

## **WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT**

### **ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: Heather L. McKay Mallory

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: May 10, 2014

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is May 10. My name is Therese Strohmer. I'm at the home of Heather Mallory in Hendersonville, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. Heather, could you state your name the way that you'd like it to be on your collection?

HM: Heather L. McKay Mallory.

TS: Okay, sounds great.

HM: Okay.

TS: Well, Heather, why don't you start out by telling me where you were born—when and where you were born?

HM: I was born in Pardee Hospital [Margaret R. Pardee Memorial Hospital] in Hendersonville, North Carolina, September 3, 1986, and my—I was born to—I was the second child to my parents, and also the second grand baby, and the first girl grandbaby.

TS: Okay.

HM: So that was, like, a big to-do in our family.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Right, very exciting.

HM: My grandfather was a farmer; he had a dairy farm. So that—

TS: In this area?

HM: In this area, yes.

TS: Okay.

HM: So it's still within Henderson County, but we're technically Hendersonville here at this house—

TS: Okay.

HM: —and then where I grew up was in Flat Rock [North Carolina].

TS: Alright.

HM: So—And then my papa gave my dad land, so we grew up in a trailer. We were very, very poor. And my papa had dairy cows all around. We had goats, chickens, dogs; I mean, all kinds of animals. The goats used to literally eat the cloths off of me.

TS: Really?

HM: Yeah.

TS: Oh that's cool.

HM: And—Do you want me to close that?

TS: I'm going to pause for a second.

HM: Okay.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Okay, so—so you're—you live—Now, did you have any other siblings?

HM: Yes, I have an older brother and a younger brother. And then my mother passed away when I was seven; she had brain tumors. And then my dad remarried two years later and she had a daughter, which we're super close now so I don't even consider her like a stepsister. She's a sister.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Right. She's a sister, right.

HM: Yeah.

TS: How were you in age?

HM: Let's see. When they got married it was eight—or seven, nine, ten, and eleven.

TS: Okay.

HM: And it's my older brother, my sister, me, and then my younger brother. Yeah.

TS: So pretty close in age.

HM: Yes, very close in age. We were all teenagers all at the same time.

TS: Oh no. [chuckles]

HM: Talk about drama. [chuckles]

TS: No kidding.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Well, what was it like growing up? So you were close to your grandparents then?

HM: Yeah, I was—we were all—it was our family lived here, and then we had a big pond beside the house. Across the dam was my grandparents. Across the street was my aunt and uncle. Then my great aunt and uncle—We had two great aunt—aunt and uncles there across the street too. So we all just lived really, really close together. We were always walking to each other's homes

TS: Did you have lots of cousins?

HM: Lots of cousins, yeah. I think—It's fifteen or sixteen, I think, cousins total.

TS: Total. That's a lot to hang out with.

HM: Yeah, yeah.

TS: What'd you do for fun?

HM: We'd usually play outside. I was a tomboy growing up.

TS: Yeah?

HM: I had two brothers and they just—"Hey, if you don't keep up, oh well."

TS: Right.

HM: "Okay, I'll keep up. [both chuckle] So we would always either—My papa rented out some of the barns for horses, so we'd go feed the horses or go look at the cows, help him milk in the mornings sometimes. Then we'd go—We had a creek that we named "The Y" because it split off at one point into, like, a V shape, so it looked like a Y. And we'd go, like, throw big rocks at each other—

TS: [chuckles]

HM: —and get soaking wet and then come back and our parents would be like, "What have you guys been doing?" covered in dirt and stuff.

TS: Perfect.

HM: So yeah.

TS: Sounds like a great—great way to grow up.

HM: Yeah, it was really good. My parents were very strict, also; very Christian conservative. So I mean, we couldn't watch anything but G-rated movies and we had to wear very conservative clothing and we were always in church and everything. So we grew up with very—really good values and morals, so.

TS: Did you do a lot of church activities, too, then?

HM: Yes. Yeah, we were in youth group and stuff.

TS: And how was—how was school?

HM: School was good. I was in a public school until my mother passed away, and we ended up—My older brother and me were held back a year because we didn't go to school very much when she was really, really sick. She was sick for, like, four years but at the very end it was just really hard.

TS: How old were you? Did you—

HM: Seven.

TS: Seven?

HM: Yeah, when she died. And so, after that—the next year—my dad put us in the school he went to growing up, which was Faith Christian School, so it was a private school and we were held back a year. And so, it was—My little brother was in first grade, then I was in second, and my older brother was in third. So that's where we went for a while and that was very good.

And then we—we kind of got, I guess, bored with the teaching and stuff, so then they ended up sending us to a public school again. So my tenth grade year I started at East Henderson High School, which was the same place that my dad was a SRO, the School Resource Officer. So that was interesting.

TS: How was that interesting?

HM: My very first day going to school there, I had, like, long blond hair and really, really cute when I was younger, and I walked in and all the boys were like, "Oh, who's this new girl?" And so, they asked me my name.

I said, "Oh, I'm Heather."

And they're like, "What's your last name?"

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that."

And then they're like, "No, really, what's your last name?"

And I'm like, "It's McKay."

They're like, "McKay? Why do I know that name?"

"I don't know."

TS: [chuckles]

HM: And then finally some guy was like, "Wait a second. McKay? Like Officer McKay?"

And I'm like, "Yep. That's right."

He says, "Whoa, that's your dad?"

I'm like, "Yeah, that's my dad," and that was literally the last time a boy talked to me—

TS: [laughs]

HM: —my high school career. I was like, "Oh, my gosh."

TS: So your dad was a police officer, too—

HM: Yes.

TS: —but he was mostly the School Resource Officer?

HM: Growing up, yeah. He did D.A.R.E. [Drug Abuse Resistance Education], and then he was a police—the School Resource Officer at East Henderson High School. And then from there he went on—he was promoted and he was a detective and stuff. So yeah. He works

for a different county now and he's a detective. So he works for Buncombe County now but still doing the same thing at a sheriff's department.

TS: Did he have a military background at all?

HM: Yes—

TS: What was—

HM: —which is one of the influences on why I joined. He was in the Marine Corps.

TS: Was he?

HM: Yes.

TS: How long?

HM: He was in for four years, and he made it to E-6 Staff Sergeant. So he was, like, fast tracking the whole time.

TS: Yeah.

HM: Yeah. And he was in the Reserves.

TS: I see.

HM: He was called up for [Operation] Desert Storm, but when they were training I guess the—the conflict ended so they didn't end up going.

TS: I see.

HM: Which was good.

TS: Yeah.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Neat.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Did you have a favorite subject when you were in school?

HM: I really liked math and english, and english was because one of my teachers in sixth grade, I think it was—Mrs. Langston—she was really sweet and she just instilled, like,

good grammar, I guess; which I still can't spell but I can form sentences thankfully. [both chuckle]

TS: You get the structure and the foundation.

HM: Yeah. And then math I was always just pretty good at it; it came to me naturally.

TS: Yeah?

HM: There was one—one class my senior year, it was called Adventure PE [Adventure to Fitness?], and Coach Shif[?] taught that—that class, and we did a lot of teambuilding and self-esteem—like, learning about yourself and just really empowering yourself to be who you are, and that was really nice. We went camping and we learned about tents and fly-fishing and hiking and all kinds of stuff.

TS: Fly-fishing?

HM: Yes, it was so much fun.

TS: Yeah, it's kind of like Boy Scouts and—

HM: Yeah, but in high school.

TS: Yeah.

HM: And that class was a first only-girls class; we had all girls.

TS: Oh, really?

HM: But they had guys—Because you have to apply for that class.

TS: Okay. So they—

HM: They had—

TS: Do they select, then?

HM: Yeah, they select you. You have to, like, write a paragraph on why you should be in that class; yada, yada, yada. You have to have good grades, you have to be on the right track, which some of the girls that actually got into that class were not on the right track but that was the reason why they were put in that class. Just, kind of, us that were on the right track, getting good grades, could kind of lead them in the right direction. And actual—and I mean, it was very beneficial for everybody.

TS: That's neat.

HM: So, yeah.

TS: That is neat. And you said that there was a coach that taught that?

HM: Yeah, Coach Shook[?]

TS: Shook[?].

HM: He—I forgot what he coached but—

TS: That's okay. I thought you had said his name, I just hadn't caught it.

HM: Yes.

TS: So—Well—So then—Now, while you're growing up and you're living out here and—

HM: Yeah.

TS: Do you have a sense of what you want to do for your future?

HM: Well, I want to, number one, be the best mom and make sure that my son is in a stable environment, and can flourish in his young life. But I just—I like to help people, so that's really my goal, is to help people, because when I help people it makes me happy.

TS: Yeah?

HM: And me being happy is good. [chuckles]

TS: Well, when you were in high school did you think, "Okay, I have these—these opportunities and I want to do this with my life"?

HM: The one thing I didn't want to do was go to school. I didn't want—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: College?

HM: Yeah, and everyone was pushing me, "You have to go to college. You're smart." I mean, I even got scholarships to college. I applied for them and got every single one that I applied for.

TS: Why didn't you want to go?



HM: I—I don't know. I'd been pushed so hard all my life to do good, do good, do good, and I did well with everything, and I was just sick and tired of that and just didn't want to continue on the same thing, doing what everyone else wanted me to do, pretty much. So I went into the Marine Corps. [chuckles]

TS: Do you think that you wanted to have, like, an adventure?

HM: Yes, I wanted to get out of a small town. I wanted to get away from all the—the restrictive, like—not—not necessarily the religious restrictions but conservative restrictions that were set so that my life was literally just this perfect little box, and I didn't want a perfect little box.

TS: So you wanted to kind of break out of it?

HM: Yeah. Yes.

TS: Okay. Well, tell me about your thought process then—about when you go from high school and then you decide to join, and did you think about any other service besides the Marine Corps?

HM: Oh, no.

TS: No, not at all?

HM: No, not at all. There was no other branch for me because my grandfather, my dad, and my older brother were all Marines. My older brother was still active whenever I went in. He had—He had actually just went through boot camp and went to SOI, which is School of Infantry; same place that my MCT [Marine Combat Training] was. So—Which we went to his graduation in—in [Marine Corps Recruit Depot] Parris Island, and it was just so neat so see everything and I was very impressed, and I had talked to the recruiter before but he had never once said, "You need to join the Marine Corps." It was always, "You're the sister; you're just the sister."

And so, I—We went to his graduation, brought him home. I saw how much better he was doing, because he had a hard time at school; like, in high school. He had some learning disabilities and made really poor grades, but he was super smart. I just—maybe not applying himself, with the learning disabilities, [he just?], kind of, created a hard time but he didn't even graduate high school. He just went into the Marine Corps. And then once in the Marine Corps they made him get his GED [General Education Development]. So that was just, kind of, a positive thing that I saw in his life; like, "Wow. This kid is going to do something with his life. He's going to go somewhere. He's going to do really well at it."

So once we got back, then his car broke down or he didn't have a ride or something, because I ended up driving him to SOI—School of Infantry—and we stayed with one of the guys that we went to school with before and that Joshua knew, and he

was—he joined the Marine Corps, had his wife there and everything. So we stayed with them. We got the whole, like, little military experience, so that was fun.

TS: Where was that at that you drove him to?

HM: Lejeune; Camp Lejeune.

TS: Okay.

HM: But his SOI was on—I think it was Camp Geiger. [Camp Geiger is part of the Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune complex] I'm pretty sure it was Camp Geiger.

And then—So after I dropped him off I came back and his recruiter called me and said, “Hey, he left some cables for something at the recruiter’s office. Can you come get this because I can’t hold on to it?”

I go, “Oh, sure.”

So I went in and I was thinking, because of this whole, “Go to college. Go to college,” and I was like, “Oh my gosh, I do not want to go to college.”

TS: Were you a senior at this point?

HM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

HM: Yeah, I was a senior in high school. Actually, right after I turned eighteen I had moved out of my parents’ house. I was the only kid to not get kicked out of my parents’ house. Everyone else, literally, got kicked out. That was just because they were so strict—

TS: Right.

HM: —and we just wanted—

TS: Rebelling against them.

HM: Yeah. Oh, yeah, absolutely. So I had been living on my own for a while, which I’d lived with my sister and we rented from my aunt, living in my grandparents’ old house.

TS: I see.

HM: And this was on my real mom’s side.

TS: Okay.

HM: So anyway. So I drove back, I got the cables, and I said—and on the way I was thinking this is something that I would like to do. It seems neat. I’m tough. I can do it on my own.

Why not? What else do I have to do? Go to college. I don't want to do that. So I was like, "Well, might as well talk to the recruiter about it."

So I went and I was like, "Hey, let me get those cables."

And he was like, "Alright." And he had never once brought up the subject ever, which kind of pissed me off a little bit.

I'm like, "Hey, I'm athletic, I'm smart, I can do this." And so, then I was like, "Well, do you have any information; like, can I get any Marine Corps information?"

He was like, "Wait, what? You?"

I'm like, "Yes, me."

And he says, "Well, are you sure you'd want to do something like that?"

I'm like, "Yeah."

He says, "Okay, well—"

And I said, "Well, where's the paperwork? Let's go ahead and sign me up."

He was like, "No. We're not signing you up today. We're going to wait."

And so, I said, "Okay."

So they gave me some paperwork and he said, "Take this home, sleep with that—sleep over it. And then come back and we'll talk about it."

I said, "Okay."

So I take it home; didn't tell anybody; did not tell a soul because I knew what would happen and that would not be good.

TS: And you're eighteen—

HM: Oh, yeah.

TS: —so you can actually make your decision; you don't need anybody to sign for you.

HM: Nobody to sign for me, yeah.

TS: Okay.

HM: All I needed was—I was definitely going to graduate high school. That was—That was never out of the—the question. So—Which I actually graduated with honors; I was really smart.

And so, I went home, barely even looked over the information. I mean, I was like, "Okay, well, my mind's set." And then I went back the next day, and I had told myself, "If—If I really, really want to do that—" and I was, like, talking to God—"God, if I really, really want to do this, just give me peace or something," because I was, like, shaking at this point. It was weird because I was so calm about it before and then on my way to do it I was like, "Holy shit, this is really going to happen," like—and I started shaking as I was driving, and I—my heart was pounding. I'm like, "Okay, maybe this is not a good idea."

And so, I was like, "Okay God, if this is what you want me to do, give me peace." And I drove into the parking lot still shaking like a leaf, went in—got into the parking space, put my car in park, and then I just—I don't know, it just—everything—I stopped

shaking, I was at peace, I was very, very calm, and I was like, “Oh crap. I actually have to do this now.” [both chuckle]

So sure enough, I went in. I was like, “Okay, let’s go. Let’s do this.”

TS: Now, did you sign up for a particular job that you wanted or—

HM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

HM: And I thought I was signing up for military police, which technically I was. What they didn’t explain to me was that I was signing up for military police corrections officer. Yeah, which thankfully, as an honor grad out of boot camp you can change your MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] to whatever you want. I should have gone, like, intelligence or something but I just switched it to regular MP [military police], so—which is fine.

TS: Yeah?

HM: But—Yeah, so I signed up. We went over, like, what—There was all these flash cards, and what you think is important and what you think is least important, and it’s, like, family, financial stability, honor, courage, and commitment; which is what the Marine Corps value—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: The creed?

HM: Yeah. So I put them all in order and he was like, “Well, this shows me that you’re definitely in tune to yourself and mature enough to make this decision.”

