera and Wi-Fi [wireless internet connection], with the husband over in Iraq or Afghanistan, where they'll video it and then they'll—they'll send the video, but now they do do some Skyping.

TS: Okay, so it's like someone's Skyping it—I see, okay. Somehow—

MS: So they can attend the delivery.

TS: I see. Interesting. So that kind of communication has—has changed—

MS: Right.

TS: —for staying connected with your family—

MS: Right.

TS: —in that way. Now, did you stay in obstetricians—that field the whole time?

MS: As you get more senior it becomes more administrative. In Charleston I became, what's called, the division officer, which is the charge nurse of the labor and delivery unit, and so I still did lots of labor and delivery, and then I would go to my office at the end of the shift and do the paperwork.

Sardinia was where I was—it was a clinic so it was strictly administrative, although with us being two nurses we did carry a radio/pager for a week at a time. So if somebody needed IV [intravenous] antibiotics, we'd come into the clinic and do it around the clock; those types of things. But it was mostly administrative.

And then Keflavík, Iceland, even though I was the chief nurse we only—there were only fifteen us so if they needed—especially if we had a laboring patient and the nurse didn't have a lot of labor and delivery experience, I let them know that they were free to call me and I would come in and sit with them and help them out. So I did that a couple times. They would call me and I would go in and sit with them.

We had a patient who was quite ill; I wasn't sure the nurse had the—the background, I wasn't real comfortable, so I just came in and did the shift with them. And once I recognized that the patient was—because it was a patient who had preeclampsia, which is a post-partum—antepartum problem, and being a labor and delivery nurse I knew a lot, and he didn't have really any labor and delivery background. So once her kidneys kicked in I knew she had rounded the corner and I said to him, "Okay, I'm going to go catch a couple hours of sack time now in that room. She's out of the woods."

So—But otherwise it was—And I would do the occasional weekend when they were short a nurse in rotation because someone was out. And there I was the acting executive officer, the acting commanding officer when the commanding officer and executive officer were gone.

And then my last duty station here, I was—

TS: [Marine Corps Base] Camp Lejeune?

MS: Yeah. Started out the Deputy Director of the branch clinics, and a lot of the—in charge of getting the supplies and ordering new equipment, doing all the fitness reports and the evaluations for the corpsmen; did a lot of the administrative work because the director was a physician. So I let him interact as a physician and a guy with the line officers, and I took care of the admin behind the scenes things, and that worked very well for us. And then I went over to the hospital and became the quality manager, so—in charge of making sure that we followed all the joint commission regulations and the Inspector General of the navy regulations, and that our care was safe.

TS: Right. Well, now, when you became—Well, I guess I don't know if I want to get there yet or not, because I kind of want to go back to some of your earlier assignments when you were—had less rank.

MS: Yes.

TS: And so, you went to—So after Tennessee you went—Is that when you went to Puerto Rico right away?

MS: Yes.

TS: Oh, tell me about that. How was that?

MS: That was—It was fun. My person who had been my charge nurse in Millington, Tennessee—surprise, surprise—was my charge nurse in Puerto Rico, so I already knew my boss. So going down, that wasn't an anxiety producing thing. And back in the days when we had nurseries, I was assigned to the nursery, and—and would come out and help with labor and delivery when they needed help. That's where—I think I had delivered one baby in Millington, Tennessee with a doctor standing over my soldier because they knew I was going overseas and wanted to make sure I had a delivery under my belt. And I delivered, I think, four more babies in Puerto Rico because, oops, they don't always get there.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Just—Because you were just there—Yeah, I see.

MS: Right. And babies come fast sometimes. I—I don't know what to say about Puerto Rico. I mean, I sometimes got pulled over to the medical-surgical ward to help out over there. You kind of became a nurse of all trades. And I would say actually, from Puerto Rico to

Bethesda [Maryland] was where I worked on the labor and delivery for two years, and then I got called into my supervisor's office one day and told that, basically, starting the next day I was getting assigned to the post-op cardio-thoracic surgery unit. I—

TS: Had no idea what you were—had in that experience for that, right?

MS: I didn't—Right, and I didn't have a choice, and I was not very happy with that decision, and took every opportunity when I was up there to offer to run lab work, because I would—I would cry on the way to the lab, give myself a good talking to, get it out of my system, and by the time I got back I was good to go again. And actually I ended up liking the unit after I learned a little bit about cardiac nursing and got good at it. And—But you didn't always have a choice where you went. So that was probably one of the more stressful times; getting pulled out of an area where I knew I wanted to go get my master's degree and was going to submit paperwork to do that, and told that I was going to go do something totally different that I had no training for.

TS: How did that work out for you?

MS: Well, actually, the medical-surgical part of it stood me in good stead, like when I was doing the quality management piece here, because you—you understood post-op surgical and—and chest tubes and some other things. So it makes you a better rounded nurse to have different, varied experiences. And I had the—the out-patient experience from when I was in Sardinia, and then again when I was over at the submarine base in Washington state.

TS: Is that like another one of—getting out of your comfort zone a little bit?

MS: Yes.

TS: Was that—Like, did you have to be pushed a little for that, sometimes?

MS: Well, that time I wasn't given a choice.

TS: [chuckling]

MS: I was pushed over the ledge.

TS: Okay.

MS: Told to find a soft landing.

TS: Did you have—Well, actually, let's pause it for a second here.

[Recording Paused]

TS: I'm going to say we're back. Okay, we took a short, little break, and so I'm back here with Marie. And Marie was just telling me that she has a—some—something you'd like to tell me about your experience in Puerto Rico.

MS: It was—We left off I told you I was a labor and delivery nurse—

TS: Right.

MS: —and delivered some babies there. And it would be funny because I would be in the nursery on a day shift and the chief nurse—director of nursing—would come up and she'd say, "We got a request for five navy nurses to come for lun—have lunch on the Australian ship [unclear] that pulled into port this morning. So you're here. You go ahead and go, and I'm sure they'll be serving alcohol so please don't come back to work this afternoon." So you'd get the afternoon off and you'd go have lunch and drink beer with some Aussie officers. And it'd be funny because they always would radio ahead and ask for navy nurses, assuming they were all girls.

TS: [chuckles]

MS: But we had some single male navy nurses, so every once in a while they would come along too, and the looks on these guys' faces when they found the male navy nurses there.

But yeah, I—We went to a German ship, we went to an Australian ship, went to a British ship.

TS: Were they all males on those ships?

MS: They were.

TS: Yeah?

MS: This was back in the eighties, so yes, they were. And then there was a—On the admiral's lawn—the admiral's quarters—they had, kind of, a mixer for the officers from—and I'm pretty sure it was the Aussie ship and the American, so we—we all went—the navy nurses—and we were playing croquet and they had this big cake—sheet cake with an Australian flag and an American flag with hands hold—And so, it was kind of a mixer to promote good relations between the Australian military and the U.S. military, and frequently joint exercises and things. So that—that was kind of an interesting sideline, that I got a chance to go onboard some of the ships form the other countries and meet some of their officers.

TS: How were you treated on those—on those ships?

MS: Oh, we were always treated like royalty because we were their guests. They wanted these navy nurses to come and mix and mingle because they'd been out to sea for a while, all these guys. They just liked to look at girls.

TS: [chuckles] It's not one of those things where what happens on the ship stays on the ship?

MS: No, no.

TS: Just all—

MS: It was—It was—It was pretty much above board.

TS: Okay; pretty much.

MS: Pretty much above board.

TS: Okay. But you did do some of the—not going back to work because of the—having some alcohol, right?

MS: Right, and it was funny because when I first joined the navy in Millington, Tennessee, it was okay to have a beer at lunch and go back to work. We never did in the hospital, but when I would have a day off during the week and I'd go over to the exchange, the guys would be in their dungarees having lunch and they'd have their beer because it was perfectly acceptable. And it was probably a couple of years in the—it was in the early eighties sometime when that culture changed and they were not allowed to. And as you and I were discussing, the vending machines in—in, like, the bachelor officer's quarters—there was a vending machine that dispensed beer. And of course, that was in the evening. If you didn't want to go out and buy a six pack you could just get a can of beer. Of course, when it came down the chute you had to let it sit for a few minutes—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: [chuckles] Yeah, I guess you would.

MS: —before you opened it up.

TS: Now, did you have—In—In this time, like, when you first went in, did you have the—officer's call—I forget what it's called when everybody gets together at the unit and there's, like, a bash and there's, pretty much, free alcohol for all the enlisted and—Did you guys have anything—like, officer's calls—not officer's call; that's not what I want to call it.