I was like, “Well, I knew that, but okay,” and then I signed up, and I went to MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station] in March. Then I—I signed up and I think went to MEPS, like, a week later or something.

TS: This is in 2005, right?

HM: Right.

TS: Okay.

HM: And in order to go to MEPS you have to send you medical records or whatever. So I went and signed all the paperwork and then just went home, and this was—I mean, obviously I wasn’t living with my parents or anything. [extraneous comments to son redacted].

[Record Paused]

TS: Okay, so—so had a short little break there to—Jackson is your son?

HM: Yes.

TS: He's very cute.

HM: Thank you.

TS: Okay, so you were telling me about—

HM: Oh yeah, signing up.

TS: Signing up, right.

HM: Yes. So in order to go to MEPS in Charlotte you have to bring your medical records, and whenever I left signing all the papers I just went home, didn't really think of what else I needed to provide my recruiter.

So a couple days later he calls me up, "Hey, where's your medical records?"

"Oh, I've got to get them from my mom."

"Okay," hangs up. He's got my mom's number, so what he does is he calls my mom.

TS: And they don't know yet?

HM: Oh, they don't know at all. And so—

TS: And how long is this after you signed up?

HM: This is, like, a couple days—

TS: Okay.

HM: —to a week or something.

TS: Okay.

HM: So—And—I mean, I signed everything, so it was se—Well, not necessarily set in stone, but—

TS: Right.

HM: —it was set in stone. So we went—He called my mom, talked to her, asked her for her—for my medical records, and she was like, “You don’t need her medical records.”  
He’s like, “Yes, ma’am, I do. She needs to go to MEPS,” blah, blah, blah.  
She’s like, “No, you’re not allowed to have them.”  
And he’s like, “Can you talk to Heather please?”  
So then she calls me crying and all this, “I can’t believe you’re doing this. We’ve already lost one son to the Marines; we can’t lose another,” dah, dah, dah.  
And I was like, “What am I supposed to do? I just need my medical records. Just please give them to me.”  
So she didn’t talk to me for a week and just cried, apparently, the whole time, so—which was—I mean, I look back now, and if Jackson did that to me I would be crushed.

TS: Right.

HM: But I just—I mean, I was a kid and I knew what I wanted to do and no one else was going to tell me not to do it. So—Which other people in my family thought I was crazy.  
My—One of my cousins didn’t talk to me until after I graduated from boot camp, and then she finally realized, “Oh, well, you actually did a good job; you were honor grad.”  
I’m like, “Really? Of course I did a good job.”  
And then my aunt put me through equine therapy—

TS: Right.

HM: —because she thought that I was crazy and wasn’t making the right decisions with my life. So I went to that and bridled a horse or—I don’t even remember. They gave me a rope and I had to go tie it around a horse’s head and then bring him over, so that was very interesting. Then they told me how—after I did that—how maybe I wasn’t so in tune with myself and wasn’t ready and blah, blah.  
I was like, “Okay, this is the last time I’m going to do this—”

TS: [chuckles]

HM: “—but thanks.” I mean, [unclear]—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: That’s a different kind of way to try to persuade you though, right?

HM: Yeah.

TS: I mean, it was indirect, right?

HM: Right.

TS: Interesting.

HM: Yeah, she—I mean, her—her heart was very pure in it, it was just very different. And I love horses but that was kind of weird.

TS: How was your dad?

HM: My dad was excited. Yeah, he was taken off guard, I guess; kind of like, “What? Okay,” but I mean, he’d been in the Marine Corps so he knew what it was and—I mean, he hadn’t been fully on active duty so it was a different experience, but he knew that I would do fine and that I would excel, so he was all about it.

TS: What about the—the wars that were going on? Was there any concern that you had or that anybody that you knew had?

HM: That’s one of the reason why I went military police, because they said that that would probably—if—There’s two sides to military police. There’s garrison, which is like policemen. You see them in the cars, you see them arresting people, responding to domestic house-calls or whatever, and then also the—the gate guards at the front of the bases. And then there’s field MP, which literally all they do is train for deployments. So that was what I was hoping to do, is just go straight into field MP and just deploy the whole time.

TS: So you did want to do that?

HM: Oh yeah. Yeah, that’s why—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: And that would’ve been okay if you got sent to a war zone?

HM: Yeah, that’s what I wanted to do. Yeah, that was full intention on why I joined the Marine Corps and not, like, the [U.S.] Navy or the [U.S.] Air Force. Which I look back, and if I ever reenlisted I would enlist in the air force. But—

TS: Why?

HM: Just because, like, taking care—I mean, I have to think about my son, so family life for me would be number one. In the Marine Corps it’s mission first then your family, and I can’t think like that anymore. So they do a good job, I think sometimes, of taking care of

the family and everything, but it's just as a mom I can't—I cannot think mission first. I have to think my son first. Which obviously, if I was on active duty I'd have to have a plan set and everything so if I deployed—which I would want to do—have him taken care of completely, which would be his dad and my parents and Nathan, but—yeah.

In the air force—I mean, they get the best equipment, they get—everything is not used before they get it. In the Marine Corps, unless it's, like, a weapon, everything is used, so you're like, “Oh, yeah, here is this tent I get to use that's twenty-eight years old. But hey, it's still good. We can still use it.” You know what I mean?

In the air force, their—I mean, some jobs, or MLS's—and I saw this at military police school; all these air force guys and girls were walking around with laptops that were issued to them. I mean, I was good to get a freaking canteen. “Thank God I can have something to carry my water in, while you have a laptop. That's awesome.” So.

TS: A little different cultures?

HM: Yes, very.

TS: Yeah.

HM: And the air force is less strict on certain things, and the Marine Corps is strict on absolutely everything, which in a sense was good and I was very good at following those guidelines and everything, and I was good at keeping other people to follow them, which they hated me for, but, I mean, I was good at it so that's what I did.

TS: [unclear]

HM: Yes.

TS: Well, why don't you tell me a little bit basic training, then, and—

HM: Okay. So we went in—went to MEPS on October 11 with five guys that I had grown up with; they all went to school with me. So that was interesting. And they were—We all went in at the same time, we all graduated at the same time, so all of our families—it was this whole crazy group of Hendersonville people all gathering together at our graduation. And actually, I was an honor grad out of my platoon, which I went in and they had wanted me to go in with this girl and do, like, a buddy program, where you go in—it's, like, for best friends. They go in, they stay through boot camp together, and if they choose the same MOS then they can go to that school together and just, kind of, go through with a battle buddy or whatever.

So I went in with this girl from Asheville. I did not know her at all. They're like, “Oh, you've got to take care of her; make sure she's fine.”

We got there. Within a week she had dropped out because she couldn't even pass the initial physical fitness test. It's like, “Really? You let someone in the Marine Corps that could not pass the physical fitness test?”



And I was, by no means, like, a hard charger physically. I was athletic and I could run for a short bit and I could do crunches and stuff, but, I mean, I didn't make a perfect score. I've never made a perfect score on my PFT [physical fitness test], but I still passed it. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, what did you—

HM: So.

TS: What did you find about basic training—Now, had you been a—It's—I mean, you're still in North Carolina, right?

HM: Yes.

TS: In South—South Carolina.

HM: Yeah, Parris Island, South Carolina.

TS: You're still pretty close to North Carolina.

HM: Right. The weather's a lot different though.

TS: Is it?

HM: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

HM: Thankfully, we went in towards the end of the year, so that it was cold by the time we graduated. Because down there the sand fleas are something else. And you get in there, the first three days you're kept awake and given a little bit of food and stuff, and barked orders, and you just, kind of, follow the leader, and wherever—whatever they say you just do just to survive. And then when you finally get assigned to your drill instructors, that's when all hell breaks loose, and—but it was fun for me. I loved it, and I'd already—I mean, my dad could bark just like a drill instructor so I had heard it all, so none of that stuff scared me, and I just did what I could do. I ran as fast as I could, I tried to be better than the person beside me, and it worked.

TS: Now—Now, in the Marine Corps you—it's—the—it's segregated.

HM: Strictly segregated, yeah.

TS: By gender, right?

HM: Yes, right.

TS: For your training?

HM: Yeah.

TS: So you're going through with all women but your—

HM: Yeah.

TS: —drill instructors are—

HM: All women.

TS: All women too?

HM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

HM: The only time we ever saw a man was when we were going through classes.

TS: Okay.

HM: So they do certain instruction on different things; Marine Corps history, weapon systems; basic knowledge just to kind of get you through life. And some of those instructors were men who were also drill instructors but on, like, a different side of the drill field.

TS: I see.

HM: So—

TS: Otherwise it's all women.

HM: All women, yeah. Even—

TS: How was that experience, because you're growing up with boys—

HM: Yeah.

TS: —right?

HM: I mean, we're all kind of focused towards one goal, so it was okay. I mean, they were very bitchy and very annoying at times because they all had their little complaints and I was just like, "Suck it up. Let's just go." And it was—I'm trying to think. We had—We could go to—to church every Sunday, so I was always in church, which always—every

single Sunday I cried while I was at church because it reminded me of home. And—But, like, to and from church you would have your little group of recruits, and one person would march them.

And our drill instructors, in the very beginning whenever they would get us together in a platoon and march, they would just bark the steps, “Left! Right! Left! Right!” Then on towards the end they would start singing it, which was really cool. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard that but that’s one of the coolest things—sounds, even though I’ve experienced it—first time—listening to it now it just, kind of, brings me back. So I used to practice that, and go marching to and from church; I would practice. And they were like, “You could actually do that.”

I’m like, “Yeah, I know. I can do it. That’s pretty cool.” But—

TS: That’s awesome.

HM: Yeah. So I kind of started off in the background not—I would work really hard on my myself but not volunteer for things, and then finally towards the middle I was like, “Okay—” the people that are squad leaders—So there was four squads in a platoon and each squad had a certain amount of people in it, so whoever the squad leader was, was kind of in charge of those people. And my squad leader was not doing a very good job, which happened to be the same person that I ended up being roommates with in MP school. So—Well, I guess she technically wasn’t my—Well, maybe she was. I don’t even remember.

But—So I—One day they—one of them got fired as a squad leader, and then our drill instructor was like, “McKay! You’re squad leader four.”

I’m like, “Okay.”

Or, “—fourth squad leader.”

“Aye, Aye, ma’am.” What am I going to do?

One of our jobs was, whenever everything was kind of quiet, then we would clean. So my job was the head and all my squad had to clean the head, which is a bathroom.

TS: Right.

HM: In order for the drill instructor to think, “Hey, I am hard charging, getting on them all the time, making them scrub till they die,” I would close the door while we were cleaning, then I’d open it every once in a while, yell—

TS: [chuckling]

HM: —“Clean faster, clean faster,” then shut the door, be like, “Okay, let’s relax for a little bit.” They knew that I would do that, and so it was kind of nice, like, every single time I would open the door they’d know, “Okay, it’s on,” and scrub, scrub, scrub. Everything would be clean—

TS: Right.

HM: —within the first five minutes—

TS: Right.

HM: —but they would make us clean for, like, half an hour—

TS: Right.

HM: —so they could do paperwork or whatever. So that was—

TS: You choreographed—

HM: Yeah.

TS: —your head cleaning.

HM: Yeah. And—But all the tests we ever took I made really, really high scores. Whenever I learn I have to repeat over and over and over again, and that's, like—or do flashcards or something—and that's how they teach everyone. Like, you stand there in your platoon, waiting for chow or whatever, and you just recite what you're learning.

So Marine Corps history, you recite who the first woman in the Marine Corps was, you recite this, that, all this stuff, so towards the end it's just—that's what you do; you know it because you've said it a gazillion times waiting for things. And actually, when I joined the Marine Corps I'd never shot a weapon before, so when we went to the—the range, that was the very first time I'd ever shot, and I ended up scoring sharpshooter, which is second to the highest, so it's in the middle. It's marksman—Well, you can fail, marksman, sharpshooter, expert.

TS: Expert.

HM: I shot sharpshooter so that was pretty—I was pretty proud of that. And every single Sunday when we went to church, I would try to look for the guys that I went in—

TS: Oh, right.

HM: —because they're the only people I knew.

TS: Right.

HM: So I went to the—We used to be able to go to the early service, and that's when they went, so I'd sit there and look at them the whole time and be like, “I know you. This is so nice I know someone.”

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: And then you'd cry harder.

HM: Yeah, I'd cry harder. And we liked to just make eye contact and that was it; no waving, no nothing, just eye contact. And then we would both know—Whoever I had seen was like, “Oh, yay, I saw her.”

And I actually wrote—Every single time I saw one of the guys I would write to their parents and say, “I saw them today. They look really good,” blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

TS: In church, which was good for them too.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: In church. Right, yeah. [both chuckle] That's always positive. And I ended up writing to all of their parents, and I think that they really liked that.

TS: Oh, sure.

HM: And then they ended up writing back to me, so that was really nice. But the one time it was kind of funny, is when we were at the range—which I don't know if it—I think it's part of their training, in how they go about getting you at the range and psyching you up, kind of, for battle, I guess, is that they're really, really strict. So if you do anything—if you sneeze the wrong way—they're going to make you get down into the—the pit and do push-ups or whatever. So it was a really stressful time.

And one time we were in the chow hall and I saw one of the guys that I had gone in with, and it was so nice—his name's Ryan—and we both went up to the drink machine at the same time. We'd actually got up there—We didn't even look at each other, but we were getting our drinks and he was like, “Hey, how are you?”

I'm like, “I'm good. How are you?”

He's like, “We're good. Everything's good.”

I'm like, “Okay, cool. Bye,” and that was it.

TS: [chuckles]

HM: And that was, like, the highlight because I had—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Able to talk?

HM: —that connection—Yeah—with someone.

TS: That's neat.

HM: So yeah, that was really cool.

TS: Now, was there anything that was particularly difficult while you were in basic training, either emotionally or physically?

HM: Well, I guess the one time—Well, sometimes just seeing that someone over me was not doing a good job was frustrating. It wasn't the end of the world. But physically, just running all the time—I lost ten pounds while I was in. I went—I started out at 140 [pounds] and I ended up at 130, graduating, which for me, at five [foot] seven [inches] is like bones pretty much. All my bones were sticking out so far, and I had gone in—I had gotten my pants that I had walked—or driven in to boot camp. I got those back and put them on and it was like—I mean, this—I could pull them out that far; it was crazy. So they didn't even fit.

TS: Yeah? [chuckles] When you're done.

HM: Yeah. But physically, just—it really wasn't too bad but—and the drill instructors would try to break you down emotionally so that they could build you back up into a Marine, which is very important, obviously, for the Marine Corps, and—because in order to be a good Marine you have to be able to follow orders, and following orders means you won't get shot and killed, so—or one of your buddies won't get shot.

So growing up with my parents being as strict as they—as they were, that really wasn't hard at all. I had fun in the Marine Corps—or in boot camp I had fun. It really—It wasn't that hard. I was homesick at some points.

TS: Right.

HM: Yeah. And I remember writing letters and just thinking, “I wish I was home but this is still fun, so I really enjoy it.”

The one time—The one time that I cried hardcore was—I had been talking to Fallon[?], her last name in boot camp was Hughes[?], and this was—ended up being my roommate. And she had been talking about how she had had, like, an eating disorder and she had stayed thin and stuff, and now she was in the Marine Corps and she was still staying thin and stuff. So I figured, “Well, I guess it's common knowledge.”

And then some girl was like, “Wow, Hughes is so thin,” blah, blah.

I was like, “Well, she's got an eating disorder; that's why she's thin.”

Well, that got back to Hughes and then Hughes said, “I'm going to strangle you.” She came in, she's like, “If you ever say anything about me ever again I'm going to strangle you in the middle of the night.”

I was like, “Oh my God.”

I mean, I had never been in a fight. I had almost been in a fight in high school but I had been able to talk them down and walk away and it had—And this girl was taller than me, she was twenty-four; I was a little nineteen year old. I’m like, “Holy shit, this girl is going to kill me.”

And so, I was standing there in formation right before we went to bed, and she slept pretty close to me too. I was like, “Holy crap, I’m not going to be able to sleep tonight.”

So I’m standing there in formation, getting ready for bed, crying, and then my drill instructor—and these are silent years, but big ole crocodile tears just rolling down my cheeks. The drill instructor’s like, “McKay, what the hell’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing, ma’am.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Are you sure there’s nothing wrong with you?”

TS: [chuckles]

HM: Because no one had ever seen me cry before.

TS: Right.

HM: Even in church I hid it really well. And so, she was like, “Okay.”

And then I ended up getting in bed, and I was so scared but my tired body won, so I was out like a light. And nothing happened to me in the middle of the night so I figured, “Well, I guess this is okay.” And I had actually taken Fallon’s spot as squad leader, so that was, like, two things against me.

TS: Right.

HM: I had talked crap about her and taken her spot, so she was on the warpath. She did not like me at all.

TS: And then you'd said you got honor grad.

HM: Yes. Yeah. Well, the—the—You call—I’m trying to think; what do you call her?—platoon—the—the guide; that’s what you call them; the platoon guide.

TS: Okay.

HM: She was this girl that cried a lot. I ended up finding out—which really pissed me off—like, two weeks before we were supposed to graduate, I found out that she was calling home every single night—that the senior drill instructor was letting her do that—which was a huge deal to us, because we only—I was there Thanksgiving,

Christmas, New Years; all big holidays I was in boot camp and not allowed to call home, except on those holidays.

TS: Right.

HM: And so, I was like, “This is BS [bullshit]. You should not be allowed to do this. I don’t know what the hell’s going on with the senior drill instructor letting you get away with this, but you need to either man-up or stop.”

So I finally decided—And I had asked, “What does a recruit need to do in order to become guide?” I’d asked one of the drill instructors, which she—apparently she’s the only one that liked me, because I would go—she would call me up to the drill instructor hut and make fun of me until I laughed. Like, she—all these things, and her nickname for me was Recruit Ugly, because I had short hair, like, right under my ears; I looked like a boy. And my hair—we never washed our hair so it was always stuck to my head; super greasy, super gross. I had these big, huge glasses; they were called “port holes.” Oh my word, I was horrible looking, and so she was like, “You’re Recruit Ugly.”

I said, “Okay.” And I just said, “Thank you, ma’am. Yes, ma’am. Aye, ma’am,” whatever.

And then finally I would get—she’d be making fun of me so bad, or making fun of other people, and it would be so funny. Like, I would breathe [takes deep breath], she says, “Oh, Recruit Ugly, really? Why are you breathing so hard?”

I’m like, “Because Recruit’s trying not to laugh, ma’am.”

And she’s like, “Oh, you’re trying [not to laugh?], huh? You want to laugh?” So that was really funny.

But I ended up asking her, “Why—What does a recruit need to do in order to become guide?”

She says, “Well, you’ve got to—to—” Oh, what’s the word?—“challenge the other guide.”

And I’m like, “Okay.” So I—I went back to my bunk and I was like, “So I’ve got to challenge the guide. Hmm. Well, might as well go challenge the guide.”

So I went back to the drill instructor that night, asked to talk to the senior. I said, “This recruit challenges guide Whatever-her-name-was.”

And the senior drill instructor looks at me, she’s like, “Wha—What?”

And I was like, “This recruit challenges the guide.”

And then she looks at the other drill instructor, she’s like, “Did you have anything to do with this?”

TS: [chuckles]

HM: And that drill instructor, she never smiled once.

TS: Yeah.

HM: And I got a hint of a smile at that point. She looks at the senior drill instructor, she says, “Senior drill instructor, ma’am, I don’t know anything that’s going on.”



TS: [chuckles]

HM: And I was like, “Wait a second. What else is going on here?” So—

TS: [chuckles] Sounds like she set you up a little.

HM: Yeah, I know. So the senior was like, “Okay, you’ve got to get the guidon,” which is the flag that every platoon carries, and it’s like, “This is what represents our platoon and we’re super proud of it, and make sure no one ever steals it or anything.”

She was like, “You’ve got to know how to work the guidon and then challenge the guide and you have to be better than her.”

I’m like, “Well, I’m already better than her, so let’s get this guidon and I’ll practice.” So I went over. I said, “I need—I need a—” Well, I said, “This recruit needs to borrow the guidon.”

And the guide’s like, “Well, why?”

I said, “Because I’m challenging your ass.” [chuckles]

She was like, “What?”

So I went and got a guidon, practiced with it a little bit, I brought it back to the senior drill instructor, I was like, “This recruit’s ready;” because you don’t say, “I.”

TS: Right.

HM: That’s one of the things that they break you down.

TS: Right.

HM: So—So they were like, “Okay,” and brought us out—the whole platoon—in order to do this, and brought us out onto the parade deck to practice drilling. I swung that thing around and did everything perfectly apparently because they were like, “Alright, you’re the guide.”

I was like, “Okay.” So somehow it worked.

And this was—At this point, it was right after the crucible, which the crucible is, like, seventy-two hours or something of hardcore—you only get a little bit to eat; you get barely any sleep; you’re marching everywhere; you go out, do, like, live trainings. So it was really—That was really cool.

But—And then the—we got back and they switched us, being that—to—so I was the guide, and then I had to go get blues tailored and everything because they had planned on her being the honor graduate, because then she was the guide. Because whoever’s the guide is the honor grad.

And then somehow they’re like, “Well, since she’s been the guide the whole time she’ll just stay the guide, and you’ll just be the honor grad.”

I’m like, “What?” I said, “You know what? It really doesn’t even matter. I just don’t care at this point. She’s a piece of crap and I did much better than her so—I’m not

going to fight though. If you choose her to hold the flag for a little bit, that's fine; it doesn't bother me."

So—And then a week before—A week before we graduated, they had decided that I was going to be the honor grad because I—Actually, I don't really know why they chose me, but—and it was the one—the—the drill instructor that used to make fun of me that actually told me—well, it was the senior drill instructor that told me, and when she told me that I was the honor grad I didn't really even know what that meant, and I was like, "Okay."

And so, I left her office, and then someone was like, "Why were you in seeing the senior—senior drill instructor?"

I said, "Well, [I don't know?]. She told me I was the honor grad. I don't really know what that is."

And they were like, "You're what? The honor grad?"

I'm like, "Yeah, what does that mean?"

For one, it meant you got promoted. You got a plaque. But you got all these honors just being the honor grad. So I thought that was pretty cool. And they sent a—a letter to my parents letting them know that I was going to be the honor grad and everything. Actually, I guess this was more than a week because they came early to graduation, and, like, my time frame on everything is kind of fuzzy. But they ended up getting the wrong letter. They got my sister platoon's honor graduate letter.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh no. [chuckles]

HM: And then her family got my letter.

TS: Got your—

HM: So they were like, "What in the world?"

And so, my mom called Parris Island and was like, "Hey, I got the wrong person's letter. I don't know, really, what's going on," because they didn't know that I was going to be the honor grad.

TS: Right.

HM: And then the person that answered followed up with my platoon, got confirmation, and they said, "Oh, your daughter's the honor graduate. We wanted to let you know. We're going to let your family sit in a specific place," which all these officers were in that section so it was a huge honor.

TS: Right.

HM: And so, that was really cool. So they ended up actually coming early, which Wednesday morning—You graduate on a Friday morning, Wednesday morning is a huge run, and you run the whole graduating platoons, which is male and female platoons. So it's 3rd Battalion, which my guys ran, and then I was in 4th Battalion—all women are in 4th Battalion—and then they've got first and second, which is all guys.

So we get out there on our run—And they had come in the night before, and so they saw us running and stuff and they were, like, hooting and hollering and stuff.

TS: [chuckles]

HM: So that was really cool.

TS: That's neat.

HM: And then Thursday, the day is family day, so you go and do practice for graduation, which I had been at a—a—like, a breakfast or a luncheon with all the honor grads. Me and my sister platoon honor grad—her name's Becky—which we still have contact which is really cool—and she—We had gone to this luncheon—Which the other guy that I was graduating with that had come from home, was an honor grad for his platoon, and all the other guys were squad leaders, so four of them got promoted. It was honor grad, three squad leaders, and then the four—the fifth guy wasn't but he was still doing great, and—

TS: So Hendersonville got, like—

HM: Everything.

TS: Nice.

HM: They—We all—We got all of the honors, which was really cool.

TS: Was there a lot of hooting and hollering in the stands?

HM: Yes. And then our recruiter was able to come because he had gotten notified—he got some award because two out of the five had gotten honor grad, and then three had gotten—or two out of the six, because it was me and five guys. So all of us getting such high, like, awards getting out made him look really good.

TS: Right.

HM: And even at the—the lunch that we went with, they had said, “Well, what's your recruiter's secret—” or, “What's your secret from [*sic*] two of you from Hendersonville getting honor grad?”

And I was like, “Well, we work really hard.”

And then the other guy was like, “Well, it's our recruiter. He taught us really well,” which he did. He spent a lot of time—Every single weekend we were PTing with

each other, working out, and he was teaching us things about the Marine Corps and how to act and all this stuff.

TS: Oh, okay. Interesting.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: So I mean, it was really—it was positive, yeah.

TS: That's really neat.

HM: But when—After getting out of that luncheon we had to run to the drill—or to the parade deck to practice, and so running through the parade deck, my parents were already there and they were just standing—sitting there in the—on the—the bleachers waiting, and they couldn't see, because everyone else was on the far side of the parade deck, which the parade deck was huge. I mean, take all this land right here; it's bigger than that. So they're—All the platoons are all the way at the very end and then they make their way around, like, marching and everything, and they do everything ceremonially.

So I'm sitting over here, running from 3rd Battalion, which is all the way back here across the street and everything. So I'm running, running, running. All of a sudden I hear, "Heather!"

TS: [chuckles]

HM: And I'm like, "Why is somebody yelling my first name?" Because I only went by McKay or Recruit.

TS: Right.

HM: Recruit Ugly. So I'm running and I look up and there's my whole family, and I'm like [makes gasping noise], and I'm not allowed to—to wave or anything, because my drill instructor was right there waiting for me.

TS: Right.

HM: And she was like, "McKay! You better not respond."  
I'm like, "Oh my God." [unclear]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: She was yelling—

HM: So me and my sister platoon honor grad just run straight through. I see them of course, and then they watched us practice, which was cool for them, and then we were able to spend some time that evening together, so that was really cool. And then went to graduate and did the whole graduation thing, and I was in my blues and everyone else was in their green uniform, so—but that was really cool. And then my mom had brought all these cookies for me.

TS: [chuckles]

HM: Because she had asked, “What do you want?”

And I said, “I want cookies,” because it was—I had missed Christmas and she usually made tons of Christmas cookies. So she brought all these cookies and I ate, I think, three cookies and I was like, “I can’t eat anymore.”

TS: [chuckles]

HM: Because we’d been—literally, no sugar. We got sugar free maple syrup at breakfast time and that was the only sweet thing we got at all; everything else was sugarless; very healthy. So eating all that sugar was just kind of, like, too much.

TS: Too much, right?

HM: Yeah.

TS: But did you share?

HM: Oh, yeah. She brought me this huge platter and I was like—I ate three cookies, and then she was disappointed afterwards. I was like, “I can’t eat anymore.”

TS: [chuckles] Yeah, neat.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: But it was really cool.

TS: Neat. So she came around, then, huh?

HM: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah, they were all very proud; very, very proud. And the fact that I got honor grad out of it kind of solidified that this was the right thing for me to do.

TS: How did that feel when you were putting on that uniform, and you’re standing out to—

HM: It wasn't really that big of a deal, I guess.

TS: No?

HM: No, not really. I mean, I was proud but it was just kind of normal, I guess. At that point—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: By then?

HM: —it—it had gotten normal, yeah, so—

TS: It's the new normal, right?

HM: Yeah, the new normal. [chuckles]

TS: Well, now, tell me a little bit, then, about your—So now you have to go to training—

HM: Right.

TS: —for military police.

HM: Yes.

TS: You got it switched so you're not in corrections—

HM: Right, not in corrections, yeah.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —but you're regular—Now, did you know whether you would do the garrison or [whether you're?] field?

HM: No, I was hoping for field, but you wouldn't know until after you graduated MP school.

TS: I see.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Okay. Well, tell me about that. Now—Now you're—are you training with men?

HM: Right, now—

TS: Okay.

HM: Still sleeping only in women's quarters—

TS: Okay.

HM: —but fully integrated training with men. So MCT [marine combat training] was a couple weeks and that was—I mean, that was fun. We had men and women instructors at that point and they were not drill instructors so that was nice. We could just call them by their ranks, and it was cool. A lot of hikes, which I got linked in with—you had, like, your little battle buddy, so you had to have them wherever you went. So if you went to the bathroom—the head—you had to take your battle buddy with you, and that just, kind of—to make sure—because we were in the woods most of the time, so it was just to make sure that everyone was safe, that no one was going doing something inappropriate that they weren't allowed to do or whatever, especially because man and women—men and women together.

So her name was Pickle; her last name was Pickle. She was very tiny. I did not know her. She wasn't in my graduating boot camp, because whenever we went to MCT it was kind of backed up a little bit, so people that had graduated before were there waiting. So we got all together, and of course I look over and there's my old nemesis from boot camp. She's sitting right there smiling at me. I'm like, "Oh my Gosh. Don't look at me. Please don't strangle me."

TS: [chuckles] Still worried—

HM: Yeah.

TS: —that maybe that might happen, right?

HM: Oh yeah. But MCT was pretty easy. It was good training. And I remember one hike that we went on, Pickle was like, "Can you take some of the weight out of my pack because I can't carry it," which these were ninety-something pound packs.

And I was like, "Hell no. If you can't carry it, you can't make it, sorry. I'm not going to do it for you," and I didn't, and she ended up falling back; falling behind. It's like, "Sorry. I'm already carrying the same thing you are. I can't carry anymore."  
So—But—And then—

TS: She needed to pull her own weight?

HM: Yeah, exactly. So—And we actually had a—a girl there, we were all sitting there learning a lesson about something, sitting Indian-style on the ground with our weapon—our M-16—in between, just holding on to it. The guy behind her fell asleep and his M-16 fell

forward when he fell asleep, and the tip of it hit her at the bottom of her neck and paralyzed her.

TS: [gasps]

HM: Yeah. So we were there only for a couple of weeks, and by the time we left she had just—like, she was unable to move, and by the time we left she was moving her upper body, and really, really shaky, but it was, like, a temporary paralysis, but it affected her from the neck down. I mean, and it was insane. She ended up getting discharged—medically discharged for that.

TS: Wow.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Very freak accident.

HM: Very, yeah. After that—After MCT, you went to MP school, and got there—

TS: What's MCT stand for?

HM: Mil—Marine Combat Training.

TS: Okay.

HM: Yeah.

TS: And women and men go through it together?

HM: Together, yes.

TS: Okay.