MS: We would have dining-ins—

TS: Okay.

MS: —and dining-outs, but those were officer only, and it was never free alcohol. It was—There would be a bar and you would pay for the drinks, and then there was an alcoholic grog and a non-alcoholic grog.

TS: I see.

MS: And you had to go drink from the grog if—if you made a social faux pas; had your cummerbund done upside down and someone caught you, or things like that. And if you had a designated driver, then you would go to the alcoholic grog and drink. And if you didn't, you went to the non-alcoholic grog. I will say the culture, as far as alcohol, probably changed. When I was first joined, happy hour at Friday afternoons at the club were a big thing, with the two for one drink specials or half price drink specials, and everybody went to the club for happy hour on Friday. It was the place to be.

Now you go to some of the old clubs, like at Cherry Point here, there's not that many people there. And I think more and more people are married, and there's so much more traffic, and now you get a DUI [driving under the influence] and it will kill your career. Back in the early eighties, it wasn't as big a deal. It really didn't kill your career. You could—You could recover from that. Now you really can't. So I'd say one of the things that I've noticed that's changed—that changed in the course of my career, was the culture and the acceptance of—of alcohol.

TS: Right, or the fact that it wasn't accepted as—as culturally acceptable. I remember now what the—commander's calls, is what that was; that we had—used to have.

MS: Yes. Well—And we would have, like, command picnics and things, but they were always real family oriented.

TS: Yeah?

MS: And command Christmas parties, and there would be a cash bar where you had to pay for your own drinks. But again, very plainly stated, "Please don't drink and drive. If you have somebody to drink, have a—or somebody to drive, have a good time." And it was never socially acceptable to have too much and make a fool of yourself, because these are the people you worked with—

TS: Right.

MS: —and people who write your evaluations, so—

TS: Right; yeah.

MS: But—And I will say, too, when I first—in the early eighties, I don't think fraternization was as big a deal looked upon as it is now. I mean, I think the corpsmen and the nurses, the enlisted and the officers, dated a lot more, and the hammer didn't fall as hard. Now, very much frowned upon.

TS: Why do you think there was that change?

MS: Well, when I joined we weren't in any armed conflicts, and I think it makes a difference when you're in a—in a war time setting and you have to maintain that distance and that discipline. It may be part of it.

TS: Do you think that the Tailhook incident had anything to do with it?

[The Tailhook scandal refers to a series of incidents were U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps officers were alleged to have sexually assaulted 83 women officers and 7 men officers during the 35th Annual Tailhook Symposium in September 1991.]

MS: It may have, but that—

TS: Ninety-one, I think it was.

MS: Yeah, I'm trying to think. Was that enlisted girls?

TS: They were officers, I believe.

MS: Yeah, so it wasn't really the officer, enlisted thing, but it was—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: But it was junior, senior officers.

MS: Right, right, so still fraternization because you have—what? —two ranks up, two ranks down. And it certainly—That's one of the things that changed the culture of the alcohol in the military, was Tailhook, and brought out all the red light, green light, yellow light, with the sexual harassment and things like that.

TS: Was there—When you were a commander, did you have to deal with any kind—kind of issues with sexual harassment? And also, just not the harassment, but also, like, sexual abuse?

MS: I—I never had—And I think again, being on the medical side of the house, people are a little more educated and they're more the nurturers. I mean, I'm not saying things don't happen, but I myself in my twenty-eight years, never was the victim of sexual harassment; never had any issues or any problems whatsoever. When I was stationed in Guam as an O-5, as a commander, I was selected—just like in civilian you have jury duty; you get selected to go sit on court-martials. And I was the lone female member on a court-martial. The head of the, like—What would they call them?—the jury—the captain—or the foreman—

TS: Okay.

MS: —was a navy captain. Then there was myself—there was seven of us. So there was—yeah, two commanders, two lieutenant commanders, two lieutenants, and the navy captain, and all the other people were males. And this happened to be a male officer and a female enlisted. He had been enlisted and had spent the majority of his career on submarines, so he had never been around female sailors the majority of his career.

TS: Okay.

MS: He was already—always around just all guys, and he had gotten all the way up to, like, an E-8 and was the—what they call the COB; the Chief of the Boat; he was the senior enlisted on his submarine. And then he got a degree and went the mustang route and became an officer. And I believe he was a lieutenant junior grade, so he'd already done his two years as an ensign and was now a lieutenant junior grade. And he was up on charges of conduct unbecoming an officer, two counts of trying to intimidate a—a witness, fraternization, and rape. He was taking advantage of the enlisted girls. He was—

TS: More than one?

MS: Well, he would—he would be in the backseat of the cars with the girls, and then he would tell them they had to go up the gangway ahead of him, and then he would go up a little bit behind. But this one time he invited himself to an enlisted party, and the—the young gal did everything that they teach you to do to be safe, except she got extremely intoxicated so she wasn't able to defend herself. But she walked to the party, she stayed at a girlfriend's house that was in the same complex where the party was going to be at, they ate some supper before they went so they could walk home, and they went as a group. So she did all the things that she should have done, except that she really over imbibed and she was not a large girl; she was a rather petite thing. And they all came back as a group.

Well, this gentleman and a little O-1 ensign who was a naval academy grad that he—he attached himself to and was teaching him all the things you don't do as an officer, they attached themselves with this group of enlisted girls and went back to their apartment to continue the party after the party. Well, this girl was sick in the bathroom and somebody moved her from the toilet to the tub so they could use the facility. She passed out on the bathroom floor. He took her, moved her to the bedroom, proceeded to

have sex with her while she was passed out in the bed, and the next morning somebody opened up the closed bedroom door and caught him on top of her again, while she was still passed out. So he—

TS: Was he convicted then?

MS: Oh, let me tell you. I was a little concerned I was the only female that—These six gentlemen on the jury were incensed. We do not—This could have been my sister, this could have been my daughter, this could have been by sister-in-law. We do not send our daughters and our sisters and our family members into the military to be preyed upon by somebody like this. He had, probably—it was, like, six months to go or a year and a half—he had somewhere between eighteen and a half, nineteen and a half years in.

TS: Okay.

MS: They threw the book—Well, they—they convicted him. He got conduct—a dishonorable discharge, not other than—dishonorable discharge—Fort Leavenworth—and so—and he had a wife and two kids. So—Was he divorced? I guess he was divorced; he had an ex-wife and two kids. So she was now not going to get any pay and benefits, because she would have been entitled to half of his retirement.

TS: Right.

MS: I was more concerned about how was she and the two children going to make ends meet. And they said, "Well, she could find somebody rich and get married tomorrow and those kids will be just fine." But the way they arrived at the term of his sentence was, "We'll give him time to come out and do his twenty years someplace before he turns sixty-five or seventy and needs to retire." He can go put in twenty years at McDonald's and get a retirement someplace." So I think he got seven years.

TS: Was he convicted of the rape?

MS: Absolutely. And he had a civilian lawyer, and the civilian lawyer pleaded him not guilty and everything. And by my way of thinking, it would have been better had the civilian lawyer pleaded him guilty on—I mean, they had eyewitness accounts. They had him on tape calling the girl that he raped, twice on the ship, asking her not to report him, to go and recant, and all this other kind of stuff. So they had him dead to rights on those. So he should have pleaded him guilty on those. He should have told him to plead guilty on conduct unbecoming, fraternization, when the girl said—and somebody watched him in the backseat of the car with the girl necking, and—and then the girl say, "I stepped out of the car, went up the gangway, and he came up ten—" you know? So they had eyewitness, first person accounts. And all those things, he should have plead him guilty to. And if you really thought he didn't rape her, you should have plead not guilty to that, but—and his whole defense was he was intoxicated as well.

And the military judge said, "It's not what any intoxicated man would do, it's what any sane, sober individual would do, and it's your problem that you got intoxicated and your inhibitions went away. You are still responsible for your actions," basically.

So after sitting on that—and we didn't get days off—

TS: About what year was that?

MS: This was—Well, let's see. I was in Guam '98 to 2000, so it was probably 1999, and we were there every day for, like, twelve hours.

TS: How many—

MS: He gave us Sunday morning off to go to church.

TS: How long was the trial—court-martial?

MS: It took about a week; court-martial. And I came back, and my director of nursing was a guy, and I relayed to him and he said, "I tell you want I'm going to do. I'm going to get all the enlisted girls together in my directorate, and I'm going to get all the enlisted boys together; not together, separate. I want you to talk to them and tell them what you just went through, how that guy ruined his life, what the impact was to the young lady who let herself get so intoxicated she couldn't defend herself, and make an impact on them." And so I did and the fact that he was astute enough to say, "I want this information get down to my junior enlisted sailors so the girls don't let themselves get in their—that position, and that the boys know that just because 'I was drunk' is no defense."