HM: Every MOS in the Marine Corps goes through M—MCT, except for infantry. Infantry goes through SOI, which is what my brother went through.

TS: Okay.

HM: Yeah. So—And it's all in the same place. So now—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Now you go to MP school.



HM: Yes, which I get there and they're really backed up so—

TS: This is in Missouri, right?

HM: Yes.

TS: Okay.

HM: Yeah. So I get some—some leave—vacation leave or whatever—and I was able to come home for thirty days, which was really nice. And then I go back and our—on the—When we were leaving MCT we were all together, we had all our sea bags full of all of our stuff and everything, and we were getting onto certain buses. One bus goes to this airport, another bus—Or one bus goes to this airport for this time, because I don't think we all went out of the same airport or buses. And finally it got down to the point where there weren't very many—few people left, and I looked over and there's my enemy right there, sitting there looking at me, thinking the same thing I was; "Are you going to the same place I am?" And then finally she comes—And I don't—

TS: So they[?] hadn't really talked about it? You didn't know?

HM: No.

TS: You never talked to her again after—

HM: I did not talk to her after she told me she was going to strangle me because I was scared out of my mind.

TS: Okay.

HM: No one had ever threatened me in that way before.

TS: Right.

HM: So I was like, "Holy crap, she's—" and she was a police officer before she came into the Marine Corps, so I knew she knew how to strangle me; she had been trained. So—Which, I mean, we went through training and stuff like that, too, but—

So we're sitting there on our sea bags, like, "Oh my God, is she going to come talk to me?"

And she actually did. She came over and she was like, "What's your MOS?"

I said, "Fifty-eight eleven. What's your MOS?"

She was like, "Fifty-eight eleven."

"What a second. We're the only women, aren't we?"

"Yep."

She was like, "You know what that means?"

I said, “Yeah, we’re probably going to be roommates, right?”

She said, “Yeah.” And then she was like, “You know what? I’m really sorry for threatening you. You were just kind of being an asshole, talking behind my back.”

I said, “Well, if you didn’t want everyone to know you shouldn’t have given out such personal information.”

She was like, “Yeah, you’re right.”

I said, “But I shouldn’t have done that. I shouldn’t have said that.”

And she said, “Yeah. Well, I’m sorry.”

I said, “Yeah, I’m sorry too.” And that was it. Then we were, like, best friends after that. It was crazy. It went from enemies to best friends and it was awesome.

So we went to MP school, we did absolutely everything together, so—

TS: Are you still friends?

HM: Oh yeah; yeah. She’s [*sic*] actually still lives in Lejeune, because she got stationed in Lejeune.

TS: What’s her name again?

HM: Fallon. Her maiden name was Hughes.

TS: Okay.

HM: It’s Fallon Cortez[?] now. So—I mean, we did absolutely everything together, and she knew a lot about stuff since she was a police officer before, so that was kind of cool. But she aced every single test in MP school—every single test—and she ended up getting honor grad out of MP school, so that was really cool.

TS: Yeah.

HM: And—What was it? It might have—Well, she might have got honor grad out of MCT too. I think she got honor grad out of MCT as well. I can’t remember. But she always aced every single test and I was jealous of that.

TS: [chuckles]

HM: Because I made good grades, just didn’t ace every single—every one.

TS: But she had done—had the experience—

HM: Oh yeah, she—yeah, she’s super smart.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —going up to it.

HM: So.

TS: What was—What was challenging for you in that school?

HM: Physically, our gunnery sergeant, Gunnery—Gunny Cartoon[?], he was spitfire like nobody's business. I have never seen a man so, like, intense before, other than him. He was crazy. And he would take us on these runs that I literally thought I was going to die, and he would always be yelling at me because I was the very last person. I was like, “Listen. I’m still going. I haven’t stopped.” We’d go on the huge—huge hills, up and down. One was carwash hill, because at the very top of the hill was a carwash, and then the hill was just, like—plummeted straight down, and then you’d turn around at the very end and go right back up. By the time you get to the hill it’s already been a couple miles that you’ve run, so then doing that at the very end is just torture, and then you have to run a couple miles back. But she was always encouraging me and stuff, but that—physically that was the hardest part.

And that was when guys started noticing me, because that was kind of difficult too. Which I was popular but they only wanted to, like—I don’t know—date me or something, or have sex with me. So that was, kind of, not a good side of it I guess, but it—

TS: How would you handle all that?

HM: Well—I mean, I thought of most people as, like, my brothers because that’s what they were. So a lot of it I just, kind of, “Uh. Whatever.” And then after I had brushed it off the first couple times or the first couple of advances, then it would—it would stop. I mean, it really wasn’t too, too bad.

But we learned a lot in MP school. And then towards the very end they had some recruiters come out from HMX [HMX-1, Marine Helicopter Squadron One], and you had to fill out the form no matter what. Like, you couldn’t opt out of going to HMX if you qualified. So I filled out the form because I was such a good kid; never did drugs, never—didn’t drink a lot; all this stuff; had nothing on my record; never had a speeding ticket. They interviewed me and found that I had good character, good morals, all that stuff, and they selected me to go to HMX.

TS: Say what HMX stands for.

HM: Let’s see. It’s something Helicopter Marine Ex—Experimental something. Let me see.

TS: But tell—It’s for—

HM: It’s for the—the president’s helicopters. Let me—

TS: There you go. That's what I was trying to get you to say.

HM: Yeah, yeah. Okay. We guarded—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So people know what you're, like—

HM: Right. We guarded presidential assets.

TS: There you go.

HM: Meaning any type of documentation and whatever that we had, I had to guard it. I had to guard our facility. I guarded—Any time we traveled with the president I guarded the helicopter specifically, and any type of gear that we brought along with it. And then of course, if the president was around we provided security for anyone there, but mostly for his assets and him, of course. But I had a top secret Yankee White clearance, which meant that I could be within one inch of the president with a loaded weapon and it was fine.

TS: That's a pretty prestigious position—

HM: Yeah.

TS: —to get assigned to, right?

HM: Right.

TS: Were you surprised, or what did you think about that assignment?

HM: Well, I mean, it was—I was excited because they showed us this video and it was, like, everywhere they've been with the president, and I was like, "Holy crap, I'm going to tra—travel everywhere," which I ended up traveling a lot of places. But then once I got there, then I saw all the downtime where we weren't traveling, and what we were doing when we weren't traveling which sucked. But the—the five seconds of fame each time we went somewhere was worth it, so yeah.

TS: How many people served on that? Was it all Marines?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: Like, in HMX?

TS: Yes.

HM: Yeah. Honestly, I don't know if I'm allowed to say, but I don't—

TS: No, that's fine.

HM: Honestly, I don't know.

TS: That's fine.

HM: Yeah, we had a couple hundred—

TS: Yes.

HM: —just se—security.

TS: And you rotated your duty?

HM: No—Well, like, main duty was back—like, back on the home front in Quantico. We guarded the base, we guarded the assets, so the assets there were helicopters. And—And that's, like, the White Top that you see here; that's one of the helicopters, but that's what [unclear].

TS: White Top helicopter?

HM: Right, yes.

TS: Okay.

HM: And then whenever you're traveling—say if the president—like when Bush was in, he would go to Texas a lot, so some of our Marines would go with him—specifically our security would go with him and protect the helicopter while we were there, and then do any ceremonial duties whenever he was flying someplace. So the Marine that salutes outside of the helicopter whenever the president is getting on or off the helicopter, that's what I did.

TS: Oh, yeah?

HM: So yeah, that's the ceremonial part, yeah.

TS: That must have been pretty cool.

HM: Yeah, it was really—I've got a good picture somewhere of me doing that, which it might be in my records. I'll have to find that.

TS: Okay.

HM: But that's really cool. You—You'll probably want that one.

TS: Yeah.

HM: So yeah—I mean, it was really cool. I went—My first month there—Well, right when I got to the unit I was put in a transitional room, which meant it wasn't going to be my per—permanent, it was just because I had just gotten there. I was the only—There was [*sic*] three us from MP school—me and two guys—which I wasn't the most senior out of all of us but they weren't taking responsibility for anything, so whenever we got there I took responsibility and I said, "We're here from MP school. Let's get logged in everywhere, make sure we got all of our stuff and everything."

And they were like, "Oh, wow, a woman being the most senior."

And I said, "No, I'm not the most senior, but I'm just the one that's going to do it," because these other guys were lazy. [chuckles]

So we got there, I got into the room. Twenty minutes after I had gotten all my stuff into the room, all these people came knocking on the door, which they were like, "Fresh meat. New girl. Let's go see what's going on." So they—All these drunk Marines, like twenty of them, came to the door. I open the door not knowing what to expect, and they were like, "We need to do a uniform inspection," and this was just, like, the Marine Corps drill; you haze the new person.

So that's what was happening and I thought, "Holy crap, I've got to do a uniform inspection," and this was late at night.

So I got my uniform together and then finally the sergeant and the guard came over. They're like, "Leave her alone. Don't be ridiculous," because everyone was drinking.

Then finally when I moved into my new room, my roommate there, which was—I mean, there were barely any women, so she, like, protected me from all that, which was nice, and she was very, very nice. And it was funny because, like, the—one of my most vivid memories was watching *Friends*, the television show, with all them and [unclear] close knit friendship with a group of the Marines out of security, and we all just sat and watched *Friends* together. [chuckles] But she really saved me from a lot of, like, the harassment at the very beginning, because it—I mean, it was kind of crazy. That was kind of weird.

But—So within my first month of being there, because they needed another female out of security and I was the only one available—I had not even finished training yet, but they were like, "You've got to go to Texas."

I'm like, "Holy cow. Okay." And I just took my orders. Consequences from that was—I went and did everything fine. They actually said I did great doing the duties, which I didn't really know a lot but it was fine. But everyone ended up being jealous, because a lot of people had been there for a while and still hadn't traveled, so—And that

was the only good part, really, about the unit, was the traveling, because you got put up in nice hotels, you got per diem for every single day, so your food was paid for, you got to see really cool places, and I was right off the bat traveling. So that really, kind of, pissed people off, but whatever.

TS: That's what happens, right?

HM: Yeah.

TS: What kind of places did you get to go? Do you have a favorite place that you went to?

HM: I really liked when—Well, I've been to almost every state in the United States.

TS: Okay.

HM: And then I went to South Korea, Israel, Egypt, and Abu Dhabi [United Arab Emirates]. Those places were really cool. I got kicked out—Well, not let into a club in Abu Dhabi because I was a woman and I was white. That was interesting.

TS: How did that go down?

HM: We all went up to the door and some of the guys I was with got in, and then they were like, "No, you can't come in."

I said, "Well, why?" Because every club I'd ever tried to get into before that I'd been fine to go in, and people paid for my drinks and stuff.

TS: Right.

HM: They were like, "You're a white American."

I was like, "Okay."

TS: So are they. [chuckles]

HM: Yeah, I know. And then I was like, "Well, okay, that's not fair."

And they said, "And you're a woman."

I'm like, "Touché." So I just turned around, and then they all left with me.

They were like, "If you can't—"

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, they did?

HM: Yeah.

TS: Oh, that's great.

HM: They're like, "If you can't get in then we're not going to go in." So—

TS: That's nice solidarity.

HM: But the style there—I mean, the women cover up completely. I mean, they're in burkas and—

TS: Yes.

HM: —even some of them only have slits for their eyes. So for me—And we were told specifically, "Do not wear open-toed shoes because it's improper to have your feet showing at some points—or to show, like, the bottom of your feet. And then make sure—Women have to wear—have to have sleeves on their shirts. Don't wear anything plunging in the neckline, and wear pants, no shorts."

So we're like, "Okay." Which the Marine Corps, the clothing standards are a little bit higher, so you have to be appropriate anyways. But—So that was—I mean, I was dressed appropriately, I thought, but I think it was—I mean, they're customs and stuff was a lot different than us.

TS: Right.

HM: So. But I liked Israel when we went, too, which—I mean, it's maybe somewhat inappropriate to say, but we were shopping in, like, an outdoor—

TS: Like a bazaar, market?

HM: Right, yeah. And this guy comes up and I was with one of my buddies, Harris[?], and he—he reminded me a lot of my younger brother, because my younger brother is huge; like six [foot] three [inches], two hundred and eighty-something pounds. I mean, he was a big guy; all muscle. And this guy was exactly like that, and he was sweet like my brother, so I always, kind of, had, like, this kinship to him. And we were walking down the street shopping and I—every single place I went I got a shot glass. So I wanted to find one, I was trying to find one, and then this guy came out and he said to Harris—he was like, "Oh, is she for sex?"

And Harris was like, "What?!" Like, he'd never heard anything like that before.

And the guy was like, "Yeah. Is she for sex?"

And then Harris was like, "No, she is our friend. What are you talking about?"

And she—And he says, "Well, everyone that comes here, they bring a woman, but they're just for sex; they're not, like, their partner," or whatever.

And Harris was like, "No. She is—" And I was the most senior person that was going out with them. So he was like, "No, we work together. She is my friend."

And then he was like, "Well, she doesn't like sex?"



And he's like, "I don't even know how to answer that question. I'm sure she does but this is, like—we're not even going to talk about that."

And then he brought us inside and showed us this statue, which is the fertility statue. So the man part was quite large on the fertility statue, and he says, "Well, this is what you should use."

And we're all like, "This is not okay. [chuckles] We're just going to turn around. Thank you for showing this to us." That was probably the most awkward [unclear].

TS: Right. Probably more awkward for your friend. [both chuckle]

HM: Yes, I know, he was very embarrassed.

TS: Yeah.

HM: But it was very interesting. But we also—When we were in Israel we visited Jerusalem, so that was really cool. We saw the wi—the Wailing Wall [also known as the Western Wall or Kotel].

TS: Which you can't approach, right?

HM: I—I could—

TS: Okay.

HM: —but I had to cover my head.

TS: Okay.

HM: And same thing with them. They could, and maybe it was—and I don't know now, maybe they—other people can't approach it, but at that point that was—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You could? Okay. That's great.

HM: I don't remember what year that was. So that was—Yeah, that was really neat. I didn't go down there. I—I—I didn't feel—I felt like it would be disrespectful for me to go down since that wasn't, like, my primary religion—I'm not Jewish—and I wanted just to respect their privacy. So—But that was really cool.

And we went to a church for mothers, or a church for women or something. It was on the side of this mountain and it was the most beautiful thing. It—It was all this—these mosaics, and the tile—like, beautiful—all on the floors it was just mosaics of animals; so it was fish and birds and just beautiful. And then it had a huge [Virgin] Mary up on the

windows, holding Jesus, and then it had one Bible verse on this huge wall outside and it was the same verse in every single language. It was the most beautiful thing I've ever seen, and I—I still think about that all the time, just—that was probably the prettiest place I've ever seen.

TS: Yeah?

HM: Yeah, it was beautiful, and the—because we had gone on a tour—Every time we traveled they tried to set up things that you could do. Especially if it was overseas and you'd never been there before, they tried to set up things; “Okay, you can pay twenty-five dollars and go on this trip,” or “eighty dollars and go on this trip.” So we—that's when we went to Jerusalem, is we took a tour, and on the way we stopped on the side of the road and the tour guide bought bread and he said, “We're all going to break bread together.”

So we all got there. It was, like, this little ceremonial, really cool breaking of bread, and we dipped it in this dried green powder stuff, which was the best thing I've ever eaten, and I don't even know what it's called or whatever, but it was so good. And he—And we broke bread together and dipped it and ate it and then went off the Jerusalem. So that was really cool.