TS: Right.

MS: So that was interesting, and—and I was—

TS: Was it an awakening for you, too, in some—

MS: Well, I was surprised that—and maybe I shouldn't have been, but that the guys were not on his side.

TS: I see.

MS: The good 'ol boys network was not in place there. They were incensed even more than I was by his behavior.

TS: What about the young woman? What happened to her. I mean, because you read sometimes that the woman is charged with things too.

MS: Well, it—

TS: Especially with their drinking—

MS: Right.

TS: —often times.

MS: But see, she didn't drink and drive.

TS: Okay.

MS: Like I said, she did all the things she—Now, maybe they gave her some counseling and—and saw if she had an alcohol problem; I don't know.

TS: Right.

MS: But she wasn't on trial—

TS: But not—

MS: —so I wouldn't know, and she wasn't in my command.

TS: I see, so you're not really sure.

MS: Right, she was on the ship.

TS: Okay, interesting.

MS: One of the ships that were there. So I don't know, but I don't think she was in trouble at all, even though, of course, the civilian attorney tried to put her on trial, but—

TS: Right; sure.

MS: Yeah.

TS: Didn't work.

MS: No, it didn't work.

TS: Very interesting—interesting about how the men on that—on that court-martial acted too.

MS: Yeah.

TS: So those kind of issues—the behavioral issues—that come up, whether it's drinking or drugs or, like you say, the—what other kind of things do young—young sol—sailors do?

MS: Oh, the—the inappropriate sexual behavior in all the little compartments onboard the ship; like, the—the getting pregnant and the—

TS: Oh, right.

MS: The sexual harassment, the—things like that.

TS: Did you see that the training for sexual harassment—because it seemed to me that in the eighties nobody was addressing things like rape; they were addressing sexual harassment. And there's all this training about that, and it didn't seem like—for the period I was in until '86—anybody ever addressed things like rape. Do—At what point did that start—was it addressed before you retired?

MS: Well, I think if you look at the hearings that just happened on Capitol Hill not that long ago with all the—CNO [Chief of Naval Operations] and all the heads of the services being called on the carpet, they will admit that there has not been enough focus and attention put on the sentencing and convicting of people accused of rape or sexual assault. Frequently they try to make it go away, and I—So I—I—I don't know because I really didn't encounter a lot. I didn't have any of my corpsmen come to me and say that they had been sexually assaulted, and so I never had to deal with it in my chain of command. But I think you're going to see some large changes now with the visibility that it has gotten recently, and especially with the service academies. The air force especially, I think, had—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Most recently, yeah.

MS: —had some issues at the [U.S.] Air Force Academy. And then there was a senior enlisted instructor at—in one of the services, and I don't remember whether it was army or air force; I don't remember that it was navy.

TS: I think they've all been touched by it.

MS: Had—Right, had—had—it came out that [he] had been coercing his female students to have sexual relations with him.

I did have one—When I say I didn't have any of my young sailor—female sailors come to me, I had one of my male nurses sexually harassed by a female civilian employee.

TS: How did you handle that?

MS: And I did not witness it. I was an O-5 at the time at one of my duty stations—I won't say where—and I was the department head, and one of the division officers, like the charge nurse, came to me and said, "I need to tell you something but I need you to promise you won't tell anybody."

And I said, "Well, not knowing what you're going to tell me, I can't make that promise." By then I had gotten savvy enough to have that response.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

MS: And I said, "Let me come back to you with something. Is this something that I need—that you feel I need to know?"

She said, "Yes, ma'am."

I said, "Well, then I think you have no choice, but you need to tell me and trust that I will do what's right." So she then proceeded to tell me that one of my male lieutenants was at the nurse's station and was leaning over to talk to a corpsman, so his upper body was at an angle and his backside was, kind of, sticking out a little bit, and one of the elderly, white-haired, female nurses goosed him. And another one of the civilian nurses said, "Oh, red light, red light," which tells you the staff knew that was inappropriate behavior at the nurse's station when he was in charge for the shift. And poor guy was a red head so he immediately, I guess, blushed brick red, and I gather it was bothering him a lot and he was losing sleep over it.

So she came to me and I said—and I guess it had happened two or three days before, and I said, "Well, thank you very much for telling me," and, "I want you to call this nurse because you're a friend of his and just tell him that you felt you needed to tell me and I would just like him to come in a little bit early for his shift so I could just chat with him a little bit.

So I brought him in and said, "What's been going on?" And that's when he told me that he was losing sleep over it, and—and I said, "You're part of my management team, as my ship charge on the evening shift," and that was a surprise to him. I said, "You're an important part of my cog. You are my eyes and ears on the evening shift. You are my representative, and the fact that somebody did that to you is totally inappropriate, and so did you talk to her at the time?" And he was so embarrassed and flabbergasted he never really did. So I said, "Well, here's what I would like to do. I will bring her into the office, and I will stay in here. I want you to tell her what you—that that was inappropriate, you didn't appreciate that, and that was not proper behavior." So—And I also reported it to the EEO; the equal [employment] opportunity—basically, sexual harassment person, and said, "I feel this needs to be addressed."

So she called her into my office, she saw him sitting there. He never said a word. She immediately started falling all over herself apologizing for her behavior, because she knew—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Before she even got in your office?

MS: No, when she came in my office and saw him sitting there.

TS: Oh, I see; he was sitting there; right.

MS: She knew she'd been busted.

TS: Yes.

MS: So I then excused him to go do his shift and I said to her, "It's obvious you know that was inappropriate behavior, because you immediately started apologizing when you came in the room." I said, "I feel like this is something that I need to take up the chain of command. I'm just letting you know I'm going to do that, and I will get back to you when whatever measure that's going to be taken is made a decision on." So—And of course then she tried to deflect to other people. And so, she went out and resumed her shift. So what ended up happening was two days without pay and a written letter of reprimand, or something got put in her record.

So I brought her back in when I—when we found out what was going to happen and told her, and she requested that I just write sick leave—SL for sick leave over those two days so nobody would know. And I said, "Well, I'm sorry. I don't think that's appropriate. I'm not going to put in big red letters that you've been laid off without pay for two days. I'll just put a line through both of those shifts and somebody else will work them." I said, "But people probably will figure it out." And I said, "Part of the reason we hold people accountable is so other people know there are consequences to actions, and maybe it will make other people think twice before they do something like that."

And actually, she was kind of a—kind of a coarse person, who probably had grown up on a—on a farm and kind of—had kind of a—a not real sophisticated language. I mean, she liked to use vulgar language a lot. And so, I think she had kind of grown up in—in a different kind of a circumstance, maybe. But I didn't have any problems with her, and—but that was the one case I had a sexual harassment. Surprisingly enough, it was a female to a male.

TS: Well, you have—but they're out numbered, right? I mean, the—the—for gender issues—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MS: In—In—Right, in a—

TS: —it's the male that's—

MS: In a medical environment, you're right.

TS: Yeah.

MS: It's the male that is the minority.

TS: Right.

MS: Yeah, although there are a lot of male corpsmen, but—

TS: True, but for authority—

MS: Right.

TS: —issues and power—

MS: Right.

TS: —it's more the women nurses, right?

MS: Right.

TS: So—Well, that's very interesting. So how did you—how—how did you like being able to have that kind of authority actually? And the way you're describing how you handled it, I'm thinking—you had said you—you learned over the years how to, like, respond to that. So how did you learn those kinds of things? Did someone mentor you to help you become a leader in that respect?

MS: There were—I guess—You know, I can't put my finger on any one person. I learned different things from different people along the way, and you also learn things from bosses that you don't think were good bosses. You learn what not to do; what you say to yourself in your head; "When I become the boss I am never going to do that to my person." So even the people that you think were not good role models you learn things from.

TS: Was there anybody in particular—I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you, Marie.

MS: I was just going to say I think part of it is just like doing four overseas tours. You pick up a little something every place you go, like knowing what a SOFA is; a status of forces agreement. In Iceland, we didn't have a status of forces agreement, but that, kind of—are the rules for how you will treat the U.S. forces over there and on the base and things like that. And you just learn little things that—In Iceland, with it being my fourth overseas duty station, and I was the acting XO, or the acting CO, or somebody would come to me and say, "I have this issue. I don't know what to do."

And I'd say, "Oh, well, da ta da ta da."

And they'd get this look on their face and they'd just—they'd say, "How do you know these things?