TS: That is cool.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Sounds like a great trip.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Did you have a lot of time—I guess it probably depended on how long you were in a place, how much time you had to explore.

HM: Right, right. Usually, I mean, we were there a little bit before the president got there and a little bit after, so I mean, depending on how long his stay was. Sometimes he was only there for a couple hours, so we'd end up being there maybe for a week or something, so—but it was—it was really—a really cool experience being in that unit.

And then after—after I traveled—Like, my very first month after I traveled that, I came back and they were like, “Okay, who can type?” And they were talking to a group of, like, fifty Marines and no one raised their hand.

I was like, “Are you kidding me?” So I rose my hand and I was like, “I can type.”

They said, “Okay, you're going work in the office now.”

I was like, “Of course. The woman working in the office. Awesome.”

So I got put in the back office, which meant I worked with the captain; the only officer that we had at the time. We ended up getting a lieutenant afterwards, but then all the higher-ups—so E-9 and the—well, E-6 to E-9. I had a Master [of Guns?] [Master Gunnery Sergeant?], which I still keep in contact, he's very nice; a Gunnery Sergeant, who was very hard on me but took care of me also; and then a couple of staff sergeants,

and then a sergeant. But I was, like, their go-to person. So whenever they needed a document I actually knew how to create a sentence, so they were like, “You have to do everything.”

TS: That’s thanks to Mrs. Langston, right?

HM: [both chuckle] Yeah, really; yeah. So literally, I typed up everything, I took—I was in control of any weapon going—traveling, so—because every time we went somewhere we had to bring protection, so we had to bring weapons, so—

TS: You still traveled but you did the—

HM: I traveled a lot less when I was in the office—

TS: Okay.

HM: —unfortunately, but I still—I still was able to, yeah. Especially—I mean, usually, “Hey, we need a female, so get McKay to do it.”

“Sweet. Let’s do it. That’s fine.”

So—And it was really when they had enough help in the back office, too, because sometimes if people went on leave or whatever and I was the last one, then I couldn’t go anywhere.

TS: I see.

HM: Yeah. But I was, like, the go-to person back there and I controlled, really, over everything, and I was really good at it. So—

TS: Did you enjoy it?

HM: Yeah, I enjoyed that part. It was—I mean, they—a lot of the people hated me for that because that was—they thought it was the easy job, because it was office hours, so you got in at 7:30 [a.m.] and you left at 4:00 [p.m.] or 4:30. Everyone else was on twelve hour shifts. They had to wear the black gear, which—weapon, OC [oleoresin capsicum] Spray [also known as pepper spray], baton; everything. It was a lot more tedious and harder work to be, like—we called it “the guard force.” So being in the back office, their—they called—they called everyone “back office bitches.” [unclear]

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Male and—Male and women—

HM: Yeah.

TS: Men and women?

HM: Yeah. One of the—One of the mean things about this—

TS: Well, you're Marines, right?

HM: Yeah, so—

TS: Nobody wants to be in office.

HM: I know, right? So one of the—one of the mean things was they always would say, “Oh, your—your knees are worn out, aren't they?” Meaning that I was back there—

TS: Right.

HM: Yeah. So—Which I just tried to brush it off but it gets a little annoying after a while and everyone's saying it.

TS: Would you still just ignore it or would you just call them out on it or—

HM: I'd try to ignore it most of the time but sometimes I would just get pissed off and call them out on it, and then that person was just not someone that I hung out with.

TS: Yeah?

HM: Which turned out to be most everybody.

TS: Really?

HM: Yeah, it was—it was not—I was a stickler too; like, I did the right thing no matter what; it's how I was raised.

TS: Right.

HM: So—And especially doing that job, you have to do the right thing. If you don't do the right thing you will get punished very swiftly, harshly, and you will lose everything. You will lose your duty station, you'll lose your MOS, because if someone got a speeding ticket they'd be kicked out of the unit and I didn't want any of that to happen.

And then we had people mess up. They were drinking one night and broke a light bulb in the barracks, and it really is not that big of a deal but they had messed up a couple times at work beforehand, so they put everything together and JPed them—non-judicial—

TS: Oh.

HM: —non-judicial punishment—

TS: Yes.

HM: —and they were out of the unit, did not have their MOS anymore, and they were doing, like, stupid work. So I was always, “I’m going to do what’s right no matter what,” and I made everyone that was under me do what was right no matter what because that was the right thing to do. And it was not—Sometimes it wasn’t a very happy place to work because it was the same thing every single day, and you would see all these other people traveling and I was like, “Great, I’m left behind again.”

So the mentality was, “What can we do—What can we get away with in order to make our lives a little bit more exciting?” And it’s hard when you’re in charge of people doing that. Because I worked for the—in the back office for a while and then they moved me back to the guard force because they needed another NCO and at that point I had—I got meritoriously promoted in boot camp because I was a honor grad, and then I got merit—meritoriously promoted to corporal, which is E-4, because I went up on a board and—and I won, so—which that they didn’t like either because they thought I was just given it because I was a woman.

TS: When you say “they” you’re talking about your peers, really?

HM: Right, yeah, yeah. My, like, senior leadership, they all knew how hard I worked and they all were very appreciative and knew, “Hey, if we put her up against someone who’s on the guard force, I’m sure they’re—they’re a hard worker and everything but we know she is good. We know she’s going to have the right things to say whenever she goes up on the board and she actually have [*sic*] a chance that she could win it.”

I mean, I’ve been on a board that I didn’t win, and that really sucks but it also gives you that experience.

TS: Right.

HM: So yeah, but it was just kind of—

TS: Did you feel like you were—I’m sorry. Go ahead, finish. It was kind of like what?

HM: Oh, I don’t know. I don’t know what I was going to say. [chuckles]

TS: Did you feel like you were treated fairly, as—as far as things go for pro—promotions and—

HM: Oh, absolutely. I was definitely treated fairly. I worked really, really hard—

TS: Yes.

HM: —on the prerequisite to get promoted, I had enough points and everything, but we went through the whole board. You have to do—You have to drill in front of the panel, you have to answer questions, which is all about Marine Corps history, current events, anything. They could pull any question out of the box and you have to answer it correctly, or answer it in a way that they believe your answer and just like, “Whoa, she kind of kicked that out of the water. She’s good.”

And then you have to run a PFT, which is a three mile run, pull ups or bar hang, and then crunches, and they look at your scores on paper. So it’s like everyone thought that I was just given it but it’s like, “Listen, I made the best scores on paper. How am I just getting it?” And it’s just like it was just their way of being frustrated that they weren’t given the opportunity or that they weren’t good enough at their job and they just took it out on me.

TS: And they lost out to a woman.

HM: Right, exactly. Yeah, that was huge. Every single time that—that was one of the things. Whenever I went to my second duty station in Okinawa [Japan], we went on a—a training exercise to South Korea and I was the most senior of MPs there, so I was put in charge of security for the port; we were on Mokpo Port, which is the very southern tip of South Korea. Cold; super cold.

We were there in February, and I remember going outside, the mist coming off of the water, because we were literally right there. I mean, the port went out and then there was cement edge, and it was twenty feet down and there was water and huge ships. Which there was a North Korean ship out there on the water watching us the whole time which was crazy. So I remember going outside and the mist coming on and freezing my eyelashes. I mean, it was that cold.

But I was in charge of the security, so we had our set Marines in our group and then we had to get other Marines to cover duty because we didn’t have enough. So each time we’d get other Marines, usually all guys. They’d be like, “I’m not listening to you. You’re a woman.” And I actually had to be so mean to just get these guys to—

TS: What—what would you do?

HM: I would yell and scream and threaten and get up in their face and make them feel like teeny, teeny, tiny, just so I could have that edge, and then usually if they didn’t respect me at least they would fear me and so they all—they would actually do what I said. So that was—that’s, kind of, not a proud moment of my military career. I did what I had to do and I did it very well, but in life, especially now, like, I don’t want to be mean, I don’t have to be mean, which is really nice.

TS: Right—

HM: [Very relieving?].

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —but you don't have that kind of challenge being pushed up against you all the time—

HM: Right.

TS: —either, right?

HM: Right, right, which my ex-husband, he was not very fond of women Marines, which was bizarre—Why did I even married him?—but we have a wonderful son together, so all-in-all it was good. But he—he was always challenging women Marines and it was very frustrating because I dealt with that everywhere else; literally every single day having to prove myself. Which when I worked in the back office with all the higher-ups, I proved myself within the first couple weeks, and they were like, “Okay, we trust you,” but they had been in the Marine Corps for so long, they had worked with women before, they were married so they had wives, they knew how women worked, so it was never that much of an issue whenever—whenever I dealt with higher-ups, like—so senior leadership. It was all my peers were below that didn't respect me just because of my gender, so that was kind of difficult to deal with.

But you—The one time—Again, when I was in Okinawa, this guy—his last name was Scott—and he gave me probably the best compliment of anyone I've ever received in my whole life, and he looked at me one time, and I don't even remember what we were doing, but he was like, “You know—” and my name was still McKay at that point; I hadn't changed it to my married name. He was like, “You know, McKay, you're just a Marine.”

And I was like, “What?!”

He was like, “You're just a Marine to me. You're not a woman Marine; you're just a Marine.”

I was like, “Holy cow.”

That was probably the best compliment I've ever received, and it was—he was just being sincere and saying, “It doesn't matter what other people say. You're—You do just what I do and that's what needs to be done.”

TS: Do you think that was really important for that identity—

HM: Yeah.

Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —to try to break away from that—that gender part that everyone's trying to stick on you?

HM: Yeah, right.

TS: And you just want—I'm sure—Did just want to be a Marine, right?

HM: Right, exactly, that's all I wanted to be. I didn't want to be—I wanted to be better than everyone else because I knew I was, and—but I didn't want them to judge me just because of my gender. So—So when he said that that was, like, one of the defining moments. [chuckles]

TS: That's cool.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Well, I wanted to ask you a question. If you can go back to when you were on the HMX—

HM: Sure.

TS: —one, you had said that you had a picture that you showed me of you next to President—well, you're not next to President Bush but you're in the picture a couple people away.

HM: Yeah.

TS: And you said you have your head turned—

HM: [chuckles] Yeah.

TS: —for a particular reason. Do you want to talk about that and what happened?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: Sure, yeah, it's this picture.

TS: There you go.

HM: I was in Ottawa, Canada, on a trip and the president was talking inside the hangar; he was giving a speech. And this is not one of the first events I'd ever done but I was still somewhat new, so instead of placing me on Marine One they placed me on Marine Two. So Marine—Marine One is whichever bird, which we—that's slang for helicopter. So whichever bird the president gets on is automatically Marine One. There's not just one helicopter, it's just whichever helicopter he's on.



So I was stationed—I was placed on Marine Two, which was good, and I had been standing out there for a while, he had come in on Air Force One, gotten off, he was giving his speech. So we'd been out there, because whenever Air Force One landed we had to be out there on the birds. And then he went in and gave—whoever knows how long his speech was I have no idea, and we had to stay out there in our blues, ceremonially, like, by the birds.

So I was standing by it. The birds were running the whole time so the exhaust was coming out, and how the wind was whipping the exhaust it just brought it right into a circle surrounding me, and I tried to hold my breath, and then finally I was like, “Holy crap. I can't hold my breath.” And then I—My instinct was—My human instinct was, “You should move and get out of this so you can breathe,” but my Marine instinct was, “You better not move because you're in ceremony—like, your ceremonial duties state that you cannot move. You have to do precision movements, everything, which I had practiced tons and tons of times, and Bush was about to come out of the hangar.

So we were still at parade rest, so it wasn't like—we weren't at attention, locked and everything, we were at parade rest, so relaxed, and I just was holding my breath for a while and finally breathed in, and when I breathed in the exhaust I got carbon monoxide poisoning and I passed out—boom, right then and there—out cold and went straight forward. And the first thing that hit the ground, or the cement, was my jaw. Which I got a scar; you can kind of see it right there on my jaw. And I ended up breaking my jaw, breaking ten teeth. It was very traumatic.

And the guy that was the crew chief—because the crew chief did part of the ceremonies with me—he thought I had been shot, because all he saw was me fall.

TS: Forward?

HM: Yeah.

TS: Straight forward. Right.

HM: He was like, “Holy crap! She's been shot!” And so, he's looking around because—

TS: So then they're on alert.

HM: Right, because obviously, I mean, there's snipers everywhere whenever the president's somewhere, so—just for protection. So he's like, “How the hell did some sniper shoot her?” and blah, blah, blah. Then he ended up coming over to me, and then they had a ambulance there for the president just in case, because they always have support with everything, including medical.

Bush was coming out of the door at this point, so they stopped him, got him back in there—he signed autographs or something, I don't know—and they got me into the ambulance and took me to the hospital in Ottawa, and he sent his personal physician with me, because he was like, “You need to go be with her and make sure she's okay.”

So his personal physician came with me and I was completely out of it. I mean, I was just in so much pain. I got to the hospital, the doctor looked at me, grabbed my jaw,

went like this. He was like, “You look okay but you’ve broken maybe six teeth,” and that just put me into a crazy amount of pain and I—and I couldn’t talk barely.

So they gave me Tylenol with codeine in it. I was like, “Okay, well, this’ll—”

TS: Take the edge off, maybe. [chuckles]

HM: Right, maybe. Yeah. Which I—Actually, whenever I passed out I was still face forward, and when they rolled me over I had so much stuff going on in my mouth—I was bleeding a lot, too, and I started choking on blood and teeth.

TS: Right.

HM: Because some of my teeth had broken so much that chunks were, like, coming off. Ugh. So I—They brought me back—The—The doctor was like, “You should be okay,” because we were planning on being there for a couple more days. They said, “You should be okay. Just stay in your hotel. You probably shouldn’t work for the rest of the time you’re here, and then just see your doctor whenever you get back.”

I was like, “Okay.”

We get back in a car, and this is part of—it was some vehicle. I don’t know whose vehicle it was, but it was really, really nice so it may have been part of the president’s fleet or something, or—honestly I don’t remember at that point. But his physician is still with me, and I’m sitting in the front seat, we’ve got a Marine driving, his physician is the back—is in the back, and then he gets a phone call—or he makes a phone call and then waits for a little bit and says—

TS: The physician?

HM: The physician, yeah. He says, “Hey, get ready to talk on the phone.”

And I didn’t really know what he was talking about. I said, “Okay.”

So then he finally gets a phone call back and he says, “Yes, sir. Yes, Mr. President, here she is.”

Gives me his cell phone—

TS: [chuckles]

HM: —and it’s the president on the other end. And so, he introduces himself and he says, “I’m so sorry this is going on. I just wanted to call and check up on you and make sure everything’s going okay.” And he asked where I was from.

Somehow I was able to speak out, “Hendersonville, North Carolina.”

He said, “Oh, I know that place. It’s a very beautiful place.”

“Oh, okay.”

And then he said—making sure I was taken care of, making sure that his physician was making sure I was comfortable and everything, and then he thanked me for serving the country and that was it. It was pretty cool.

TS: Nice.

HM: Yeah. And then I went back and I spent the night—that night in the hotel room, which I didn't sleep at all because I was in so much pain, and I was sick because of all the blood that I had ingested. And then the next day my commanding officer said, "We're going to get you home because you're not doing very well."

So I rode on Air Force Two, which is the smaller version of Air Force One, and it's funny because when I went on we all sit—had our assigned seats and I had, like, my name written on this thing with a picture of Air Force Two on it and I thought that was really cool. And my commanding officer was sitting right beside me, and I was an E-3 at that point—a lance corporal—which is very low on the totem pole, and he was an officer—an O-6—so very, very high, and he was sitting beside me and talking to me, which was crazy. He did tell me though—he said, "Just so you know, I'm not going back and going because you're hurt. I'm going back because my son has—has a baseball game."

I was like, "Okay, sir."

TS: [chuckling]

HM: "[Going to go?]. I got it. I'm not important here. I totally understand that." But I think he was very concerned about me though.

TS: Yeah?

HM: And so, we get back, and that night they drive me to Bethesda Hospital [Walter Reed National Military Medical Center]. They actually do x-rays, like should have been done—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh, they hadn't—they hadn't done any?

HM: No.

TS: Oh my goodness.

HM: They only did a physical exam, yeah.

TS: Oh, the turning of your face.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Okay, I see.

HM: So when we get and do x-rays, and then—What time is it?

TS: We're fine. It's a little after 1:00.

HM: Okay, Oh, okay, good, because I've got a three o'clock appointment.

TS: Okay.

HM: So they do x-rays. They find that my jaw is broken, which, like, your jaw is one piece but mine was broken like this, so—

TS: Jag—So back—

HM: Right.

TS: One was pushed back?

HM: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

HM: Yeah, and it had, like, split in half. So I ended up getting three screws in my jaw right here, which they had to move open my lips, so I have some paralysis. Everything moves pretty well, which is good, but I can't feel right around here. I definitely can't feel any of my gums.

TS: Oh, still.

HM: Yeah, still, I can't.

TS: Oh, okay.

HM: Yeah, I can't feel any of my gums on the inside. They extracted four teeth and then did implants. You can kind of see right here—

TS: Right.

HM: —two fake, and then I had two down there. And then they were able to fix the six other teeth that were broken. So all in all ten teeth, and then the broken jaw, so three screws.

TS: Wow.

HM: So that was—

TS: That's a lot of work, huh?

HM: Yeah. It ended up being, like, seven surgeries overall, with the extractions and then doing the implants and everything, so I've got a lot of money in my mouth. [both chuckle]

TS: Yeah.

HM: Very expensive, so.

TS: Fortunately you were in the military.

HM: I know, it was all covered, which was great. Well, I did get one bill from the hospital in Canada, and I tried to get that taken care of, because I was covered by Tri-Care and they were just being too difficult, so I just paid for it. It was a hundred bucks.

TS: Really?

HM: I was like, "Screw this. I'm just going to pay for it because that's going to be easier than getting you guys to pay for it."

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Than having to go—

HM: Yeah.

TS: Interesting.

HM: So—But that was really cool. And then we ended up—This time when it—For this picture—

TS: Right.

HM: —this is actually in our hangar at [Marine Corps Base] Quantico [Virginia].

TS: Okay.

HM: So this is usually where—And there's one of the helicopters right there, so it's all—where the helicopters are worked on, and kept, and everything. And whenever he got out of office he came to say, "Goodbye and thank you." So that's this picture right here, and I specifically asked him—I was—and I shook his hand and I said, "Do you remember me? I'm the Marine that fell in Ottawa, Canada."

And he said, "Ottawa? That's right. I do remember you. You look really good."

I was like, “I look good? Oh, thank you.” [both chuckle] But it was—it was cool that he actually remembered, so that was really neat.

TS: Yeah?

HM: Yeah.

TS: Did—Now—And then you stayed on a little bit during President [Barrack Hussein] Obama’s—

HM: Right, I was—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Did you notice any difference between—

HM: Yeah. With Bush, he was very personable. Like, one time we were at Camp David and Bush gets off of the helicopter and goes and gets in his golf cart—golf cart, and he’s waiting—he waits for his wife, his wife gets in, and then he’s waiting for the VP [Vice President], and the VP comes out of the bird and Bush is like, “Come on, man! Tally-ho!”

TS: [chuckles]

HM: And then he drives off in his golf cart and we’re all like, “What just happened?” Because we’re all standing there at a position of attention—you have to do that—and he’s just, like, in his element; relaxed. So that was really funny. He was very personable; always talking to us where ever we were.

And Obama was very different. He was very straight-faced usually.

TS: Like more reserved?

HM: Very reserved, yeah. I went to Camp David with him once and wherever he went we would have to leave, and it was just—not as personable as Bush but he was brand new whenever I served under him, so it was—it’s kind of expected. But then this picture—

TS: So you think he was trying to feel his way?

HM: Yeah, absolutely, learn the ropes. This picture is in the Oval Office.

TS: This is one with you and President—

HM: Right.

TS: —Obama, and who's next to you on—

HM: And this is my father.

TS: Oh, okay, very nice.

HM: Yes. So this picture is—Everyone that gets out of the unit honorably, so is not kicked out of the unit or whatever, can go to the Oval Office; it's called a "grip and grin." So you go there and shake the president's hand and then you get to take a picture with him, and you get to take one family member so I decided to take my dad, and he was so excited. Oh my word. I mean, he doesn't agree with the same principles of the president but just to meet the President of the United States, to go in to the Oval Office, was just astounding for him, and for me too. I mean, it was really cool. I—I met him before but to be there in the Oval Office was awesome.

TS: Right.

HM: And so, we waited—we, like—When we entered the White House we had to go through all these security checks, and then they took us, like, the back way. So we went through the kitchen and then we went outside—like, on this little path outside, and then went in a then finally got into the hallway, waiting right outside the Oval Office, and stood there for forever, and then finally got our chance and—

TS: Was there, like, a line of people doing the meet and greets—

HM: Yes.

TS: —at that time?

HM: Yeah.

TS: So it's like a day that they pick to—

HM: Right. Yeah.

TS: I see.

HM: And then they push you all through and you only get, like, five seconds with him. But he shook my hand and he said, "Thank you for your service," and then he shook my dad's hand and he said, "We are so very proud of your daughter. Thank you so much." My dad just thought that was so cool, and I did too. I thought that was really neat, so.

TS: Very neat.

HM: Yeah. It was—It was really cool. And then after that—Because this was my last day—Well, last week, I guess, at that unit, and then I went to Okinawa.

TS: Okay.

HM: And that was the field side—

TS: Okay.

HM: —of MPs, so that was really cool; very different. Every single day was, literally, training for deployment.

TS: Did you enjoy that?

HM: So—Yes, I loved it. Yeah.

TS: What was a typical day like?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: Hey, Nathan? Yeah.

TS: Oh, I don't have it on yet. Just a sec.

HM: Oh, okay.

TS: Okay, go ahead, I'm sorry.

HM: Okay, so a typical day there was getting up, working out, then getting together and training for deployment. So usually on a deployment what our job would be is to guard—do security for our convoy, which a convoy is a whole bunch of trucks getting together, moving supplies from one place to another, or a whole bunch of trucks getting together and going on a mission or something. So our job would have been security for the convoy; so protecting all the trucks, all the gear, whatever you were taking from one place to another. But with that there's always an opportunity to do, like, room searching, or if you get attacked you have to do counter-attacks or whatever. So we'd trained on all that stuff.

So it was really fun but it was way out of my element because I was already a NCO at that time, which is a E-4 Corporal, and with an NCO you're in charge of everyone. So it was a lot different going from being in charge and knowing what I was doing to being in charge and not knowing what I was doing.

TS: How did you handle that?



HM: Well, I tried to get help from the other NCOs that I was with, which everyone there thought I was stuck up because at that point I was married, and so a lot of the people—which in my first unit whenever we traveled a lot of people would cheat on their spouses unfortunately, so—and the same thing had happened whenever people went on unaccompanied tours to overseas duty stations.

I mean, they would have problems with their spouse and break up with them, or they would just cheat and not tell their spouse, so I was, like—they called me “the married one,” because I was strictly faithful and everyone knew I was married; I had a—my ring on and everything. And I didn’t want to be one of those because I’d seen it so much, and I did not want to ruin my marriage.

TS: And he was—

HM: [unclear]

TS: It was unaccompanied?

HM: Yeah, I was thirteen months—

TS: Okay.

HM: —tour unaccompanied, so—and the reason I went to Okinawa—which I—initially no one would have left HMX until four years was over because they spend so much money on the clearance and everything, and the training, and it’s not worth it to them to lose one of those Marines. So the only reason was, for some reason the Marine Corps said we were overstaffed so they needed NCOs to go deploy, so they wanted ones from our unit to go to Okinawa. So that’s why—The first six people that were chosen were the six people that got to that unit right before me, and they were chosen to go over and they all refused those orders—all of them—and they were all given other orders. Which you can refuse orders once in your military career and that is it.

So they refused orders and they were given orders other—to other places, and my Master of Guns had sat me down—he said, “Hey—” because he’d talked to me about going places or deploying or whatever and I’d always said, “Yes, I’d love to go.”

So he said, “Hey, this is your chance. You are number seven.”

I was like, “Okay. That’s fine.” And so, sure enough, another six of us got orders and I was the first one to get them, and I accepted them right off because it’s either you accept these orders and go to Okinawa, or you refuse them and they’re going to reissue you the same orders, because you can refuse your initial orders but whatever they issue you after that you don’t have a choice. So I was like, “Why would I refuse and have that bad rap on my record—”

TS: Right.

HM: “—when I’m going to get reissued the same orders?” So then all of us that got orders after that took it and went.

TS: Did the six that refused it the first time, did they get reissued the same orders, then?

HM: They got orders to PMO, which is the Provost Martial Office, which is the garri—the garrison side of the MP field but not HMX. So they didn’t get sent to Okinawa; they get—got sent to other parts of Quantico and California, so—but they didn’t have to deploy or anything like that.

TS: I see.

HM: But then that bad rap is on their record.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: On their record, right.

HM: And they probably would not—they’d be ineligible to reenlist, depending on numbers and stuff like that.

TS: Right.

HM: Yeah. So I didn’t want that on my record. I wanted eligibility to reenlist whenever I wanted, so.

TS: Go ahead and keep telling me your typical day, then.

HM: Yeah, I mean, it was just—I mean, just training. We did a lot of weapons training. We were always in the field and it was—there weren’t very many women in our unit either, so that was—it’s always nice to have not very many women because it’s less drama.

TS: Really?

HM: Yeah.

TS: When—When were you in a unit with a lot of women?

HM: Well, at HMX, going towards the end of my career there, they kept getting more and more women from the schoolhouse[?], so—I mean, we would go—And actually, I was part of the unit that went recruiting after a while because I worked in the office. I made up the whole recruiting slideshow and everything, and I had to present it whenever we went. So every time we went and we’d do interviews, there ended up being a lot more

women. That just means a lot more women are joining the Marine Corps and the military itself.

TS: Right.

HM: So—

TS: Well, that one—the Marine Corps Magazine [Marines Mag] that you showed the picture—

HM: Yeah.

TS: —with the helicopter with the white top. Is that what you call it?

HM: Yeah.

TS: Now, they're all women in there.

HM: Right.

TS: How did that come about for that article?

HM: They—Yeah, they wanted to do, like, a special issue of Marine Magazine focusing on women in the Marine Corps, because it—it used to be nonexistent, then it was not very many women and they weren't able to do certain jobs, then it got to the point where they could do admin jobs—administrative jobs, and then it got to a point where they could do anything but infantry. And now, I mean, I'm sure you've seen on the news, that they're even letting them train through infantry and stuff. So they just wanted to—to do a spot on women in the Marine Corps, and what all types of job that they do. So I think I have a—because this is just the cover because I couldn't fit the full magazine in the frame.

TS: Oh, because you had it in the frame, right.

HM: But I may have an extra magazine that you could actually have.

TS: What—Okay. What—What's—When is that published?

HM: Two thousand nine, the January, February, March edition.

TS: Okay.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Okay. Pretty neat.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Did you ever receive any particular award or decoration that you're particularly proud of? I mean, you talked about a couple; honor grad and—

HM: Yeah, yeah. I did get a navy achievement medal out of HMX whenever I left there for the work that I had done there, so that was—that was—that made me proud. And—Yeah, I mean, I—I qualified as expert for rifle and pistol.

TS: Oh, you did the expert, not just the—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: Yeah, expert; yeah.

TS: —the marksman, right?

HM: Because—Right, the—When I initial—initially qualified in boot camp I got sharpshooter, and then the next qualifying I got expert, and then first time qualifying for pistol I got sharpshooter, and then I requalified and got expert.

TS: You had told me at some point before I'd turned the tape on, that you and this women that was your nemesis and then best friend—

HM: Yeah.

TS: —that you were two of the best shooters.

HM: Yeah.

TS: And—And how did the—the male Marines react to that?

HM: Well, it's funny because the first time ever shooting a weapon was in boot camp, and then I went to MP school and that's the first time I've ever shot a pistol. So the first time shooting it I hit the berm, which is the—the dirt mound—

TS: Behind—

HM: —behind, yeah.

TS: —the target.

HM: And so, our Gunnery Sergeant was like, "McKay! What are you doing?"

And I'm like, "I'm so sorry, Gunnery Sergeant."

But she had qualified high qualifications while in the police force before so she knew what to do, so she kind of gave me pointers; "You have to do this."

I'm like, "Okay," and I was just able to align the sights and finally relax and just do it. And the—the guys thought it was BS [bullshit] that the only women in the class got the highest scores, because she got the highest score overall and then I think I was third or fourth. So—But we actually listened to the instructions and applied it, which other people did not, so.

TS: Now, did you have anyone that was a real good mentor to you throughout your time in the Marine Corps?

HM: I would say my Master Guns at—Master Gunnery Sergeant Roloff[?] at HMX, which he's still actually living on Quantico. He's doing civilian police there. And then—

TS: What was it that made him a good mentor?

HM: He listened to me and—and actually took my thoughts or considerations as, like, legit. How do I say this? He took what I said as being beneficial to the overall plan or whatever we were trying to do.

TS: He took input that you had, right?

HM: Right, and actually considered it. So that was just—It was nice to be understood and—and respected in that way. And then he always gave me advice about life, because he was older and—but older in the military or the Marine Corps is, like, late thirties.

TS: Right.

HM: So—But he just—and always cared. And then my Gunnery Sergeant, McDonald—which I think he's a Master of Guns now but at that point he was Gunnery Sergeant—he was—always took care of me. Whenever I had my accident with my—my jaw, he actually paid for my—or he requested that the unit pay for my parents to come stay out there and take care of me, because—Excuse me—there was a week were I had to go back to my appointments after my surgery. I was in the hospital for three days and it was either my parents come out and stay with me or one of my sergeants take care of me. So he was like, "Your parents should come out."

TS: Right.

HM: I'm like, "Yeah, they should." So he actually had the unit pay for them to stay there, and they got money to buy food and stuff, and it was really amazing. He really took care of us and he—it's funny because whenever we went out he would always be like, "McKay, you're our DD [designated driver]." It did not matter what plans I had that night, those plans were off, and I was the DD for the group. It's like, "Okay."

So—But it kind of gave me some cool experiences, going out with a whole bunch of people that were older than me; wiser. They knew what was going on within the unit and they would talk about it, and they wouldn't mind that I was sitting there listening intently and not saying a word, and then I would—I'd drive them home afterwards; they were drunk out of their minds. But it was just really cool to be included in that kind of thing.

TS: Right. Well, they must have respected and trusted you.