And my response would be, “Well, I don’t know how I know, I just do,” and I think part of it is just years and years of experience, and sitting around sometimes and listening to people problem solve, or watching how people make decisions, or in this situation you saw this didn’t work well and then you saw a another situation similar and somebody used something different and that did work better.

And the part—Once I became a manager and I wasn’t doing so much patient care, all that nurturing that I used to do with my patients I now did with my staff. And one of the—the biggest compliments I got paid—I had a labor and delivery nurse who wanted—had originally told me she wanted to be a midwife—she wanted to deliver babies—and I—she was a staff nurse and this was the same place and I was the department head, and my division officer, or charge nurse, was leaving and I needed a new one. So I called her in and asked her—told her I would like her to think about being my charge nurse. And she was kind of a quiet person, and I said, “I think you have what it takes, and I would be here to mentor you and help out. So I want you to think about it and come back and let me know if that’s something you would be interested in doing.”

So she did take the job, and one of the things—one time she came in and one of the doctors had chastised and reamed out one of her nurses at the patient’s bedside, and this was the patient the nurse was caring for so she felt it ruined the nurse’s credibility with the patient. So I told her that she needed to go talk to the doctor. “Oh, ma’am, won’t you do it? You’re just so much better at this because—”

I said, “Well, this maybe is how the conversation could go.”

And that’s when she said, “Could you just talk to him? You’re so much better at this.”

And I said, “How do you think I got good at this? It was by doing it.” I said, “I tell you what. You have to be the evening supervisor at three o’clock. You go in there at quarter to three; it’s time limited; you only have fifteen minutes.”

And she said, “Oh, you’ve been such a bear because the coffee—the coffee bar downstairs has been closed and he doesn’t have his caffeine.”

I said, “Take him a Coke.”

She said, “He yelled at my nurse and I got to talk to him and now you want me to buy him a Coke too?”

I said, “Now, I’ll buy him the Coke. Here’s a dollar. Go take a Coke in with you.” And we went through maybe how—some ideas for the conversation. I said, “Then come back and let me know how it went.”

So she came back in and she said, “That Coke was the smartest idea.” She said, “I came in the door, kind of waved it at him, and he said, ‘Boy, could I use that.’” And she said, “Well, here you go.” And then she sat down and had her conversation, and he did agree that was the wrong place to have the discussion with the nurse; should not have happened at the patient’s bedside. He should have asked her to step out of the room and gone to an empty room and had it. He didn’t feel he was in the wrong talking to her.

And I said, “Did he get your point?”

“Yes, ma’am, he did.”

“And is he going to change his behavior?”

“Yes, ma’am, he promised he—”

I said, “Mission accomplished.” I said, “Now you’ve learned how to do that. You won’t be so apprehensive the next time.”

And so—And it was very rewarding to watch her. When she first took that job as the division officer she would come into my room and my office and say, “Oh, this is what happened. I don’t have any idea what to do.”

And so, I’d say, “Well, it seems there’s three choices you have; you could do this, you could do this, or you could do this.”

“Oh, I don’t know. Which one should I do?”

“Well, I found that if I did this sometimes this worked or this, but this probably is your best option, but any of them will work but try this one.”

So she’d come back in and she’d say, “Oh, that worked good. Thank you so much, ma’am.” So over a course of time, then I’d know she was coming in my office and saying, “Oh, I’ve got this situation and—and I think I could do this, this, or this.” So she was starting to come up with possible solutions but she still wanted some guidance on which one to use. Then a little time passed and she would come in and say, “This is what the situation is, these are what my choices are, this is what I think I should do. Do you agree?”

“Sounds great.”

Then it got to the point where she’d come in and say, “Oh, da da da da da. This is what happened and this is what I did.”

I— “Thank you very much for taking care of him; keeping me in the loop,” and to watch that progression.

And when I was getting ready to transfer, she came into the office and said, “You know, I changed my mind. I don’t want to be a nurse midwife. I want to be—get my master’s in clinical ob[stetrics] because I want to do for somebody else what you did for me. I want to be a mentor.” That was the highest compliment that anybody could have paid.

TS: That was a real terrific explanation of how mentoring works too; really great.

MS: Right.

TS: Yeah.

MS: And we still keep in contact with each other, and I promoted her to commander.

TS: Terrific.

MS: Yeah.

TS: That’s terrific. Well, speaking of getting your master’s, why don’t we talk a little bit about that?” How—How did you decide—Oh, actually, before you tell me that I wanted to ask you about when you signed up, when you raised your hand for your commission.

MS: Yes.

TS: What was your—Did you expect that you were going to serve twenty[-eight – MS corrected later] years and—or did you—What were—What were your expectations?

MS: I—I was going in to just, kind of, get away from home for a little bit. No, I thought I'd do three years and get out.

TS: Did you?

MS: I really did, and—and to be honest I probably thought it was a good place to find a husband. I don't even remember if that was something that crossed my mind, but that was a thing that a lot of girls thought. And I had fun in Millington, met some good friends, we traveled all the time. Every time we had a weekend off we were never in town; we were everywhere.

And—And then came time for orders and they offered me Puerto Rico and I thought, "Oh, that's an island. It's warm. That sounds like fun," so I took those orders. And then by then I was thinking, "Oh gosh, I want to get a master's in obstetrics and it would be a lot better if the navy paid for it, so—" So then I took another set of orders and went to Bethesda, and that—from there is where I put in for my master's.

And so, it was funny because my relatives would ask me when I went home, "Oh, are you going to make a career of it?"

"Oh, God, no."

And then, "Are you going to make a career of it?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Are you going to make a career of it?"

"Well, I hope not."

"Are you going to make a career of it?"

"Well, it's starting to look that way." [both chuckle]

So—And that's what I tell young girls, or prospective navy nurses, because I did tours a lot in San Diego for the recruiters. And I'd say, "You know, you're not signing on the dotted line for twenty years. You're signing for three years, or however long your contract is for, and if it's not for you, you get out after that. If you're enjoying it, sign up for another hitch." I said, "I didn't sign up to make it a career. It just happened because I was enjoying myself and having a good time and eventually making a good living at it." So—But no, I—I originally didn't join to have a career but it ended up that way.

TS: Yeah. So you did get your master's?

MS: I got my master's, and you submitted a packet and then there was a group of people that met and select—made selections. And part of it was, were you asking for a specialty that they needed?

TS: Okay.

MS: So you—Ahead of time they would put out, "We really need people to get master's in this and this," and if it was something that met your interest then you would submit your paperwork. But you always gave them a second choice in case they had ten people who asked for a master's in something and they only needed five, but you had a good packet, maybe you could get picked up for something else.

So I got selected, and actually I was only the second navy nurse to have gone to Catholic [University of America], because previously they thought it was too expensive and—but since I was already in Bethesda they didn't have to move me, so that saved them thousands of dollars.

And so, there was one other navy nurse there and myself while I was there, and I did it in a year and a half instead of two years. And—

TS: What did you get it in?

MS: Obstetrics.

TS: Okay.

MS: And—And then they gave you, what's called, a follow on tour, and that was when I was Division Officer of Labor and Delivery in Charleston; it was after my master's.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, that's when you went to South Carolina?

MS: Right, that's when I went to South Carolina. So it was nice because you could focus on getting you master's degree, and so many of the—of the people there were working fulltime, and then trying to get their master's around a fulltime job. So it was nice that that was my fulltime job; was going to school.

TS: And getting your master's.

MS: Right.

TS: Yeah, that is true. So you—So after that, then you went to Charleston. You told me how much you enjoyed—

MS: Yes.

TS: —being in Charleston, right?

MS: I did.

TS: And did—What was your job there?

MS: I was the Division Officer of Labor and Delivery.

TS: Okay.

MS: And shortly before I left I went over to Staff Education and Training [SEAT] and developed courses and things for labor and delivery, and that kind of thing.

TS: And so, then you—So we're looking—I'm just looking at the years to see what's happening in the world here.

MS: It was 1990-1993.

TS: So that was during the Gulf War?

MS: Right, and a lot of nurses from Charleston did get deployed, and some of my labor and delivery nurses did, and I was given notification that I was next up. So I had gone over to the exchange and done my shopping trip and basically had my sea bag all packed when things resolved quicker than they thought.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: They ended, right.

MS: Right. So I did not get deployed, but I had the sea bag all packed and I was ready to go. So—And that's when they brought a lot of reserve nurses in to backfill.

TS: Right, for the nurses that went out and deployed.

MS: Right; right.

TS: How did that work out?