HM: Oh yeah, definitely. Yeah. And then there was a gunnery sergeant—Cawthon—he was—C-A-W-T-H-O-N—he is still active right now and he's in California, I think, or—no, he's at the Pentagon. But he was very in tune to my needs as well, and whenever we went out most of the people—because my rank was lower and most of the people of his rank would just, kind of, throw me off to the wayside, but he really included me and my best friend, which is this girl right here, Sarah.

TS: Standing next to you?

HM: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

HM: She—She's not the one that I hated.

TS: That's—[chuckles]

HM: Yeah.

TS: Another best friend.

HM: Yeah, we—we were dating two friends and then ended up breaking off with them and then we just became best friends, and still today are best friends. She's the [unclear].

TS: This is the one in the Marine—Marine's Magazine, right?

HM: Right, yes.

TS: Okay.

HM: And so—What was I saying?

TS: You were talking about Cawthon.

HM: Oh, yeah. He just really helped me throughout the Marine Corps; making good decisions. And then he's one of the ones that I've used as a reference to get the job that I have now, so—which he then—and told all kinds of stories to my boss.

TS: Oh, sure. You can't—You can't avoid that.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: I know, right? Yeah.

TS: Well, we had—You talked a little bit about the—kind of, the harassment you got as being a woman.

HM: Yes.

TS: And did you witness that at all, too, happening throughout the time that you were in the service?

HM: Yeah. Actually when I was in Quantico—or Okinawa, there was a lot of rapes going on. We had a guy that stole the master key from the barracks manager, and went and raided a whole bunch of people's bedrooms, and then came up, and his intent was to find someone and do whatever. And he ended up—And our floor was the fourth floor and he ended up going through some people's rooms not finding any person or whatever, he was just going through their stuff, and then coming up to the fourth floor, and some of the guys went and tackled him. So—But he knew what side the women slept on, and—and my room was one of the rooms that was in his way and he was planning on getting in. Yeah, it was pretty crazy.

TS: Were you there at the time?

HM: Yes.

TS: So did—

HM: Yeah.

TS: So while this was happening you were there on the floor?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: Oh yeah; yes. Yeah, and I was one of the ones that helped them tackle him. So—But he—I mean, he—I think he was on some sort of crazy medication, too, or something, but—

TS: Yeah. What do you think about that issue, that—I mean, it’s in the news all the time, about sexual assault in the military?

HM: Yeah. I mean, it’s very real, unfortunately. In my job now I’m the service officer that reaches out to survivors of military sexual trauma, so it’s a very real thing unfortunately, and a lot of people who served before my time, they would be assaulted and wouldn’t be able to say a single thing about it because the reporting process was so bizarre back then. It still is now. It’s changed a little bit. But when I was in, if you were sexually harassed you dealt with it and told them to stop or whatever, and if it didn’t happen then you got some people together and they went and beat them up. That’s—And if you didn’t have anyone that could do that for you then you were, kind of, SOL [shit out of luck], so.

TS: Did you have anybody beat up?

HM: [chuckles] No.

TS: Okay. Alright, we’ll just keep that like that.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Now, one thing we hadn’t talked about—Oh, I—I—On that subject though, what do you think should—do you think there’s anything that should be done differently to handle that culture, or the issue of sexual harassment and assault?

HM: Yeah, maybe just from the basics. So when you start off going through boot camp the—and I heard it and that’s when I knew it was true—the guys are literally told, “Women are not supposed to be Marines. They’re not supposed to be doing the same thing as you. You’re better than them.” And I literally heard that over and over and over again in boot camp whenever—say, if we were training side by side we’d still be segregated but the male drill instructors would be right there saying that. That would need to change, and unfortunately everyone’s had that, kind of, instilled in their mind, and until that changes at the very basic level nothing else will change.

TS: So until you’re—there’s some respect for the women that they’re working with—

HM: Yes.

TS: —I mean, throughout; from the bottom to the top.

HM: Right, from the bottom to the top, yeah. Because you can have people say all day long, “You need to respect this person. You need to respect them,” but, I mean, they’re not



going to do that unless it starts at the very get-go. Like, a kid is not going to pee in a potty unless they're taught to do that from the very beginning. So it's the same thing. They break you down for a reason, and that's to build you back up the way they want you to be, so.

TS: They have—You think that they have the capability to build you up and deal with this issue of sexual harassment and—

HM: I think they have the capability to—to start a change. It's never going to be gone completely because that's just human nature that people are bad and bad things happen.

TS: Yes.

HM: But I think that it can definitely be curbed.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: But once it happens it can be handled differently, too, right?

HM: Oh, yeah.

TS: Yeah.

HM: It can definitely be handled differently. I mean, there were some times where I didn't appreciate things that were—that were going on and I told my higher ups and they said, "Get a backbone. Handle it," which is very true. I should have nipped it in the bud at the very beginning but I didn't really know how to do that.

TS: Well, you were nineteen when you went in.

HM: Yeah, exactly, I was a kid. So I think that if some guidance is given on how to nip it in the bud, then that can absolutely be, "Hey, handle it," and as long as that person is—knows what to do then they should be able to handle it.

TS: I didn't ask you at all about, like, where you lived; like, your housing accommodations.

HM: Yes.

TS: How were they throughout the time—I mean, we know about the barracks and basic training and—

HM: Yeah.

TS: —but once you got into—like, when you were at HMX, what were they like?

HM: I lived in a condemned barracks.

TS: Really?

HM: Yes. It was full—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: This is in Quantico?

HM: This is in Quantico. It was full of—of asbestos, which is interesting because every single day we were on twelve hour shifts—and this was—At the very beginning—Well, throughout my entire career—or until I was given BAH, which is Basic Allowance for Housing, and you only get that if you are E-4 or above, so that was quite a while after I'd joined the military and after I got to HMX. And every day after we got off a shift, we would go work out for about an hour, and we had a whole gym set up in the basement of the barracks, and in the basement of the barracks was where most of the asbestos was.

TS: [unclear] popcorn ceilings and—

HM: Oh yeah.

TS: —just—Yeah.

HM: I mean, it was just covered with stuff, I guess, and I didn't know any of that stuff until they started breaking down and re—

TS: Modeling?

HM: —remodeling the building, and they had to get someone else to come in and remove it. And that's when we're like, "Where are you removing this from?"

“Oh, it's all throughout the basement.”

“Oh, great.”

So, I mean, that'll be interesting in the fut—in my future if I—

TS: Health issues?

HM: Yeah.

TS: Yes.

HM: So—But it was—In Quantico it was two person per room for females.

TS: Okay.

HM: For males it was three person per room, and the males would get the larger rooms. So we were all segregated at one side of the hallway, and then all the guys were on the other side, but we were all still on one hall. And then each room would share a head, or bathroom, with another room.

TS: Yes.

HM: So we had two girls in one room, two girls in the other room, and we'd share the bathroom.

TS: It's like a suite set up.

HM: Yeah. No kitchen; no nothing like that, but—And actually, one of my roommates when I was in Quantico had insomnia, and so she would literally be awake all the time, and one night I was sleeping and for some reason I woke up and looked up and she was staring at me while I was sleeping and that freaked me out so bad. Which we didn't really have a good relationship; it was just kind of like we were roommates and that's it.

TS: You're stuck with who you're stuck with.

HM: Exactly, yeah, and I could—I wasn't allowed to change so—but after that I was like, "What is she going to do to me in the middle of the night?"

TS: [chuckles] You remembered that woman who—or that—your friend that threatened you, right?

HM: Yeah, exactly. So—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Well, how about—Oh, sorry. So how about food?

HM: Well, in boot camp, like I said, it was all, like, no sugar, so that was very, very healthy eating. And then when I got to HMX, we had a chow hall there, right there on base, so it was within walking distance from the barracks, and, I mean, the food wasn't really bad. They actually—They had hired—They used a hiring agency that employed individuals with disabilities, and they were usually mental disabilities, so that was kind of cool to see. Which sometimes, the service was a little lacking, I think, just because they didn't have, maybe, the capabilities to—they usually didn't have the capabilities to do the job

completely, but for them to be given that opportunity was really good. I—I really—I really liked that. So—But the food—I mean, it was just regular food.

TS: Yeah?

HM: So.

TS: Nothing to complain about necessarily.

HM: Yeah, I mean—Yeah. I mean, a lot—everyone complained about it, but I didn't see it as being bad. But whenever I was in Okinawa, the same thing; the chow hall was very close to where I lived, and—to the barracks. And—But we had to send a Marine to do chow hall duty every couple months, and chow hall duty meant you literally did not get time off, so they would have to work in the chow hall breakfast, lunch, dinner; no holidays because they still had to feed people on holidays. So that really sucked, but I never had that duty. [both chuckle]

TS: I wouldn't want that one either.

HM: I just had to say, "Oh, we're choosing this person for that duty; this one."

TS: Now, did you ever—Was there ever a—like, a training that you—or school or advanced school or something like that—that you wish you could have gone to that you didn't get selected for?

HM: I always wanted to do K-9 school, and whenever they did—because they would offer it if they were given a seat at the school, because throughout the Marine Corps, if a class is offered for a particular MOS, they've actually give each unit a seat availability. So if you can fill it, then you fill it with one of your Marines. If not, then you give it back and then they'll give it to someone else.

So they—We got a seat for K-9 and I asked if I could go and the gunny at the time said, "No, I'm never going to send a woman to do K-9."

And I was like, "Okay, screw you too." So that was kind of disappointing but it was fine because I did other things.

But I ended up going to Military Police Investigator School, which was about a year, maybe two years, after I graduated MP School, and it was back at Fort Leonard Wood.

TS: Okay.

HM: That was a really neat school to go through; very intense; a lot of detail through that school, because you literally—you were taught to go into a crime scene and document everything in a crime scene, so that was really cool.

TS: CSI kind of stuff.

HM: Yeah, pretty much; yeah.

TS: Yeah.

HM: And then—But then when I got back to my unit, I never used that, so—

TS: Because you were at the HMX.

HM: Right.

TS: Right.

HM: When I was in Okinawa once, they—they did—because they knew I had that school, they did ask me to help on a couple of occasions, but I never got to do, like, hands-on; it was just, “What do you think of this?” So—But it was still—I mean, it was still cool.

TS: Good training—

HM: Yeah, very good training.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —to have.

HM: Yeah.

TS: Now, there was a couple things that—We talked a little bit about the sexual harassment, but what about the issue—I’m trying to remember—“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” It was repealed when you were—

HM: Oh, yeah.

TS: Was it repealed when you were in or after you got out?

HM: It was while I was in Okinawa, I think.

TS: Okay. So it was—

HM: I got out in 2010.

TS: Okay. So it was, like, right in that time, I think; yeah.

HM: I think, yeah. I don't remember.

TS: Yeah, I think that might have been the year. So you're—What did—What did you think about that—the whole idea of homosexuals in the military, and then—

HM: Yeah, when I was in—I'll be honest—a lot of the women in the Marine Corps were lesbians, and, I mean, I'm straight and it never bothered me if someone else was gay or not. As long as they weren't trying to, like, hit on me and try to get me to cross over it—it didn't bother me. I feel like a gay person can do the same exact job that I can do; as good or better. So it didn't really bother me. I—I didn't really care.

TS: So it was more of an issue of how that person can do the job, not their—

HM: Yeah, right.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —sexuality or whatever; regardless—

HM: To me, and I think that's just because, like, for me and my gender, I didn't want someone to look at me, saying, "Oh, you're a woman. You can't do this job."

So I would never—I don't want to look at someone else, saying, "Oh, you're gay. You can't do this job."

TS: Yes.

HM: Who cares if you're gay? Who cares if you're a woman? Who cares if you're a man? As long as you can do the job; you can pick up whatever you need to pick up; you can tote it wherever you need to tote it; you can shoot whatever you need to shoot; then that's fine.

But a lot—I know a lot of people—Which we actually had a really bad incident happen where a male corporal molested a lot of male junior Marines. He had—He had a prescription for sleeping medication and would have big keg parties at his house, which I went to a couple of them. Actually, one girl ended up passing out, having one drink, which is—we finally found out, "Okay, something's going on."

TS: It was, like, the ruffies?

HM: Yeah. Well, he would just put—You got a bug. Hold on.

TS: Sleeping pills?

HM: Okay. It was a little fruit fly or something.

TS: Okay.

HM: Yeah, he would crush them up and put them—Oh, there it is. Yeah, he would crush them up and put them in the beer, and then give the drink to the person and then they would end up passing out. So—I think it was, like, twenty people, so that was kind of really intense when that happened. And then that whole issue was being talked about, because it was talked about for a really long time before they set in place anything. So for that to happen—It was mostly—He molested male Marines, so that kind of put a bad taste in everyone's mouth.

To me, it was—that was an isolated incident. I don't think that—

TS: It was because he was a predator.

HM: Right.

TS: Not because—

HM: Not because—

TS: —sexuality or anything.

HM: Right.

TS: Yes.

HM: Exactly. So—But that was really hard, and he was actually put into the brig for that. But—I mean—[unclear].

TS: [chuckles]

HM: Did I get it?

TS: You're a Marine; you should be able to get the fruit fly.

HM: I know. [both chuckling] So—Yeah.

TS: Do you have—Did you have any heroes or heroines?

HM: I'm trying to think. I had a couple people that I served with that died in Afghanistan, so I would say that they were. One of them, he was Motor T [Motor Transport], so he wasn't the same MOS as us, but me and my headmate, Stephanie, and him would always go out in town because he had a car, and him and Stephanie were good friends because I think they deployed before together or something; because we called him Monny[?], because his last name was Monahan; Christopher Monahan [U.S. Marine Corporal Christopher M. Monahan Jr.]. And he was hilarious.

I've got a picture somewhere of me with—we're in his car and it's all of us in the backseat, so Monahan's not in it, but I've got earplugs in, because every single time we were in his car he would have his music up so loud, and I've got sensitive ears; which my hearing's not as great as it used to be. But I tell you what. I like to be cool and all that stuff, but that music was way too loud, so I'd always wear earplugs. So he called me "Earplugs" usually, and we would always hang out and go out to eat together and stuff.

And then he ended up deploying to Afghanistan and he was blown up by an IED [improvised explosive device]. He had three kids back home, so that was really crazy. And me and Stephanie had planned on going and seeing him when he came back, because him and her were in contact all the time, and she said, "Let's get together, and let's go travel, and let's go see Monahan when he gets back home."

I'm like, "Okay, sweet."

And so, I think it was two weeks before he was supposed to be—move his—Because when you're deployed, you're in—you're active—Like, when you're in the fight you're in—on one base, and then once you're done with that and you're replaced, then you move to another base that is supposed to be less dangerous and stuff, and kind of doing the administrative—getting everything together, making sure you have all your gear and everything to leave and come back. So I think it was two weeks before he left the dangerous base, he was blown up. I would say that he's definitely one of my heroes.

TS: Right.

HM: And then just some of the people that I served with are just—Like Sarah, she's still on active duty and she's a damn good Marine. Fallon, she got out a year before I—Was it a year? No. She actually got out after I got out. For some reason I think she extended or something, which she's—she's a damn good Marine too. Yeah.

TS: Now, did—Do you have—What—Did you have a reaction—What was your reaction—I'm sure you had a reaction to the Fort Hood shooting.

HM: Yeah, I—Things like that, it's very sad, but—and I don't understand it. So—And like, they just had a shooting at Camp Lejeune too. It's—It frustrates me, because if someone had a mental disability or issue going on—which they always blame it on the mental condition, which I think is unfair, but if they've got a mental condition they need to get help for it. I mean, I have issues, and that's one of the things that I've worked towards, is actually getting help for it. So it just frustrates me when people die for no reason.

TS: Yes.

HM: But, I mean, I don't have any control over that kind of stuff, so in order to, kind of, save myself I just try to not—not necessarily not think about it but try to separate myself from it, because otherwise I'll get consumed with it. It's, like, self-preservation, I guess.

TS: What kind of—Can you talk about what kind of things you mean?



HM: Like, with myself?

TS: Yeah.

HM: I have a lot of anxiety, and it's just, like, dealing with some of the issues. A lot of it's from my—my previous marriage; it wasn't a very good marriage. So now I have issues dealing with relationships. So, like, unfortunately, me and Nathan have a hard time sometimes.

TS: Nathan, you're boyfriend?

HM: Yeah.

TS: Yes.

HM: Which he's perfect; he's really great. But I react to things very weird, so I'm in counseling for that, which is really good. And it's funny, because in my job I assist people in filing for disability benefits. So we literally talk about stuff like this. We go through their military journey, but we talk about the hard stuff; injuries; any, like, crazy traumatic event that could cause some sort of issues, whether physical or mental, now. So I go over with them what they need to do.

TS: Like PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]?

HM: Right, yeah, exactly. I go over their treatment; like, "You need to be seeking treatment for this." And the reason I always give them is, if they have that stuff on record, then it's a lot easier for them to get a service connected disability and to get compensation for that. But then for myself it's like, "Well, I don't want to do that, because I don't want to go through everything; like, relive what I've been through in my life. It's going to suck." And it's finally—He got to a point—Nathan was like, "You need to get help, and that's just it." And—And I absolutely agree. I—I've needed to for a really long time. I should have gotten counseling when my mother passed away when I was little.

TS: Right.

HM: We didn't have the money and—and it just didn't happen, which is fine, but now I just need to do it.

TS: Do you think that's a Marine pride thing or even just a military person—like a pride—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: Yeah.

TS: —where you—you feel like you don't want to show a flaw—

HM: Right.

TS: —and if you—if you say you have this weakness—or it's not a weakness—

HM: Right.

TS: —but, I mean, it seems the appearance of one.

HM: Absolutely.

TS: That that makes it more difficult to seek, kind of, help?

HM: I'm very prideful, [chuckling] unfortunately.

TS: I haven't noticed that.

HM: Yeah. [But all these?] strewn pictures everywhere.

TS: No, it's great.

HM: Yeah.

TS: It's great. You should be proud.

HM: Yeah, I—Yeah, pride is one of my biggest issues, I think, and it was instilled in me from when I was born; you need to be pride—proud of who you are and what you do, and by all means I am very proud. But it does get in the way, and that's one of the things that I have to work on, is to set myself aside and say, “Hey, what's the greater good? Just do it for the greater good.” So.

TS: About—Just about every time I talk to a Marine and ask them why they joined the Marines, I get the same answers.

HM: Oh, really? [chuckles]

TS: What's your answer? Besides the—Besides the fact that you had a history—

HM: Yeah.

TS: —what drew you to it?

HM: It's probably not the answer that you—that you've gotten.

TS: Maybe not.

HM: I wanted to go kill people.

TS: Okay.

HM: Yeah.

TS: I haven't heard that one; you're right. [both laugh] I don't think. Maybe one other time.

HM: Yeah, and—and I did—I definitely did not do that whatsoever, but I wanted—I wanted to protect my brother who was in, I wanted to make sure that my country was protected, and I wanted to get rid of the bad people.

TS: Were you really affected by 9/11?

HM: Yeah, I was—I'm trying to think. I was in—Was I in ninth grade? Eighth grade or ninth grade, and—or maybe seventh grade. I don't—I don't even remember at this point. But I remember being in the room—in the classroom, and then the teacher saying, "Something's going on."

And we're like, "Well, what?"

They said, "Well, you're too young. We're not going to expose you to this."

And we were young, yes, but we were—we had the ability to understand, and so that—that's really what affected me; is that no one wanted to tell us because we were "too young." So that kind of made it a—a stigma almost; like, I can do anything; I can understand things. Don't say that I'm not capable of something.

TS: Right.

HM: And I—I didn't know anyone that was involved; thankfully. I had—My sister and stepmom had family in the [Washington] D.C./Maryland area, but, I mean—

TS: It didn't affect you personally—

HM: Right, right.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —but it impacted you in the same way.

HM: Right, yeah. So.

TS: Well, did you—Well, at what point did you decide to leave the service?

HM: I was in Okinawa. I'd planned on being there for my thirteen months, and it was unaccompanied, so I'd left my husband back in Quantico; he was still active duty. We had a lot of problems while I was gone because—just the differences, and he was very controlling and he felt like if I talked to a guy in Okinawa then I would be cheating, which there were only guys in the Marine Corps in Okinawa, so unfortunately I had to talk to guys or I had to befriend guys or whatever.

TS: Right.

HM: So that kind of put a huge strain on our relationship, and I was not perfect by any means, and I didn't communicate very well, so whenever it got to the point [that] I had three months left on my contract and they were getting ready to choose people to deploy, and I was like, "I need to deploy." For one, it's great money, because it's all tax free because you're in a combat environment, and I wanted that experience, so I told my staff sergeant. I was like, "I kind of want to extend or something. Can I do, like, a six month extension?"

And then he passed it up and they brought me down to the S-1 shop, which is—I think S—it was S-1—but they did the, like, logistical stuff. So they would look at my contract and see how much time I needed to extend, and then I would have needed to extend for over a year, because the deployment itself was, like, seven months or something. So you'd have to—have to train before that, go on the deployment, and then, kind of, have a debriefing time afterwards.

So I told my husband. I was like, "This is something I want to do. We need to—" because we had just bought a house. He bought it without me there, which was very nerve-wracking, but he did a great job. And I said, "You know, I really want to do this."

And he was like, "No. Our marriage is in shambles right now. You need to come home. We need to fix this. We need to last."

So I chose a marriage that ended up failing over deploying. And I look back now and I'm disappointed I never deployed, but I would never have gotten my son, because I got pregnant in December whenever I came home, and I just got out in August. So it's worth it. My decisions were right and—Yeah. Did I answer your question?

TS: Yeah, you did.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: Okay. [chuckles]

TS: You totally answered my question; of course. And—So how—but how was your adjustment, then, when you went into civilian life after you got out?

HM: I still worked with military guide[?] because I was a contractor to the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation]. There was—The first place I worked was on the backside of Quantico where the FBI Academy is, and I worked in the building that houses all evidence, so that was pretty cool, and I just did security. And everyone that worked there was prior Marine Corps, so it was like, “Okay, this is pretty easy. I know everything. I know how to talk to you; whatever.”

And then they—And that was part-time. And then they put me full-time but up in D.C. at FBI Headquarters [J. Edgar Hoover Building?], and that was civilian and prior military, so that was, kind of, an easier way of adjusting into it. And then my marriage ended, and I actually up and left one day and moved back here and lived with my parents for two weeks, and then I ended up renting. I was out of work for a while. I—I had nothing. I mean, I went on Medicaid and food stamps for a while just to put food on the table for me and my, then, nine month old son. So that was kind of hard.

But I finally found a job working at DSS [Division of Social Services]. Same place I went in to sign up for Medicaid and food stamps so that was a little embarrassing, but it kind of helped me understand what the clients were dealing with.

TS: Right.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: The clients that came in. And I was, literally, the only military person—or prior military—there that I dealt with from day-to-day basis. It was very bizarre, because I went in, applied for one job, and then another job was open and I—and I asked about the job, because the—the other opening was a little bit higher pay. So I asked during the interview, “Is this position still open, and are you still considering individuals or interviewing?”

And they said, “Oh, well, we didn’t think about you for this job but you should come back and interview for it.”

So I did; I had two interviews before I got hired. They ended up hiring me for the higher position, which was great, but I—the name of the position was Administrative Assistant, and it—it was explained to me that I would—that job would be the Administrative Assistant to the, like, boss over everybody. Not the director, but the boss over Income Maintenance, which is Medicaid and food stamps. So I thought, “That’s easy. I’ve done that before.”

And then my very first day, I went in and she introduced me as the supervisor for the front desks, and then all clerical and the mailroom. And I was like, “I’m a supervisor?”

TS: [chuckles]

HM: “What—When did—When did this happen?”

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: “What’s my job?”

HM: Yeah. So that was interesting. And she introduced me as the “mean Marine supervisor,”—

TS: Awesome.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: —and I was like, “There we go. That’s a great way to, kind of, stick it to them. I’m the mean Marine,” and literally, everyone was scared of me.

TS: Oh no.

HM: And they thought I was going to come in and be yelling and screaming and stuff.

TS: Right.

HM: They thought I was going to look a lot different, because I have long hair and attractive and not, like, super buff or anything.

TS: Right.

HM: So they were like, “We thought—”

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You weren’t a butch Marine woman—

HM: Right.

TS: —that they expected to be this mean Marine.

HM: Exactly. That’s exactly what they expected. When I walked in they were like, “You’re not what we expected,” but they were still scared. I worked there for, like, two weeks, and then I changed everything because nothing that was happening was efficient. So that even created more problems. But then—And I was tough too; like, I wanted them to work hard

and do the best they could do and I wanted them to be efficient. They were giving out papers—papers like this—

TS: Yes.

HM: —that people would scan and make copies, and it would be crooked, and I was like, “That’s not professional. You need to do it over again and you need make straight copies,” which to me seems very minimal and easy.

TS: Right.

HM: But to them, who’d been doing it for the same—

TS: Long time.

HM: Right, and so they thought, “Oh my gosh, she’s changing everything.” So come to find out—And I worked there for a year and then I got this current job, so that was a really nice change in scenery. But the people I worked with I loved, for my first civilian—all civilian job. And then when I left they were like, “We really miss you. You made a lot of changes and it was hard, but it was all positive,” and I went about it in a non—I—I tried to be nonthreatening, which I kind of—there was a stigma around me as being a Marine, but I really showed them that I cared, so I—I think that it was, all-in-all, a positive experience; not for a lot of money, but it was still positive. [chuckles]

TS: Right. Well, do you think—How do you think you’re world has been different—or your life has been different—because you joined the Marines?

HM: Well, I used to be known as this—the really, really sweet and innocent person, because growing up, I mean, I never did anything wrong. And then I got to see the world, and I got to see the good and the bad of the world, so I’m definitely a lot more knowledgeable about people and about places. And before I probably would have just gone to college and been really unhappy and gotten some really good job that I hated, instead of being not the richest person in the world but actually somewhat happy.

TS: Right.

HM: So I think—And I’ve met so many cool people and done so many things that no one, literally, will ever be able to do, and that, to me, is worth all the heartache that I went through and toughness.

TS: Do you feel like a trailblazer for women?

HM: No, I don’t—not necessarily, but I think I’ve influenced a lot of women. When I was working in the office on Quantico, anyone—any Marine—specifically women Marines

that had problems—they would be sent to me, and I would have to work with them and straighten them out, and then once they were straightened out and I gave them my stamp of approval, then they'd go back to the fleet and do their job.

Some of them didn't make it. One of which, she had a very hard time not being a stripper, which you weren't allowed to be a stripper and in the Marine Corps at the same time, so—and that was her job before joining the Marine Corps.

TS: She probably made a lot of money.

HM: She did; she made great money. She was able to pay—She was in a lot of debt, so doing that on the weekends—she would drive, like, five hours every single weekend, work the whole weekend, then drive back, and none of us knew about it until one day she left her computer—because she was—she was having a lot of problems anyways, and so I was trying to straighten her out and, kind of, just make her think about things before she'd say—because she would say the most inappropriate things at the wrong time. So—

TS: No filter.

HM: Right, none whatsoever. So I was just—it was my goal to help her think before she spoke. And she left her computer open one time and her screensaver was all of her pictures.

TS: As a stripper?

HM: As a stripper. [both chuckle] So I saw them; “Oh my God!” Closed down her laptop. And peop—everyone else had seen it, because I didn't come in until, like, halfway through lunch, and it'd been on screensaver for [unclear].

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: [unclear]

HM: And all the guys were like, “Hey, we're going to leave that open. Let—Let that keep on playing.” Oh, goodness.

TS: Well, I—Would you recommend the service to men and women today?

HM: Yeah, I would just sit them down and talk to them realistically about it, and no one could dissuade me from go—from joining, and I don't think I would be able to dissuade anyone from joining, and I—I don't think there's any reason to dissuade someone. But I would want them to be very informed, and I think that—I think that would be healthy for someone to be informed before they join. But the most—the typical person that joins the military is a high schooler, or right out of high school, and they don't tend to listen so it's



kind of hard. I've had a lot of people ask me, "Hey, can you talk to my son? Can you talk to my daughter? They want to join the Marine Corps."

"Absolutely, I'll do it, but only if they listen. If they don't listen I'm not going to spend my time on it."

TS: Right.

HM: Because I know—I mean, I know what's going to happen because I was there, and I wasn't going to listen to anybody.

TS: Well, would you consider yourself a indepi—independent minded person?

HM: Oh, yeah.

TS: Even before you joined the military?

HM: Yeah, definitely; yeah.

TS: I would say, [both laugh] just from what you told me. Do you think there's anything in particular that you would want a civilian to know or understand about what it's like to serve in the military that they may not understand or appreciate?

HM: I think the one thing—and even with, like, all the sexual harassment stuff I talked about—when you get down to it, everyone has your back, and in the civilian world sometimes you don't have that, so I think that's something that I would want people to know that was a very positive and good thing, because no matter where you went there was someone there that would get you back no matter what the [certain?] situation.

So that was—And it—Even if I hated someone, man, if they were in trouble I was there and I would make sure they got back. When they got back it would be a different story and they would be punished, but they would absolutely—I would have their back no matter what. So that's definitely—I think that's something that people look down on the military—for, maybe, sometimes not being as educated or whatever as other kids their age who are going through college, but to go through the life experiences that we do in the military, you have to have that camaraderie and you have to have your buddy's back, so.

TS: So what people say about it being like a family—

HM: Yeah, absolutely true.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —you think that's true?

HM: Yeah, yes. And then sometimes, again, with it being family—the sexual trauma—it’s like if it happens it’s your brother or sister doing that to you. So that’s really—

TS: Makes it even worse?

HM: Yeah, absolutely.

TS: Well, what does patriotism mean to you?

HM: For me personally, it’s kind of a—a legacy given down. We’ve always been taught, from the time we were really little, to love our country and to respect it, so for me it means I’m going to do the same thing. I’m going to do whatever I can to make my country into the best it can be, whether that’s serving in the military or serving it’s veterans now, speaking highly of my country; doing everything I can to better myself so that I am a—a—a good example for others, I guess, [looking in?], and I’m going to teach my children that we have to love where we grow up and believe in—in the—in what America stands for. So yeah.

TS: That’s a great answer.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

HM: I don’t know if that a good answer. [chuckles]

TS: Great answer. Well, I don’t have any more formal questions—

HM: Okay.

TS: —but is there anything that we haven’t talked about that you want to—you want to mention or bring up?

HM: I do have—I have every single letter that I wrote back while I was in boot camp, and they’re pretty comical. I don’t know if you’d want, like, a copy of those.

TS: Yes, we’d love that, but—

HM: That’s what my mom—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: I'll go ahead a turn the tape off now, then, though.

HM: Okay, yeah; sure.

TS: Okay, thank you—Sure. [both chuckle] Thank you, Heather.

[End of Interview]