MS: Worked out very, very well. We got very high quality nurses, at least on my unit, and they fit in very, very well. And the corpsmen that came in, even if they weren't doing corpsmen duties, very quickly were matching them up with one of our corpsmen and they—they were all very happy to be there to pitch in and help out in any way that they could. And like I said, our—the nurses that we got worked out really, really well.

TS: And then you told me a little—the next station that you went to after that was Sardinia, right?

MS: Yes.

TS: And that was the island under the island under the boot? [chuckling]

MS: The island off the island off the—yeah, off the coast of Italy.

TS: There you go. Well, we briefly—When we first started talking we talked a little bit about how you were in the BOQ, you were an enlisted officer, and so—can you talk a little bit about your housing situation and how it changed as you progressed in your rank?

MS: When I first joined, I lived in the BOQ for two years because I basically had a rocking chair for furniture; that was all I owned. And after living in the BOQ for two years one of my friends, kind of, convinced me to go get a little one bedroom apartment in the apartment complex where she was at, so that's when I first started accruing furniture. And I think I took my bed over to Puerto Rico with me and basically—and you take your little things, but bigger furniture you put into storage, and then—

TS: Did they let you get furniture—like, government furniture in—to help you furnish things?

MS: Yeah, some places they do; some places they do. And basically, our little apartment that we had in Puerto Rico was above the daycare center, and that came furnished with what we fondly called "Fred Flintstone furniture."

TS: Oh really? What was it like?

MS: Well, it's the stuff that they made in the prisons; very uncomfortable and—but it was furniture. And so, that's why I said I brought my own mattress and my own bed. So they came and took the government mattress and bed out. So at least I knew I had a comfortable bed while I was there. But that did come furnished with furniture, and that was on base.

And then I didn't really live on base anymore. Guam I did; I lived in the BOQ for two years, and three different BOQs in the two years; I got to move around.

TS: Oh, really?

MS: I finally ended up on the one—in the one on the hospital compound, and—and then I lived on base in Iceland. You weren't allowed to live off base in Iceland unless you were married to an Icelander.

TS: Is that right?

MS: Yes.

TS: Did—Did—Were very many people getting married?

MS: No.

TS: No?

MS: I mean, I think there were, like, maybe two people who lived off base. I mean, the base was huge; it was sprawling. It was—There were apartments. It wasn't that they were all living in BOQs. There was apartments and huge buildings with, like, eight different families with three kids each, and they had huge common play areas for the kids, and—

TS: So they had accommodations.

MS: Oh yes; yeah; very much a social thing. And in Sardinia there really wasn't—Well, there was base housing. It was a cluster of houses where all the—the families lived. But for single people, I think there was an enlisted barracks but there was no single BOQ so all the single officers lived off base.

TS: Okay.

MS: So I had—had an apartment.

TS: Well, what was your experience like just for work and seeing things when you went to Washington?

MS: Washington state or Washington D.C.?

TS: Washington—Washington state came first, right? Didn't it?

MS: No, Washington D.C. was—was—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, well, tell me about both; that's fine. I skipped that one, I guess.

MS: Yeah, it was where I went to Catholic for my master's.

TS: Oh, right, okay. Oh, and when you were in Bethesda too.

MS: Right; right.

TS: Okay.

MS: I'm trying—That was mostly working.

TS: [chuckles] The one in—near D.C.?

MS: Long hours.

TS: Okay.

MS: I mean, when I worked labor and delivery it was eight hour shifts but I was the assistant charge nurse and the charge nurse was a civilian, so if somebody called in sick I frequently just stayed and worked a double, and would see her coming in in the morning and say, "I stayed and worked the p.m. shift—or worked the night shift because So-and-so called in sick. We're adequately staffed today. I'm going home to bed."

So I didn't do a lot of social things in Washington, D.C. because I worked; I worked; I worked; I worked. And I remember thinking, "God, I'm only in my thirties. I feel so old. I'm exhausted."

I mean, I remember coming home from a twelve hour shift—because your shift started at seven but you had to leave the house at five thirty to get there, and people who live in D.C. now know exactly what I'm talking about. And you know, you'd work till seven and you were just going to the locker room to put a coat on, and a patient would waylay you and say, "Oh, Lieutenant, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure, no problem."

And I mean, I had patients a couple times—one time this gentleman said to me, "You were here when I went to sleep last night. You're here when I wake up in the morning. Don't you ever go home?" And then I had another patient told me one time that I looked like I needed the bed worse than they did. [both chuckle]

But—And I remember coming home after my third twelve hour shift in a row, and I had my favorite little places I would stop. There was a Subway a couple blocks from my house and I would stop there and pick up a sandwich, and I laid my head on the counter while they were making the sandwich. And I went home and ate it, fell asleep on the sofa, like, at nine o'clock and woke up at three o'clock in the morning, moved to the bed, woke back up at three o'clock the next afternoon. So I slept, like, eighteen hours.

TS: Wow.

MS: And went back to bed and slept all night the next night as well. Once I went—After about two or three weeks at Catholic for my master's where I was getting good sleep and I wasn't stressed, I mean, I felt years younger. I finally felt my age. I mean, it was very physically—very, very demanding there.

TS: Yeah, it sounds like it.

MS: So—I mean, I really didn't do a whole lot of social things. I think—I would go down to the mall and study when I was at Catholic; just take the Metro [The Washington Metro; rapid transit system] down. I went to the fireworks on—on the [National] Mall sometimes, or the Fourth of July celebrations; would go down to the Smithsonian on the weekends or go to the art museums; the galleries; go to some of the craft shows.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So you stayed pretty local?

MS: Yeah. There was a little, nice B and B [Bed and Breakfast] in the Shenandoah Valley I used to like to go to occasionally for a night here and there, and went to a couple wineries, but didn't really travel a whole lot there. I think I did do a cruise or two.

TS: Yeah? How about when you got to Washington state?

MS: Washington state; I had some relatives up in Concrete, which was a couple ferry rides and a couple hours by car. So I would take my cousin and her two kids and load them in the car to go up and visit our relatives. So I did that quite frequently, and it was nice to have family in the area because I got to see my cousins and things. They had [a] nice ITT office. You could go up to—One weekend they did a—a tour through the lava flow tubes in—in one of the—the mountains. And the wineries; they would take a bus trip from the base and go—excuse me—visit the wineries on Bainbridge Island. Used to like to go down by Olympia and go to the sea; the—the shore.

TS: Yes.

MS: All—We could take the ferry over and go to the Seattle Mariners games when it was at the Kingdome [officially King County Multipurpose Domed Stadium], because it was an easy walk from the ferry, and then you just get back on the ferry after the game and go back over and pick up your car and go home. So I got to see quite a few Mariners games. The [Green Bay] Packers came out, played the [Seattle] Seahawks once, so I went to a football game. And so, it—doing a lot of those types of things.

TS: Did you like your tour there for work?

MS: Yeah, I actually did two different things. I started out at the submarine base, because when I was coming from [unclear] in Sardinia the detailers said, "You didn't call and ask me to send you home early. You didn't give me any problems, and that is such a hard billet to fill, and thank you for doing it for two years and not giving me any trouble. Where would you like to go? You tell me."

And I said, "Well, it'd be kind of nice to go to a clinic where I wasn't in charge; that shut down every afternoon; I didn't have to worry about it."

"I'll send you to [Naval] Submarine Base Bangor, Washington [Naval Submarine Base Bangor and Naval Station Bremerton merged in 2004 to create Naval Base Kitsap]."

I said, "Okay, that sounds good."

So I did that for about a year, and then the—the chief nurse over at the hospital called me up one day and said, "What are you doing over at that base clinic when you have a master's in obstetrics?"

I said, "Well, ma'am, the detailer told me I could have whatever orders I wanted because I just came from a very difficult to fill, arduous billet, and I told her I wanted to come here."

"Well, I need you over at the hospital. I don't need you there."

I said, "Well—" And I had just gotten there not that long before, and I said, "Well, ma'am, could I at least, like, do a year here? I'm just getting myself settled in over here."

And she said, "Okay, but then you're coming over to the hospital." I mean, it wasn't a week later I had orders, but they were for a year.

TS: For a year, really?

MS: So—So I did get to stay a year there, and it was nice. You got off on time, lunchtime I was able to go over to the gym and work out; those kinds of things.

TS: Regular hours for a change.

MS: Yes, and—and then I was over at the hospital and became the—the department head of maternal/child.

TS: How was that?

MS: That was fine. I mean—I mean, that's where I mentored that one nurse.

TS: Oh, I see; okay; very neat.

MS: Yeah; yeah, So I mean, I had good people who worked for me, and so it—I mean, but it was just I wanted something different for a change.

TS: Right.

MS: Yeah.

TS: You needed to decompress a little too.

MS: I did; I did.

TS: Yeah. So then you went to Guam after that assignment?

MS: Let's see, that was '98, 2000—or—

TS: Ninety-eight up to—From '95—

MS: Let's see. When did I come back? Yes, I did because I—I did overseas, stateside, overseas, stateside, overseas. [both chuckle] So I did go to Guam next, yes.

TS: And you enjoyed that one?

MS: Very much. That's where I—I met two of my very dearest friends, and, I mean, it—I had—I had two good bosses and there was always something to do. You could catch Continental Airlines, and our Information, Ticket, and Tours Office would—if you could take four days leave over a long weekend, they would, for, say, four hundred and some dollars—that included your airfare and your hotel—to go to Hong Kong or to go to Cannes, Italy or—different places. So—And we did that in Sardinia as well. We were able to go—I think one weekend we went to London, and we went to Paris. So you did get to travel when you were overseas.

TS: So you got around quite a bit, traveling?

MS: Yes. Yes.

TS: You did get your traveling and seeing the world in, then?

MS: Oh, absolutely. I mean, from Sardinia, went and spent a week in Belgium, and then we spent a week up in Austria skiing, and then spent a week in Garmisch[-Partenkirchen] Germany going with an ITT trip. So you took your leave and you didn't go back to the States, you traveled. We did that in Guam somewhat. I think I only went back to the States once and that was on a—for a two week course. And so, you took your vacation time. And I did do a cruise while I was there. I used the telephone—I still kept my travel agent back in the States and did a two week cruise that did Australia—from Sydney, Australia to Auckland, New Zealand, and I didn't have the jetlag because I was in that part of the world.

TS: I see; neat.

MS: So.

TS: Was that what you liked about being overseas, was the travel?

MS: Right, the—the being able to travel and see different things and buying unique, neat things. You could always tell—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, yeah. You showed me some really interesting things you have here.

MS: You can always tell the house of someone who's either been in the foreign service and traveled a lot, or been in the military, because they have such an eclectic mix of souvenirs and furniture, so. I always tell my junior nurses—if it was their first duty station I said, "Look, I know you're not going to make it a career, but think about doing one more tour and making it an overseas tour. Have the navy pay to move you and live overseas for a year and a half or two years."

So some of them would do that, and they would come back and say, "Okay, ma'am, I took your advice. I took orders to So-and-so."

I said, "Okay, now, those are only—what?—a year and a half orders. So I tell you what. The minute you hit the ground, you start looking for what kind of trips and tours you can do because that year and a half's going to go really fast. And you should come back with not a lot of leave on the books, which means you traveled, and not a lot of money in the bank because you should be buying lots of interesting furniture and things that you can only get in that part of the world. Now, don't go broke, but you need to shop."

TS: [chuckles]

MS: "Shop and travel."

And so, I would get emails from some of my nurses that said, "Oh, ma'am, I took your advice. I've only been here a month and this week we're going to do this and this and—You're right. The time's going to go really fast. We've got all of our trips planned in already."

TS: That's really terrific; great advice.

MS: Yeah; yeah.

TS: Great advice. So did you—So I want to jump forward a little bit to where you were when 9/11 happened.

MS: Yes.

TS: Do you remember that?

MS: I was in San Diego and I was in firefighting class.

TS: Okay.

MS: I had to go to firefighting school because I was assigned to the hospital ship, so they wanted you to know how to fight fires, because if a—if a fire breaks out onboard ship, there's no place to go. So I was sitting in firefighting class and one of the instructors came in and said—I don't remember whether he said, "Some planes just flew into the

towers [World Trade Center] and the Pentagon's been bombed—or been hit and ya'll need to go back to your commands. We're canceling class for the day."

TS: It would have been really earlier there, right?

MS: Right. It was probably only—we had just started class. It was probably ten o'clock in the morning, or nine o'clock, because I don't know if we started class at seven or eight; probably eight. So it might have been nine thirty or nine o'clock; something like that. And by the time it—it got out and was all over on the—on the TV. And so, getting back through the gate at the hospital, they had already increased security, and for about a week afterwards, I mean, you just added about forty-five minutes or an hour to get through the gate, just to the hospital. And trying to get on any of the bases, they were really stringently checking cars for quite a while after that. And yeah, I remember exactly where I was when 9/11 happened.

TS: Do you think the navy changed at all after that?

MS: The navy? I—I don't think so. I think, just like it has for everybody else, certain things changed. The—

TS: What kind—

MS: Security.

TS: Security? Like you say, getting on and off base?

MS: Right; right. They certainly instituted new training courses on terrorism; how to keep yourself safe, like, when you're traveling; what floor of the hotel to stay on; do you want an inside room or an outside room; do you want one that's really high up or do you want one that's low down; to vary your route going to and from work; don't make yourself a target; those—

TS: Those kind of things?

MS: Yeah. So they instituted some new training courses based on that.

TS: Well, what were your personal feelings about what happened on that day?

MS: You know, I think—and I'm not a big TV, news hound person, but I don't think my TV went off CNN for two weeks. And then when we invaded in—I was glued to the TV when I wasn't at work. So it—it was a tragedy to a very, very large degree. And a gal that's a friend of mine now—and this is more Oklahoma City, not—but she almost lost her life in the Oklahoma City bombing, which was another terrorist incident.

TS: Right.

MS: Domestic terrorism, that's true, but—and you can't help—I haven't been to Pennsylvania to see the memorial there. I did go to the 9/11 memorial [National September 11 Memorial and Museum] in Washing—in New York City, which is still not completed. But the reflection pools, they have them in the footprint of where the two towers came down, and they have the survivor tree there; the one tree that survived the attack. And then the little church that's across from where the—the towers were that—the firefighters and the rescue workers would go there to sleep, and that's basically a memorial now. And it was very, very moving when I was there just last summer.

TS: Okay.

MS: And then the one at the Pentagon as well.

TS: Did you see that one too?

MS: Yes. That's—Its simplicity is very moving. So if you have not been—been, I would suggest it at some point. And the one at the Pentagon may mean more to you like it did to me, even than the Twin Towers, because that's that military connection.

TS: Right.

MS: Yeah, so.

TS: Right. Well, did you—So you didn't—you didn't have to deploy anywhere?

MS: I did not. I did not. We—In San Diego, I helped all—because you can imagine that—In Charleston, there was twos and threes of nurses that came in. San Diego, when we had the huge deployments, all those reserve nurses that came in to back fill, I was doing staffing at the time and—so part of my job I worked with the reserve nurse and we assigned—tracked and assigned all those reserve nurses who came in and—and paired them up. If there was somebody who hadn't done ward nursing in a while and were afraid of all the technology, we paired them up with a new ensign who was a wiz on the technology but needed that seasoned nurse to watch the way they interacted with the physician; to help them problem solve; help them prioritize, and things like that. So it worked out beautifully to marry up a more senior reservist with a more junior navy nurse, and they—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Yeah?

MS: It was a very good, symbiotic relationship. So that's what I did when they all came onboard in San Diego. Again, it was a very good working relationship, on the nursing side of the house.

TS: Now, how about Iceland? You talked a little bit about Iceland; that you don't need to experience those winters again, right?

MS: Right; right. Yeah, I was—I was the senior person in my building, and I should have made a watch bill [a method of assigning regular periods of work duty] for shoveling—

TS: [chuckles]

MS: —because most of the buildings had a watch bill and your name came up, and if you were on the watch bill and it snows, you went out and shoveled; you were the person that shoveled. But we had some Department of Defense school teachers in the building who—I was afraid to have them go out and shovel because I wasn't sure physically they were able to do that. And unfortunately, I was the one who got up the earliest to go to work, so even though I was the senior person I was the one who generally ended up shoveling off the sidewalks, putting down the rock salt, shoveling the path out to the street—yeah. [both chuckle]

TS: Yeah, because you were up—were you a captain by then?

MS: I was, but the air force doesn't go to work as early as I do.

TS: No, maybe—some of them do. Maybe not there though.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MS: Yeah, but these guys didn't because it was just—they were admin jobs so they didn't start till eight, and I was at the hospital at seven.

TS: Yeah. Did you enjoy that tour too?

MS: I did. I enjoyed the people a lot.

TS: The people. That's right; you talked about how you enjoyed the people there.

MS: Yeah; yeah.

TS: And then you went—So you're—Did you pick your final assignment or—

MS: I did. The—I called the detailer from Iceland and he—he offered me Great Lakes—

TS: [chuckles]

MS: —and I said to him—

TS: That's ironic, isn't it?

MS: —"Do you remember where I am sitting right now?

"Yeah."

Now, by this time I'm the same rank as the detailer.

TS: Okay.

MS: I said, "And you remember what time of the year it is?"

"Yeah, it's December."

I said, "Hector, excuse me, but you know what?"

"No."

"Am I going to Great Lakes?" I said, "No, thank you very much. There are no garages here on this base. I have shoveled more snow and chipped more ice off my windshield, I never want to have to do it again, so no." And I said, "I understand there are three O-6 billets at Camp Lejeune and there's only one O-6 there."

"Oh, we don't fill those."

I said, "Then you need to take them off the books." I said, "I have enough time in," and when you're coming back from overseas you only have to do one year and then you can retire. So I could basically come back to a duty station, immediately drop my retirement papers, and retire a year from that. And he wanted me to go be the chief nurse at Great Lakes, or be the chief nurse here, and I said, "Hector, I'm telling you, you send me someplace I don't want go, the first thing I'm doing when I hit the States is I'm dropping my retirement papers and you're going to have to back fill me in a year anyways. You might as well send me to Camp Lejeune. I want someplace warm, and I want someplace where there's another female O-6, so that if I have a bad day there's somebody I can go talk to about it over dinner."

So he finally relented and he sent me someplace warm, where I had a friend who was the chief nurse, and I had somebody to do things with.

TS: Did you know the nurse that was there before you got there?

MS: Here?

TS: The—Yeah.

MS: Yes—

TS: Oh, you knew—

MS: —I knew who it was.

TS: Oh, I see.

MS: Yes; yeah.

TS: So you had to, kind of, negotiate—not really negotiate.

MS: Yes.

TS: It sounds more like you, like, were pretty insistent about coming here.

MS: Well, and I told him—I said, "My entire career, a lot of these duty stations I didn't ask to go to. When I went to talk to the detailer they said, 'I really need you to go here,' and I said, 'That's fine. That's where I'll go then.'"

TS: Right.

MS: "So I have always done what the detailer needed me to do." I said, "This one time I would like to select where I'm going," so.

TS: How did that one work out?

MS: Well, that's where I ended up; was Camp Lejeune.

TS: Right. No, I mean how was your tour there?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MS: Oh, the tour.

TS: Yeah.

MS: It was good.

TS: Yeah?

MS: Yeah, it was good.

TS: And so, the end—you ended up staying in—in North Carolina.

MS: Right; right.

TS: Yeah.

MS: Yeah, because—I mean, I—I have a nice home and I like where I live, and as I previously—the state doesn't tax my military retired pay, so it helps your paycheck go a little bit further.

TS: Yeah. Now, did you—while—the whole twenty[-eight – MS corrected later] years you were in, was there any memorable award, or anything like that, that you received; decoration; things like that?

MS: I mean, just—just the usual Navy Achievement Medals, Navy Commendation Medals. You get the Meritorious Service Medal as you get more senior. But no, I don't—I don't—I don't think so.

TS: Yeah.

MS: Nothing that sticks out in my mind.

TS: So you just enjoyed all the tours and—that you had, mostly; the way you've described them?

MS: I did, and I mean—like I tell people, any job that you have, there are days when you don't like your job, and there are days when you love your job, and that's how it was with my military career.

TS: What—What made you decide—Because you could have stayed in longer, right?

MS: Only two more years.

TS: Two more years?

MS: The thing that made me decide—The detailer came for a visit here, and basically they were offering only three duty stations; San Diego—

TS: Been there.

MS: Been there. Bethesda, Maryland.

TS: Been there.

MS: Been there. And Portsmouth [Virginia]. All three high traffic areas, high cost areas, and very large facilities were you were going to work very hard. And so, I said to the detailer, "Well, of those three the only place I have not been is Portsmouth."

And she said, "Well, of those three, the place I really don't need you to go is Portsmouth."

And I said, "Well, ma'am, as I've already been there, done that, have the t-shirt from the other two, I think I'll just submit my retirement papers. Thank you very much."

"Okay, fine," and that was the end of the conversation, so.

TS: So how has it been since—when you got out? Did you have any kind of transition?

MS: Well, I loved to cruise, and I had, for ten years, been accruing brochures about world cruises, so I had been saving money into a savings account all along anyways, and when I retired I treated myself to an around the world cruise.

TS: Did you really?

MS: So my retirement date was effective November first, and January nineteenth I left on a hundred and thirteen day around the world cruise, and came back May thirteenth, I think.

TS: Terrific.

MS: And I was so relaxed. There's not a picture of me on that ship that I don't have a big ear to ear smile on my face. So—

TS: Did you go by yourself, or did you go with friends?

MS: I went by myself; didn't know a single person; not one—And compare that to the girl who joined the navy, who was so shy. The first two weeks I was in Millington, Tennessee, I only left by BOQ room to go to work and go to the exchange and get more chocolate.

TS: [chuckles]

MS: You know? So what a difference. And I can credit the military with giving me the self-confidence and getting to know myself. So it really was a wonderful thing for me personally to have spent all those years in the military, and it's been an easy transition—

TS: Yeah?

MS: —to retirement. I—People always said, "You'll know when it's time to retire," and I just didn't want to learn one more software system, and get one more new training evolution put down, so it was just—it was time.

And I still get my healthcare at Camp Lejeune, so I can go there and visit people and see all the changes but see the people that are still there that I know, and—so I still keep my contacts and I have all my retired O-6 friends that come and visit, and I go visit them, and—But it's wonderful to not have to worry about, "Am I going to be able to get the leave to go on my cruise, or is something going to happen to cancel the cruise?" And if I want to book a cruise, I book a cruise. If I want to take off and drive somewhere, there's no person [to contact for leave – MS clarified later].

TS: [chuckles] So did you—did you retire completely or did you go work at all or—

MS: Well, I—I say I'm—I just haven't gone back to work yet, because I guess I'm kind of young to say I'm retired.

TS: No, you're not. No, you're not. You're sure not.

MS: So if I get bored maybe I'll go back part time, but I—there are so many things to do community service-wise. There's so many different organizations that need help, and I'm—I'm busy. I don't sit at home all the time. I'm out and about helping different organizations.

TS: I usually ask the question that you kind of answered about how has your life been different since you joined the military?

MS: Yes.

TS: And you kind of answered that.

MS: Right.

TS: So I'm going to ask you, how do you think your life would have been different if you hadn't joined the military?

MS: I think, honestly, I wouldn't have developed into the person that I am. I think I probably would have stayed very much a shy, quiet person, and may still have been living in my parent's house. Granted, I'm still single at fifty-five, but I'm not living in my mother's house. I own my own house and have made my own decisions for years, and maybe that's part of the reason I'm still single. Some men are put off by a self-confident person who makes her own decisions and knows what they want out of life.

TS: And might just take off for a cruise anytime? [chuckles]

MS: Absolutely.

TS: That's great.

MS: So I don't think I would have developed the confidence in myself that I did with my military career had I not joined.

TS: Would you—Or—Would you or have you recommended the military for anybody else, especially young women?

MS: I—I have and I do.

TS: Yes.

MS: Like I said, I used to give tours to nursing students in San Diego who were thinking about a career—or thinking about joining the military. And I—I mean, I was very honest about some of the negatives and some of the positives, and what personality type might fit better and what type might not. I said, "If you're a person who likes to color outside of the lines and not follow the rules, you might have a little tougher transition. If you're a—a person who—who likes routine and likes to follow the rules, then—always colors inside the lines, you'll have a smooth transition to the military." And, I mean, I would recommend it to any of my nieces or nephews, so.

TS: Do you—Sorry, I lost my place there. Do you think there's any position that women can't serve in the military or in the navy?

MS: I—I don't think that they should change requirements so women can serve in certain billets. If women meet the requirements to be a Navy SEAL [Sea, Air, Land], let them be a Navy SEAL, but don't change the physical requirements so that women can. I think women would figure out a way to do certain things that may be physically—they figure out a different way to do it. So—And even now, all guys are not big strong ones. If you've got a smaller guy who's not got the upper body strength, he gets another guy to help him lift the bomb up to the bomb wing, or whatever.

So it would be the same way with women. I don't know there—And I think they're going to put women on submarines; I think that's coming. They just have to figure out which one they want to reconfigure and where they want to put them. But I don't know if there's anything I would say that they shouldn't be allowed to do. It's whatever—If they can meet the requirements that are already set, they should be allowed to do it.

TS: What did you think about the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"?

MS: Well, I don't know if it's—been repealed but expanded upon. Before it was you could be in here but don't—don't advertise it. Now it's just you can be here and ad—The thing that I find the most interesting is how, now, all the benefits—since they have legalized same-sex marriages, now the same-sex spouses are getting—going to get medical care, commissary privileges—

TS: That just, kind of, came out this week, right?

MS: That just came out this week, and [it's] very, very interesting that—And I don't know if that's by law because I don't think same-sex marriages are legal in every state, so are they going to do it just by state or—because that's not a law that's come out that said that; that's the Department of Defense or the military saying, "We will now—If—"

TS: So what—But what do you think? What's your personal views on that?

MS: I don't have any problem with serving beside a—a guy who's homosexual or a gal who is homosexual. I—As long as I'm not making advances to the guy and [the] girl's not making advances to me, it shouldn't matter what our sexual orientation is. If—If you are not making unwanted advances, which you're not supposed to do in the workplace anyways, to a heterosexual, the homosexual should not be making unwanted advances to me.

TS: So it's more about behavior—

MS: Right.

TS: —rather than sexuality.

MS: Right, right. What a person does in their private life, in their private time, is not my concern. It's how they perform on the job.

TS: You've answered a lot of these questions. I'm trying to see if there's something I missed. Oh, have you—have you had any experience with the VA [Veterans Affairs] at all?

MS: I—I have, and I, in fact, get most of my meds through—through the VA system. I go to Morehead [City] to the clinic.

TS: Is that working well?

MS: It works okay for chronic conditions. If you have, like, an acute—And even the VA doctor said, "Keep your TRICARE," because if you have, like, an acute sinusitis it takes me two months to get an appointment with my VA doctor, and then they'll call and cancel it the week before I have the appointment, and it takes me another month to get the appointment. It's taken me about three months to get an eye exam. So nothing works quickly through the system with the VA, so it's fine for, like, your annual physical, and—

TS: Something you can put off.

MS: Right, or something that's chronic that you're just getting a check-up on or something. But if I have something acute I—

TS: That you need to be seen right away.

MS: Right.

TS: I see.

MS: Then I generally go down to Camp Lejeune.

TS: I see.

MS: And I—And I think if I was not able to be seen at Morehead, they would probably direct me to Urgent Care in town and they would pay the bill.

TS: I see. Do you think that there's anything—or is there anything in particular that you would like a civilian to know or understand about what it's like to serve in the military that you don't think that they understand or appreciate?

MS: I—I think it's hard to—Sometimes they will compare pay between a civilian and a military, and I know some civilian jobs take you away from your family, but all the time that you're away from your family—and these kids nowadays with the wars that we have in Iraq and Afghanistan, being away, deployed for nine months or twelve months or six months—whatever the evolution is—coming back, and in two or three months you start training to go back over and then you're back over there again, and the constant up-tempo and the toll it takes mentally and physically on the marriages, on the person's psyche. A person who is normal with good mental health, would not fare well after a time with that kind of a stressor and that kind of an up-tempo. You can't put a price on—on the service that people do for the country.

When you think about it, there's only about one percent of the people who are in the military, and then they're talking about how it's going to break the bank; one percent of the population. And what percent of the one percent retires? Not a large percentage go all the way to twenty years to retire, and how that's going to break the bank, I fail to see. When they start—When [United States] Congress starts to vote themselves to not get a pay raise, or to take a pay cut—or with sequestration and what it's done to the military and to the civilian Department of Defense employees, has Congress taken a day off without pay? I don't think they have.

So I just don't think, until our civilian counterparts walk a week or a month in a military person's shoes—I don't think they'll ever understand. My family has—really has no clue, except for my youngest brother who served, what it was like going to Iceland. And yes, I had been home in November before I went over there. We get to Iceland right before Thanksgiving, it's already dark twenty hours a day with dusk, kind of, for three or four hours; basically it never got light. And you do that and then you don't even get a Christmas card from your mother. You know, it's—to be so far away and so isolated from all your family when you're single, and then have family that doesn't understand, and—and that's your family.

So I'm not sure unless they've walked in the shoes—and that's where it's important, that I guess some of the people that have military backgrounds start to run and get elected for our—our seats in government, because right now there's too few people who understand that the war fighters don't choose to go over and fight; they're ordered to do that and they have to follow orders. They join up because they want to defend their country and they're patriotic. They don't join up because they want to go to war.

TS: Are there any leaders that were in—While you were in, were there any leaders that you particularly have admired?

MS: Colin [Luther] Powell was one.

TS: Why do you admire him?

MS: I think he is a very bright, bright man, and I think he was a very, very good leader, and [Herbert] Norman Schwarzkopf [Jr.] was—was, too, in a—totally different leadership styles, I think. Do you mean military or civilian or both?

TS: It doesn't matter; both.

MS: Yeah.

TS: Any.

MS: Colin Powell's probably the one that I have the most admiration for, I think.

TS: Would you have liked to see him run for higher office?

MS: I would have.

TS: Yeah?

MS: And—And I know it was family considerations that stopped him from doing that. I would have liked to have seen him. And Condoleezza Rice I think would be—is another extremely, extremely bright, articulate woman who—I would like a chance to see what she was capable of doing. So those are probably the two people that, off the top of my head, strike me.

TS: Right. What does patriotism mean to you?

MS: I think patriotism means doing the hard jobs, doing whatever it takes to be true to your country, and standing up when other people don't when you see something that's not right. So—And not being ashamed to stand up when the flag goes by, put your hand over your heart, and for the gentlemen, to take your cap off your head. So I think that's probably what patriotism means to me. [unclear] being proud of your country even when your country—you don't always agree with what—the direction maybe the leaders are taking it or some of the things that people in that country are doing, and always trying to be a good ambassador to that country when you're somewhere else in the world so people get a positive reflection of what it is to be an American.

TS: Well, I don't have any more formal questions. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you might like to add?

MS: I can't—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Or say anything further about your service?

MS: I can't—I can't think of anything. I think we've pretty well covered a lot of things. I have to say the friendships that I have made in the navy I think are very deep and very true. And a little bit about—One story about what it means to be a—a navy nurse, and I think I touched on it when I talked about I had just gotten to my very first duty station.

TS: Right.

MS: Somebody invited me for Thanksgiving dinner; just gotten to Iceland; the commanding officer invites me over to his house for Thanksgiving dinner. I was in Washington D.C. while I was at Catholic University and the person who was the administrative person where you submitted all your paperwork to—to get picked up for your—your schooling, called me and said, "I have this navy nurse who's going to be going to Catholic next semester and she's coming into town to do some house hunting. I was wondering if I could give her your phone number so she could hook up with you?"

I said, "Oh, sure, that's fine."

So she called me up and I—in chatting with her, she was going to be staying with her girlfriend and her girlfriend's brother, but her girlfriend was only going to be there for a couple days, and then she was staying—still at this house and she didn't know this guy from Adam. And I said, "Well, when your girlfriend leaves, I have an extra bedroom if you want to just come stay here."

So she said, "Well, I might take you up on it."

So she did, and the realtor was taking her around, kind of asked her where she was staying and stuff, and she said she was staying with another navy nurse.

"Oh, she's a friend of yours?"

She said, "No, never met her in my life." And the realtor couldn't believe it, and she said, "We're navy nurses. I know if she's a navy nurse there's a certain integrity and a certain code and a certain ethics that she has."

Same thing with me. I didn't worry that she was going to steal my things or—you know? I knew there was a certain caliber person that made it to that level in the Navy Nurse Corps, and there was an instant sisterhood, so you open up your house to them. And that's kind of—

TS: It's like family?

MS: It is; it is. And there's this whole subculture called the military in our country that I never knew existed until I joined the military, and it's—I heard—I was at a lecture one time on gangs, and the person who gave the lecture actually gave me something to think about. He said, "You know, the military's like one of the biggest gangs around." He said, "We

have our—We have our—our language. We have our own colors; our uniform. We have our own subculture." He said, "The things that attract kids to gangs, we should be able to get to attract them to the military, because it gives them a sense of belonging."

TS: Identity?

MS: Yeah. And so, I never thought about it that way, but in a way it's kind of like a big gang, and like I said, I—I—by and large, a lot of very good people in the military, and the occasional bad apple. But by and large, I mean, wonderful, wonderful people; a whole—a whole different class. And you were in. You know what I'm talking about.

TS: Well, I think that's a great place to end it, if you want to. Unless you have anything else you'd like to tell?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

MS: Sure. No. I think—I think that does it. [chuckles]

TS: One big happy family, aren't we?

MS: Thank you for your time. Yeah.

TS: Yes. Well, thank you, Marie; really appreciate it.

[End of Interview]